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## Beth's Last Funny Joke

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## Beth's Last Funny Joke

I still keep the half filled cups of beer hidden in my sister's room. She taught me that flies love beer and if you leave just a little in a cup they fly right in and their wings get wet and they can never get out and it takes them a long time to die. One cup has flies that I caught right after my sister left and they're still alive. The fly joke is my sister's favorite. But she told me once that the joke was only funny if the flies drowned, she didn't think it would be nearly as funny a joke if the flies drank themselves to death. I usually think that her jokes are funny but that's because she lets me help.

All the bedrooms in my house are on the second floor so when my sister would want to talk to me and it was after my bedtime she would have to go out the window of her room along the roof of the porch and then knock on my window so I could let her in. If she would try and sneak into my room through my door my mother would always hear and then make her go to her room and lock her in. I hated when my mother caught my sister because she would talk in her loud and mean way and say, "Beth you fool, leave the child alone."

When my father lived with us he made Beth start to take horseback riding lessons but it was different than my mother making Beth go to her room because Beth loved the horses. She was of course a very great horseback rider. She rode just about everyday which made my mother very angry because that was all Beth did and riding was expensive. My mother thought Beth should get a job and even tried to get her one but never could. My mother said it was because no one would hire her. Which was a good thing for Beth's horseback riding because she had lots of time to have lessons with Mr. Hurley. On my way home from school I would sometimes stop to watch Beth's lesson. She told me that she had to have lessons with Mr. Hurley because he could teach her to jump and that was what she really wanted to do. But I didn't think that her lessons with Mr. Hurley were so great because he would yell at her much louder than my mother ever did and sometimes he would even curse at her. I thought that Mr. Hurley was acting like that because he owned the stable and the horse which my sister always rode. The horse's name was Rowdy. My sister said she didn't care too much about Mr. Hurley because she got to ride Rowdy and that sometime she would jump with Rowdy, so usually she would just laugh when Mr. Hurley yelled. My sister also told me that Mr. Hurley had told her that when Rowdy was younger he could jump the truly high fences and that he probably still could if he wanted to badly enough. But in order for Rowdy to jump truly high fences he had to like the person who was on his back.

This always made sense to me and I knew it made my sister very happy because she thought that Rowdy liked her very much. I wanted my sister to jump, so I used to try and help her convince Rowdy to like her enough to want to jump. But this was hard because it is always hard to tell if a horse really likes you, I mean for sure, because horses don't wag their tails, or purr, they just look straight through you. But my sister thought that Rowdy looked at her as if he liked her, she said she could definitely tell, so she would always give Rowdy carrots after her lesson. She never forgot about the carrots because she thought that she was getting good enough that she would soon be able to jump. She wanted Rowdy to like her enough to want to jump with her on his back when she was ready. Rowdy always ate the carrots she gave him.

Later in the year, when my sister was getting to be so good that even Mr. Hurley said so, we would slide down the drain pipe and into the bushes, after my mother had gone to bed, and walk over to Mr. Hurley's stable to give Rowdy carrots. It was an easy walk and I knew the fastest way because my friend Billy lived right near the stable and I used to play at his house a lot because he had a pool.

We went to give Rowdy carrots in the night any time my mother had carrots in the house and that was a lot because my mother thinks vegetables are very important. So I was sure that Rowdy must really like my sister because we gave him more carrots than probably any horse has ever gotten. Until my mother found out that we were stealing carrots for the horse, which made her very angry. That was one of the worst nights because my mother thought that it was already bad that my sister had to spend money on horse lessons but we didn't need to feed both Mr. Hurley and the horse. That was the night my mother told Beth that she could not go and ride horses ever again.

That night I had been asleep and I heard my sister knocking on the window so I got up and let her in. She came into my room and because it was so dark I couldn't really see her face but I heard her voice and she sounded like she was about to cry. She told me to put on my shoes because we were going to go visit Rowdy. I told her that we didn't have any carrots to give to him and that he might not like it if we showed up without any carrots. She said it didn't matter because she was good enough to jump Rowdy. I asked her if Mr. Hurley would like that and she said it wouldn't matter because neither she nor Rowdy liked Mr. Hurley. We slid down the drain pipe without my mother hearing and we walked to the stable. We passed Billy's house and all the lights were off, so I knew that it must have been very late.

We went into the stable and Beth thought that we should use a lantern. Usually when we came to give Rowdy carrots we didn't use a

lantern which I always thought was a bad thing because he might not recognize my sister in the dark and if he couldn't recognize her then he wouldn't like her any different with or without the carrots. But this time we didn't have any carrots we just had the lantern and Rowdy let out a sort-of grunt when we got near him. My sister held the lantern and it made all the eyes of the horses look red from the flame in the center of the lantern and they all stuck their heads out into the aisle. Having all those animals watching us and ruffling their feet in the hay made me feel very scared because I thought there might be someone else in the stable. I was wearing sneakers so they didn't make any noise but Beth was wearing her riding boots and every time she took a step they made such a loud sound on the cement aisle that I was sure that someone would hear her. She must have been thinking about something else.

My sister went into Rowdy's stall to grab him by his head and bring him out. But when she went in, Rowdy's ears went up and he started to prance around his stall like he was getting upset. You can never tell when horses are happy but you can tell when they are upset.

Beth told me that she had seen Mr. Hurley do this many times before and that she could do it, so she put the lantern down and grabbed Rowdy's head and tried to lead him into the center aisle. But after about two steps Rowdy was leading her and then he started to run and she had to let go of his head or she would have been dragged. The horse sprinted down to the other end of the barn, it was a good thing we had closed the door behind us or I think that he would have run outside and then we never would have gotten him. So I was glad about the horse but my sister was angry because she said that Rowdy never did that to Mr. Hurley. I said that maybe Rowdy was being like that because we had not brought him any carrots. My sister thought that maybe that was true, which made her less angry at the horse and more angry with my mother. Beth said that she would definitely not be able to jump a horse that was not happy with her but she still wanted to sit on him anyway because she didn't think that Mr. Hurley would even let her do that if she couldn't pay and she couldn't pay anything if mother didn't give her money. She said that she had a plan but we would have to wait.

I was definitely willing to wait for my sister's plan because she always came up with great plans. For other plans of hers we had to wait for days, but it was definitely worth it because they were always very funny and turned out to be great jokes. One time we were waiting for my mother to fall asleep in front of the T.V. in just the right position. And it took 3 nights of watching my mother instead of the T. V. but as soon as her wrists were close enough to each other my sister jumped up and taped them together while I taped her ankles together. My mother

couldn't move at all and I thought it was the funniest thing that I had ever seen until my mother started to cry and I felt sorry for her, so I cut the tape. Beth got in a lot of trouble for that and I felt bad, as if I had turned her in.

We were waiting a long time and my sister said that she had to go get some stuff and while she was gone I fell asleep. She must have been gone a long time because I was sleeping hard when she came back and woke me up and handed me a hammer and some nails and told me about a horse's hooves and how they are just like finger nails. And she squeezed my fingernail and it didn't hurt. She told me that Mr. Hurley told her that that's why it doesn't bother horses to wear shoes. So, I guess that's why I didn't really feel bad about her plan.

We went slowly and quietly up to where Rowdy was standing, my sister whispered that he was asleep and that the plan would work as long as he didn't wake up. She pushed me up to the front left hoof and she went to the rear right hoof and we each put three nails through his hooves and into the cement floor. My sister had found long nails and they went through Rowdy's hooves and into the cement but we had to hit them very hard with the hammers. Rowdy woke up but we already had the nails all the way through way down deep into the cement floor. He tried to walk away just like he normally would but when he tried to lift his left front hoof and couldn't he started to get nervous. He tried it again because I don't think he could believe my sister's plan. And then he started to kick with his other free legs and whine in an awful way that I thought sounded a lot like my mother's scream. His eyes got real big and even though the lantern was way back in his stall I could see that he was very scared. And I was hoping that Mr. Hurley wasn't wrong about hooves being just like fingernails because Rowdy looked like he was hurt. But my sister was laughing and I thought that the whole thing was actually pretty funny because Rowdy was trying as hard as he could to move but he wasn't getting anywhere. My sister said she was going to ride Rowdy and she hopped up onto his back, of course he didn't have a saddle or reins or anything like that on so my sister just grabbed onto his mane because, even though he was nailed in, he was still shaking a lot and trying to get away. My sister was very happy to be on Rowdy's back but I was a little scared because Rowdy did not want her to be on his back and I was beginning to wonder about whether the nails were strong enough to hold Rowdy who, after all, could jump the truly high fences if he wanted to. But I couldn't tell my sister to get down because she was laughing and whooping and pretending and I would have felt bad to ruin it for her. So I sat down and closed my eyes and pretended I was at home in my room. I could always make bad things go much faster if I

pretended they weren't happening. And I was pretending for a long time. I hadn't opened my eyes the whole time I had been pretending and after a while it began to sound like Rowdy was calming down and my sister was whooping less but she was still having fun. And then I think I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I heard was my sister scream and then Rowdy screamed and then I heard other horses scream and when I opened my eyes I had to shut them again because the barn was filled with smoke. My sister grabbed my arm and we ran away from the barn towards Billy's house and hid in Billy's bushes. I got scared for all the horses still in the barn and I went up to Billy's front door and rang the doorbell. Billy's mother came to the door in her nightgown and I didn't even have to tell her what had happened because she saw the smoke right away and called the fire department and the police also came. The firemen got a few of the horses out, but not Rowdy. This bothered Beth more than having to leave home because even though it was always hard to tell whether Rowdy liked her, Beth always liked Rowdy. She said she wasn't mad about me telling Billy's mother about the fire, but I felt bad when mother made her leave.

*Jedd Gould*