

Barn Time

Spending time riding at a barn filled with horses is the thing I enjoy doing most in the world. After a tough day, there is no better place to be than on the back of a horse. Riding gives me a chance to unwind and be myself better than anything else.

Crunch, crunch, crunch. I hear the gravel under the tires of our van. A horse whinnies, and a dog barks. Then, just around the bend, Baymount Acres (the barn) appears. As I meander down the main aisle, specks of dust dance playfully in the warm shafts of sunlight streaming through the entrance. I hear a soft whicker, and there stands my favorite mare, Molly, waiting patiently for me to arrive. There is a beautiful lake that lies just beyond the arena outside. The horses graze peacefully in the pasture; it feels as though I am a part of that herd. Everything about the barn is special to me. Just being there puts me at ease. The barn is my home away from home.

“Tacking up”, as horse people refer to the chore of grooming, saddling, and bridling your horse is always plenty of fun. A shelf mounted to the wall holds everything you need to give your horse a proper grooming. I often bury my face in that coarse horse mane and inhale that sweet, horsey scent. First, you use a curry comb (a brush with rubber teeth) to loosen hair and dirt. Then, you groom with a stiff brush to sweep the grime away, and finally, a soft brush, to add a little shine and remove dust.

One of my favorite rooms in the barn is the tack room. Here, rows of saddles rest on racks, coated with a fine layer of dust, and bridles hang in tangles of brow bands, nose bands, metal bits, and leather reins. I enjoy running my fingers over the antiquated saddles and feeling the supple leather beneath my fingers. The saddle pad is soft and

plush, perfect padding for the horse's back. I quickly saddle and bridle Molly. Then, I lead her out of the barn.

I swing into the saddle with practiced ease, and urge my horse forward. After we warm up for a while, we pick up a trot, and finally, a gentle canter. I feel myself sinking into the rhythm of my horse, my body in tune with her gentle, rocking gait. Whenever I ride, the tensions of the day simply melt away, left far behind in the dust. The feeling of victory when we clear a jump is indescribable. When I work extremely hard to hone a particular skill, and it all finally "clicks", the satisfaction of knowing my riding is improving makes me feel elated.

All too soon, it is time to head for home. I usually dawdle on my way back to the barn, wanting the ride to last as long as possible. After my ride, I pamper my horse by giving her an excellent brushing down. Sometimes, I watch Molly plunge her face into the flake of hay my instructor tosses her after my lesson. Once I have taken my horse to her stall and put away the tack, it is time to get going. As I trudge toward our van, I turn back for one last look at the cozy barn. The sun is setting out over the lake, painting the shimmering water with radiant pink, orange, and purple hues. Dark silhouettes of horses gazing peacefully out over the pastoral scene settle in for the night. It seems as though the Almighty Artist has captured the breathtaking view on His canvas just for me. It is time to leave but I do not want to. "Until next time," I think to myself and turn to go.

Even if I do not ever mount a horse, my barn time allows me to escape the worry and stress of everyday life. Spending time riding at a barn filled with horses will always be the thing I enjoy doing most in the world. When I am on a horse, I am free to soar.

By: Caroline Williams