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June Nelson Memorial Scholarship Essay

Prompt: Your life is a series of stories. Tell a story that has helped shape you or reflects who you are today, and how that will move you into the future.

When I was twelve years old, my parents bought me a three-year old horse for my birthday. He had one summer of training in his short lifetime, and overall, was fairly untamed. Thinking I was already a cowgirl, I decided I was going to tame the wild creature and ride off into the sunset like so many western movies. To add a bit of context, I had taken a total of two years of riding lessons once a month on a 30-year old mare and cantered once by accident. In contrast, my new horse, Riley, was young with an endless supply of energy, and he had no problem tossing me into the dirt whenever he pleased. This little black gelding was much faster than any horse I'd ever ridden, and I often felt I was far too unskilled as a rider to handle him. All too often, our rides would end abruptly with me on the ground and Riley bucking his way across the arena.

My twelve year old self wasn't capable of handling Riley. I was shy, passive, and I didn't have the confidence I needed to boss around a 1,200 pound animal. I recognized this, but refused to accept it. Although I lacked confidence, along with my other character flaws, I was stubborn. I wanted to have a horse to ride off into the sunset with. Instead of getting a new, better trained horse as was suggested by several people, I wanted Riley. As herd animals, horses look for a strong leader. I knew that if I wanted to keep Riley, I had to change. So, I changed myself. Instead of being shy and hesitant, I became strong.

It's cliché to say that in changing my horse, I changed myself, but nothing could be more accurate. Training Riley was the first long-term goal I had ever achieved, and it helped me understand how to set and follow goals in a way that works for me. Riley is now my show horse, trail horse, and my best friend. As a team, we've won quite a few events and are always looking for new experiences. In no way was training this horse easy. Growing up with Riley, I had many failures. On more than one occasion, I ended a ride in the hospital with a concussion (despite wearing a helmet at all times) or with broken bones. I was forced to make serious adjustments to my personality and my riding in order to succeed. I took lessons, attended clinics, and asked a lot

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of questions about horse behavior. I learned to control myself and my emotions as much as I learned to handle his. Riley taught me patience and perseverance, traits that I had yet to develop on my own.

Looking into the future, I can't help but think about the lessons taught to me by my horse. Every failure, every broken bone and injury only increased my determination. I became both physically and mentally stronger, and I learned how to aggressively chase my goals. While I was terrified of the very real danger involved, I knew I couldn't give up. A quote by Jennifer Lee says, "Be fearless in the pursuit of what sets your soul on fire." I like to think that, despite being scared, that I will take risks and always strive to reach my goals.

Currently, my long-term goal is to achieve a master's degree in biological engineering. As a girl from a very rural area, just the idea of going to college somewhere with thousands of people is absolutely terrifying. Nevertheless, I am working extremely hard to be sure that I set myself up correctly to achieve this goal. I have put in a great deal of effort in my academics and am currently ranked first in my senior class. Just like with training Riley, I know there will be small failures, but I understand they are essential to overall success. Through the years of working with Riley, I learned patience, confidence, and determination. I understand what it means to work hard to achieve goals I have set for myself. Working through everything thrown at you is the only way to be successful, and I fully intend to apply this to all of my future endeavors.