

Trixie's Story

by guest columnist **Maxine Stewart**

Go back in time to the early 1940s, when World War Two was raging in Europe and the Pacific. Many things were rationed, or at least hard to get - even if you had the money. Anyone with a car was desperately hanging on to what they had. So many people were using horses we'd sing "*The Old Grey Mare is back where she used to be . . .* "

My Dad had a 1931 Dodge 8. It was more trouble than it was good. He wasn't very mechanically minded, so if the car "stopped," so did he! Dad could change a tire, but not much else, and tires were almost impossible to get, (many people were driving around with patched tires) and gas was one of the things rationed. Like many others, we used the car sparingly, saving it for the occasional short Sunday afternoon drive, or a necessary trip to Liverpool, which was 30 miles away, over unpaved roads.

Nearby there was a family of young boys whose father had passed away. They had a dapple gray mare who was a spirited young thing about five years old. Dad grew up on a farm and was very much an animal lover. When he heard those boys were mistreating their horse, he vowed to try to do something about it.

Quite the swap!

It wasn't long before he heard the eldest boy, who was 16, wanted a car. Can you guess what happened? Right . . . they traded! The young fellow got a car (such as it was) and we got Trixie. Trouble was, we didn't even have a barn - fortunately, two neighbours did, so we stabled her in one for a while, and then the other one.

She was one frightened horse. The boys tried to control her by beating her over the head. She didn't trust anyone, for a while. She wasn't nasty, she was terrified.

I was 13 years old, and had not grown up on a farm, but wanted very much to make friends with Trixie. I went to the barn with my Dad as much as I could and talked to her. She watched us both closely, and soon learned neither of us would hurt her. She learned to trust us, but for a long time was suspicious of other people.

Of course we had to have the usual "vehicles," and managed a few sleigh rides over the snowy roads that first winter. Dad held her head while everyone else got in the sleigh, then he jumped in before she took off.

We had a 100-acre woodlot a few miles away, along the Medway River, and Dad enjoyed cutting some of his own wood. Sometimes I went with him and attempted to keep Trixie calm while he got his wood loaded on the bob-sled - then off we'd go for home.

Short riding career

Of course I wanted to ride Trixie! I'd never had any experience riding other than occasionally on the back of somebody's docile old farm horse. Adding to the challenge was Trixie - she'd never had a saddle on her back.

A young lad lived near us, he was used to riding, and agreed to try to get her used to the saddle which my Dad was able to borrow (or rent?). This worked to a point, and I did manage to ride her some, although she wasn't really a "riding horse." No dainty little feet and slim legs and she was always nervous.

I felt sure she would never throw me, but one time when the other boy was riding her, she shied at a piece of paper by the road, and off he went. He vowed never to ride her again. She really didn't like him, and we felt he might have been around with those other boys when she was being badly treated. (Maybe she threw him off on purpose?)

Dad was afraid for me, so my riding was pretty much ended, but not my love for that horse, nor hers for me! When I was in school, if I looked out and saw her coming along the road from the Co-op, I'd go out and stand by the road until she got to me. She'd stop beside me and start gently nipping along my arm to see if I had a treat for her, then at a touch from my Dad, on her way she'd go.

She became so used to me when my Dad was sick once or twice, I could look after her in the barn, without any problems. I even took my two year old niece to the barn sometimes, and put her up on Trixie's back. She'd look around, but anything I did seemed just fine with her.

After about two years, Dad was feeling guilty about keeping a horse when we didn't have any work for her to do, and having to use someone else's barn and pasture, so he found a good home for her. The night he told me about his decision, he knew I'd be very upset, so he had already bought the second hand bicycle he knew I'd been wanting for a long time. That was my consolation for losing "My" horse.

Gone, but not forgotten

The man who bought her assured me I could go and visit her any time I wanted, and she never forgot about stopping to see me if I was standing by the road.

One time, a few years later, when Dad had a car again, and I had graduated from university and was teaching school, I brought a friend home with me for a weekend. This friend had heard so much about Trixie she wanted to meet her, so we drove to Trixie's home and knocked on the door. When there was no reply, I called out to my friend "I guess no one's home." From the barn, there came a loud whinny!

Trixie heard my voice, and wanted to see me. There was just a button closing the barn door, so we went in and she welcomed us with great joy!

She moved on from that good master to another good one, where she spent the rest of her days. Of course she turned completely white as the years went by, and lived to be about 23 years old, in double harness with another horse in her later years. I visited her whenever I could, and there was never any doubt that she knew me as she "nipped" along my arm, looking for treats, and sometimes leaning her head on my shoulder.

In April, 1958, Dad passed away in Camp Hill Hospital in Halifax. And not long after my mother and I got home that day, someone looked out the window, and saw Trixie and her "partner" coming along the road.

I went out, and when she got to where I was standing, she stopped, put her head against my shoulder, and just stood there. No nipping, no excitement. She knew I was grieving, and so was she.

If anyone thought horses had no feelings, that was as sure proof as they'd ever need to prove them wrong. Her master, who had the reins in his hands said, "Well, will you look at that. She knows!"

Trixie added a dimension to my life which I would not otherwise have had. She made the "bonding" with my Dad that much stronger. I'll always be grateful for those short years when she "belonged" to us, and the memories of sharing a love of horses with my Dad.

See you on the trail. Ride safely! Denise Penney & Maxine Stewart

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