

Hooked on Horses



Chapter Eight by Kay Hively

Suzanne waited for her name to be called. All around her were dozens of other kids, all with beautiful horses and lovely costumes. Many had fancy saddles and flashy halters. Grandfather's old halter and reins were not fancy, but their leather was warm and rich looking. And Babe never looked better.

The only dark cloud over the day was that Tom Bass would not be at the show. His doctor would not let him leave home.

Suzanne climbed into the saddle, straightened her costume and spoke softly to Babe. Then, with the words of Tom Bass whispering in her ears, she gently laced the reins through her fingers, using only enough pressure to keep the reins straight.

When her number was announced, Suzanne and Babe entered the ring. A huge crowd filled the stands. Bright lights blazed all around them. Suzanne did not see or hear anything. She was focused on the job ahead.

Gently, Suzanne led Babe through the routines. The little gray mare pranced so sprightly that her hooves never seemed to touch the ground. Babe was like a ballerina, full of grace and beauty. Other horses were big and bold, but Babe was delicate. Pacing back and forth she barely disturbed the dust in the ring.

Suzanne did not hear the applause. She did not see her parents and grandparents on the front row. She was lost in a world where only three things existed; Babe, herself, and the calm steady voice of Tom Bass.

The next day, Suzanne went with her grandfather to tell Mr. Bass about the show. Tom Bass said his heart was not good that day and apologized for not greeting them at the door.

Suzanne, dressed in her riding costume for Mr. Bass to see, knelt down beside his chair. As he reached out to touch her red jacket,

she laid a bright blue ribbon in his hands. Printed in gold on the ribbon was the word "Champion."

It was a gift, she told him.

A tear formed in the old man's eye and he pressed the ribbon against his failing heart. He congratulated her and said she had made him very proud.

Mrs. Bass placed the little blue ribbon from the little country horse show in a very large case. There it hung beside dozens of other ribbons which Tom Bass had won at some of the most prestigious horse shows in the world.

But Suzanne did not think the little ribbon looked out of place. After all, it was a championship ribbon and, to Suzanne, there was no greater champion in all the world than Tom Bass.

Tom Bass died on November 20, 1934, not long after Suzanne's first horse show. His death brought sadness to horse lovers around the world. But Suzanne was saddest of all. Tom Bass had been her teacher and her friend.



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.

Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do -

- Do you think Suzanne ever got a horse of her own? Write about your answer or draw a picture.
- Using colored paper, make several "ribbons" and give them to friends or family members who deserve recognition. On the ribbons, write words such as "champion," "winner" or "brave."