

The Seven Stages of Aging on Horseback

By Cindy Hale

Stage 1: Fall off pony. Bounce. Laugh. Climb back on. Repeat.

Stage 2: Fall off horse. Run after horse, cussing. Climb back on by shimmying up horse's neck. Ride until sundown.

Stage 3: Fall off horse. Use sleeve of shirt to stanch bleeding. Have friend help you get back on horse. Take two Advil and apply ice packs when you get home. Ride next day.

Stage 4: Fall off horse. Refuse advice to call ambulance; drive self to urgent care clinic. Entertain nursing staff with tales of previous daredevil stunts on horseback. Back to riding before cast comes off.

Stage 5: Fall off horse. Temporarily forget name of horse and name of husband. Flirt shamelessly with paramedics when they arrive. Spend week in hospital while titanium pins are screwed in place. Start riding again before doctor gives official okay.

Stage 6: Fall off horse. Fail to see any humor when hunky paramedic says, "You again?" Gain firsthand knowledge of advances in medical technology thanks to stint in ICU. Convince self that permanent limp isn't that noticeable. Promise husband you'll give up riding. One week later purchase older, slower, shorter horse.

Stage 7: Slip off horse. Relieved when artificial joints and implanted medical devices seem unaffected. Tell husband that scrapes and bruises are due to gardening accident. Pretend you don't see husband roll his eyes and mutter as he walks away. Give apple to horse.

Trust me. Despite a lack of bounce-ability, aging on horseback isn't so bad, as long as you know what lies ahead. And as long as you keep your sense of humor.