

My Dream  
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"Today's the day! My first race!" These were my first thoughts as I woke up. I could hardly wait. "I'm scared. What if I screw up? Will I win or lose? Oh, boy. Coming in last would be horrible on my first race." I kept trying to reassure myself: I'm okay. I know what I'm doing. It wasn't working very well. I finally forced myself to sit up in bed. "I have to get up or I'll be late."

As I slowly made my way to the bathroom, I thought back to how I came to be preparing for my first professional horse race. It all started when I had my first pony ride, when I was three. From then on, I kept pestering my parents for more and more pony rides, until they couldn't stand it any longer and gave me horseback riding lessons for my eighth birthday. It was love at first ride. I knew right then that I wanted to be a jockey. I also knew I wouldn't be able to ride a real race horse until I was a very good rider. So I started riding anytime I could. I helped mucking out stalls for extra riding time. By the time I reached seventeen, I was a great rider (I thought, anyway). When I finished high school and received my first car (as a graduation gift), I found a nearby stable that had race horses. Again I volunteered there for the chance to exercise some of the horses eventually. Now look at me today! I am going to ride in my first official horse race.

Now, where did I put those riding colors?" I panicked. "Damn it, I couldn't have lost them. Stupid. No, I didn't lose them. I haven't gotten them yet. They won't give them to me until just before the first race."

It took forever to drive the fifteen endless miles to the track. When I found a space in the overcrowded parking lot, I galloped to the office. All jockeys had to be weighed for handicap purposes. I couldn't stand still as I waited for my turn. "I hope I haven't gained any weight" I thought, horrified, as I climbed on the scale, saddle under my arm. "Phew, I hadn't." And now, "I was called over to get my new clothes!"

With my silk bundle of pride under my arms, I headed for the bathroom (the changing room was male only). As I pulled the silks over my head and let them glide down over my body I nearly shouted "I'm here!" But I didn't. I had to remain professional. I was working! In a real job as a jockey. – My dream-come-true.

"Mount up!" came the call. As I entered the horse barn, I inhaled the fantastic aroma of horses. "Oh, no," I panicked. "I can't do this. What if I fail? What if I make a fool of myself? I'll be failing for all the other women who want to be jockeys. No one will want to hire a woman ever again," I thought. "Calm down. You can do it. This is what you are meant to be doing. You're good with horses. You love horses and they like you and trust you. You'll do okay."

I sprinted over to my horse, a beautiful bay mare named Rose of beauty. As I waited for my leg up, I kept thinking "I can't believe I'm, actually here, riding a real race horse in my first real race!" Once I was mounted, it wasn't long before we started the long walk down the excited-crowd-lined path and out to the starting gate, where Rose was a perfect lady and went right in. I was a bundle of nerves, thinking "I'm so excited I hope I don't make Rose nervous." But she was a professional, having run in four races already, so she wasn't in the least bit nervous.

The gate came up and "they're off!" came over the loudspeaker. Rose broke perfectly from lane four (my lucky number, I realized later) and broke to the rail, ending up in fifth place. She was running perfectly. The wind was rushing by me a mile a minute. The deafening noise of thundering hooves and snorting horses blocked out the excitement of the cheering crowd and the harassing taunts aimed at the newcomer by the jockeys. I was one with her. We were a team! I was in my first race. Then things started happening so fast that I barely had time to think.

"That a girl, Rose," I screamed. We pulled up one place by the quarter mile and were running strong. Swerving out into the middle of the track, we flew past another horse without looking back. "Three more to get past" I thought, and urged Rose even faster. We were flying over track and gaining on the third place horse which we easily passed. "Two left", I shouted. Back to the rail, and we caught a glimpse of the second place horse right next to us. "Come on, Rose" I yelled. With another burst of energy, Rose surged forward again. Seconds later -or was it hours- we broke out into the open. Nothing ahead of us now, except the finish line which was drawing ever nearer, very quickly. We flew over the finish line, in full stride, four lengths ahead of the next horse.

"We won, we won" I shouted, as we slowed down. I leaned over and gave Rose a hug. We did a slow turn back toward the excited, cheering crowd and the finish line. "I can't believe it. I won my first race. I won for all women. We can do it! The owners and trainers and track officials gathered in the

winner's circle. I felt proud of myself. All of my life, I had been told that women couldn't be jockeys, but I proved them wrong. I did it.