

A hilarious parody of horse care guides for parents of horse-crazed kids. Equine humorist Bob Goddard offers advice on classic topics such as buying a new horse, daily care, showing, and escaping to Mexico. Illustrations by Laurie Mackenzie.

Horse Crazy!

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Horse Crazy!

A Tongue-in-Cheek Guide for Parents of Horse-Addicted
Girls

Bob Goddard

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CHAPTER 1:

The Second Most Powerful Force in the Universe

I should have seen it coming. I'm a good parent and I should have seen it coming. The warning signs were clear enough.

The first thing I noticed was the hat. Why was Jamie wearing that hat? And who gave her those boots?

It's just a phase, I told myself.

Then came the mood swings. Dark and sullen one moment, cheerleader-happy the next. But even when she was euphoric, communication was difficult. Her speech was laced with a jargon that made it sound like a foreign language. "Snaffle bit!" she once blurted out at the dinner table.

Who was this girl?

A new circle of friends appeared. Phone conversations whispered in conspiratorial tones became a nightly ritual. These kids were up to something. Something sinister. Something treacherous. Something expensive. And they were drawing Jamie deeper and deeper into their world.

She will grow out of this, I prayed.

But then, during a teary-eyed confession on a sleepless August night, Jamie admitted to me her loyalty to the Indianapolis Colts. And that's when the awful truth hit home: the girl was completely and hopelessly horse crazy. And before I could absorb the news, another shock: "Hiliary secretly roots for the Denver Broncos, Dad."

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Horse crazy! How could this happen? Why couldn't they get into drugs or gangs like normal kids? Why horses? Why me?

This was a crisis. Something had to be done, and soon. But what? Like any sensible husband, I turned to my wife:

"This is your fault, Jenny."

"Bob, it's not anybody's 'fault'. The girls are developing new interests - that's all."

"You don't understand. They're horse crazy! Do you know what that means?"

"Of course I do, honey. They're horse *crazy*. It means they're definitely your children. You need to relax."

"Relax? Listen, we're the parents and we should be in control around here."

"We *are* in control. At least one of us is."

"You're the one who gave Jamie that horse sticker book."

"What horse sticker book?"

"When she was seven. You bought it for her."

"That was six years ago!" protested Jenny.

"And Hiliary's rocking horse. That was your idea too."

"She was three years old..."

"Why did you encourage them?"

"You're making way too big a deal about this, Bob. It's not like we're going to turn our lives upside down because the girls talk about horses."

"It's a crisis!"

"Nobody said we're actually going to get a horse right now. We'll just take it one step at a time."

That was thirteen years ago. Since then, we've been through nine horses, attended one hundred eighty-two horse shows, bought three horse trailers, ruined two trucks, moved to the country, built a barn, spent all our money, and then spent some more. We bought every

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kind of saddle ever made. We assembled a remarkable collection of tack and over priced show outfits. We wrote countless checks for vets and farriers and horse dentists. We used up seven different trainers. Our weekends, our summers, and the girls' inheritance disappeared into a black hole of equine mania.

Of course, I didn't actually know all this was going to happen. I just had a sense that we were dealing with something that went beyond the normal "I Want a Pony" thing. This was far more serious. And it wasn't just about money. This thing could actually threaten our way of life. Would I still have time to feed my addiction to computer games? How many reruns of *Star Trek* would I miss? Was pro football in jeopardy?

Jenny's response was a mystery. The woman is an intelligent, practical person – an *accountant* for Pete's sake. In all other matters she was our voice of reason and good sense. She was the one who persuaded me not to quit my job as a caregiver at a veterans' home when I wanted to run for president in 1988. She was the one who talked Jamie out of applying to the Air Force Academy at age 11. And she is the one who kept Hiliary from roller-blading off the roof of our house in order to impress the neighbor boy or his dog, I wasn't sure which. But when it came to horses, Jenny became a misty-eyed enabler. And she was not pulling any punches. A week after Jamie's late night confession, she hit me with "Bob, we need to talk."

We need to talk. Normally Jenny would use this phrase to initiate a conversation that would culminate in my offering an apology for something. It could be for something I did, but didn't know, or it could be for something I didn't do and still didn't know. I cut through the preliminaries:

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“Jenny, I’m sorry and I promise to do better next time.”

“No, we need to talk about Hiliary and Jamie. I’m thinking a horse might not be such a bad idea.”

This was getting out of hand.

“Are you sure you wouldn’t rather talk about something I did or didn’t do?”

“It would be nice if they had something they could do together.”

“Couldn’t we just buy them a tandem bike? And what happened to one step at time? We’re not ready for this. We don’t have the money, we don’t have the stuff, and we don’t know what we’re doing.”

“That didn’t stop us from getting married, did it Bob?”

A “nag” analogy popped into my head, but I held my tongue.

“Look Bob, we don’t have to jump in all at once. The girls met some people in 4-H who are willing to lease a horse to us. We can keep him at their barn and all we have to do is pay for the upkeep. We can go from there.”

They met some “people” in 4-H? What was she thinking? Clearly, she did not comprehend the true nature of this organization. People think 4-H is such a wonderful thing, but it’s no place for a horse crazy kid. Sending a horse-crazed kid to 4-H is like holding AA meetings at the neighborhood pub. People in 4-H LOVE horses. 4-H is an evil cult of true believers and a source of the most radical, pro-horse-ownership propaganda imaginable. Kids come home from 4-H meetings not only believing that owning a horse is possible, but that it's wholesome fun and builds character. Like I said, 4-H is evil.

(Author’s Disclaimer: throughout this guide you will find several references to 4-H. As most of you know, 4-H stands for "Hogs, Horses, Heifers, and Hounds." Actually,

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4-H is a great organization. It provides kids with a great way to become involved with horses – or a variety of other animals for that matter. It's mainly about learning and responsibility. I highly recommend this organization. My only objection to 4-H is its vicious plan to take over the world and enslave humanity.)

It was only through sheer trickery that the girls got into 4-H in the first place. It started when Jamie approached me about joining an organization called Sunset Riders. Like any other self-distracted father, I said “Well, sure!”

Allow me to describe the level of my naivety at that moment. I assumed Sunset Riders was some kind of horse appreciation group where people sat around, ate cookies, and talked about how much they loved horses and how great it would be to actually have one. As we all know, no such group has ever existed anywhere in the United States of America. This was a *riding* group. And they used *real* horses. The name *Sunset Riders* should have tipped me off.

Of course, Jamie neglected to mention that Sunset Riders was a 4-H club. And she didn't bother to tell me that every last kid in that 4-H club had a horse. And she forgot to point out that the club put on monthly horse shows. I even drove Hiliary and Jamie to their first meeting, unaware of the trap that had been set. This pattern of deceit and manipulation was to be repeated many times in the next thirteen years.

So here was our dilemma. Unless we were going to allow our girls to bounce around a show ring horseless, like characters in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, we had to do something. But did Jenny seriously think these two could share a horse? Obviously, she hadn't looked in their bedrooms lately.

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Mathematically, Jamie (14) and Hiliary (9) were five years apart. But in terms of personality and temperament, they were from different planets. Their bedrooms were monuments to their differences.

In Jamie's room, the bed was always made, complete with hospital corners. I often wondered if she actually slept under the covers. Two large bookcases supported a book collection that was sorted and labeled according to the Dewey Decimal System. Four long cardboard boxes, each containing bedroom decorations for a season were stacked under her bed. The walls were adorned with a *Top Gun* poster, a picture of Gandhi, and the American flag. Her stuffed animals were arranged in a perfect pyramid on a 32-inch shelf above her bed, exactly midway between the walls. A badly worn but intact Mickey Mouse doll, which her grandmother had given her when she was 3 months old, perched at the top of the pyramid, surveying it all.

I was never quite sure if Hiliary even had a bed. There was a place where the layer of tangled clothes – clean, dirty, undefined – and miscellaneous items rose higher off the floor, and I assumed that was her bed, but no one ever really knew. An autographed photo of Jim Carey was taped to the wall above her dresser, just over her copy of *Mystery Science Theater 3000, the Movie*, which was missing the case. A poster of John Lennon looked down on us from the ceiling. Breyer horse models peeked out from every nook and cranny. Pictures of Hiliary Herself could be found if you dug around the room long enough. As often as not, these featured something inappropriate, like a kitchen doily or a cat on her head. If she was angry at one of us, we would find one of *our* pictures on the floor - outside her bedroom door.

The idea that these polar opposites could work together on anything without creating a mass

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disturbance in the balance of the universe - or at least the psycho/emotional balance of our family - had to be one of the most optimistic notions of the 20th Century. However, the girls did have one significant thing in common; they both took great pride and pleasure in their ability to manipulate and deceive their father. When infused with the power of horse craziness, the Improbable Alliance of Sisters with the support of their hopelessly insane mother proved too strong for me to resist. They got their damn horse.

What I've learned from our horse-centered life is the subject of this book. I wish to share with you, the parents of horse-crazed girls, my vast knowledge of these curiously headstrong creatures. I will discuss things like what to feed them, how to keep them under control, and how to keep yourself safe around them. I have a great deal to say about horses as well.

What About You?

If you are new to horsegirl parenting, you are probably feeling a little confused. Perhaps you even feel overwhelmed. Be assured that millions of parents have gone through what you are now experiencing. And most of them would agree with the following advice. Hide. Run away and hide. Do it now. Put down this book and make yourself invisible. Find an empty closet or some attic space, or go to your sister's in St. Louis. Defect to Mexico. It's cheaper and it may be your last chance to maintain any trace of sanity.

Of course, I realize you aren't going anywhere. A part of you hopes you can continue living a normal life, despite the fact that your daughter is deeply disturbed. *Oh, a horse is no big deal*, you tell yourself. Or perhaps you're still in denial. You think all this is temporary and

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that it's natural for a girl her age to want a horse. You're sure she'll forget about horses when she discovers boys.

I have news for you. A tidal wave is coming, and you are in its path. If your kid has a genuine case of horse craziness, she will not "just forget about it." She will plead. She will promise. She will plot. *She will tell Grandma.* And she will never, ever give up. That eighty pounds of sheer determination standing in front of you is a product of the Second Most Powerful Force in the Universe. No earthly power can hold out forever against a young girl's desire to have a horse of her own. You will delay. You will compromise. You will distract. You will say NO a thousand times. You will lose.

I suppose you could forget about this book and educate yourself with a serious guide for parents of horse-crazed kids. There are many available. But why bother? Some parents have been doing this for years and *still* don't have a clue. And they're doing just fine (sort of). As long as you have no real choice about any of this, you might as well relax and have some FUN. So, whether you're a new horse parent or you've been having FUN for years, this book is for you.

This book is also for anyone who has ever been horse crazy. You need to know how much trouble you've caused.

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