

Hooked on Horses



Chapter Seven by Kay Hively

One day not long before the horse show, Suzanne and her grandfather worked in the barn. Suzanne told Grandfather about the costume her mother had made for her. Her mother had made black riding britches and had knitted a white sweater. But the best part of the costume was a bright red riding coat.

Grandfather said she would be the prettiest girl in the show and Babe would be the best-looking mare. He said Tom Bass would be proud of her.

Suzanne was glad to hear that. She wasn't sure she could ever please Tom Bass. He is such a stickler for "freedom" Suzanne said. He doesn't talk very much, she said, but when he does, every other word is "freedom."

Grandfather laid down the halter he was working on and began to tell Suzanne the story of Tom Bass. Grandfather said that Tom Bass was born a slave in 1859, on a plantation not far from Mexico, Missouri. As a slave, he had very little hope making a good life. But in 1865, Grandfather said, the Civil War ended and Tom Bass was free – no longer a slave.

Although he was only 6 years old when he became free, Tom Bass already had a remarkable ability to train horses and even mules. Eventually word spread about Tom Bass and people in the surrounding countryside brought horses to him for training. They also wanted to buy horses that Tom Bass owned.

After much hard work, Tom Bass was able to buy some land and build a stable where he could open his own business. He was so good with horses that even famous people wanted to buy from him. Some of his customers and friends were Presidents Teddy

Roosevelt, William McKinley, Grover Cleveland and William Howard Taft. Another famous person who came to Mexico to see Tom Bass was Buffalo Bill. And, Grandfather said, Queen Victoria herself invited Tom Bass to ride in a big parade in London, England.

Grandfather told Suzanne that Tom Bass was probably the greatest horseman on the face of the earth, and that she should be honored to have him as a teacher. And, Grandfather also told Suzanne, that because he was born a slave, freedom means much more to him than it will ever mean to you or me.

Tom Bass understands that nothing will ever be accomplished unless a person – or a horse – has freedom.

Suzanne was stunned to know that the little man who was teaching her to ride was world famous. She now realized that she had been working with greatness.

For a long, long time neither Suzanne nor her grandfather spoke. As she sat thinking about what she had heard, Suzanne made a vow to compete in the show not for herself, but for her teacher, Tom Bass. She couldn't let him down.



Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do –

- Find a book about Presidents of the United States and learn about Presidents Teddy Roosevelt, William McKinley, Grover Cleveland and William Howard Taft. Then read about Queen Victoria of England. How long was she the Queen of England?
- Using math skills, find out how old Tom Bass was when he trained Suzanne for the horse show in 1934.

Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation with support from Verizon Foundation. Copyright 2002.

Next Week: Chapter Eight – Showtime!