

## My Life with Horses and Horseshoeing

Since I was born, I've been outside breathing fresh, country air and the smells of a farm. This farm was my home, and we had a variety of animals, including goats, sheep, chickens, and horses. Each one of those animals had a positive effect on me, teaching me to appreciate the outdoors and the meaning of hard work. The horses however, taught me the most important lessons, and made me who I am.

By the time I could walk I was on the back of a horse, being led around by my mother or maybe just sitting on their backs while the ponies ate hay in the barnyard. It gave me great pleasure to be around them and by age five or six I rode regularly on trail rides, in fields, or my front lawn. I wanted to be more involved with horses though, and joined the United States Pony Clubs when I was eight. Pony Club taught me much in the ways of good horsemanship, including the importance of safety, horse care and maintenance, and riding and training methods.

My first pony was a rescue case named Bon Bon, and my second horse was named Windy. Windy was a chestnut colored Morgan cross, and was the first horse I used in Pony Club. He and I learned mountains of skills together, but unfortunately I outgrew him when I was eleven. I had to move on to larger horses, and owned three different horses that I used in Pony Club. Not all of them worked out as well as I had hoped, but I persevered as long as was reasonable with each one.



I finally found a draft/paint cross named Darby who I purchased five years ago, and used him in Pony Club until I was sixteen when I left the Club due to a lack of money for riding lessons. I continued to work with Darby, and taught him a great deal about jumping and dressage. I still own him and two other horses now that I ride for pleasure.

During my teen years I always had a passion for a career in working with horses. My first idea was to be a vet, which then changed to being the owner of a massive broodmare farm. However I came to my senses and considered being a farrier at eleven, although I never did anything about it then. I changed my mind a few more times regarding which career I wanted, until I was sixteen and decided to definitely be a farrier.

**Figure 1**

**Windy, My first Pony Club Horse**

That firm decision came when my farrier at the time taught me how to trim my own horses because he was retiring and wanted to cut back on his work load. The moment I picked up those nippers and went to work I knew that this trade was mine for life. I instantly fell in love with the work, however physically difficult it may be, and my family pitched in together to buy me my first set of basic trimming tools.



After that I was trimming my own horses, as well as my aunt's horses and her neighbor's horses. The following year my farrier taught me how to shoe me own horses, and from there I continued to buy more tools and practiced shoeing on my horses every chance I got. I also picked up a couple more trimming customers, and slowly the word spread that I was open for business.

A year later I started advertising myself as a horse trimmer only, because I didn't feel comfortable shoeing many horses other than my own until I was done with formal farrier school. I continued to get more customers, and word spread even more and faster from there on out. By August of 2009 I had approximately 35 regular customers, and about 50 horses I worked on total.

In September 2009 I left home for Cornell University's Farrier Program, a sixteen week course taught by the great Mike Wildenstein CJF FWCF with Honors, who is one of the best farriers in the world. Mike taught me tremendous amounts of information related to horseshoeing, but one of the most highly valued lessons I learned was the importance of evaluating the entire horse before you go to work on it. This is because anything you do in the application of shoes or even just in trimming can drastically affect the soundness and athletic capabilities of that animal throughout it's life.





I also learned how to make shoes from raw steel, from shoes like the basic Plain Stamped Front Shoe, to more complicated ones like a Front Heartbar with a Rockered Toe, a therapeutic shoe used on horses with a condition called Laminitis. I had to make a set of sixteen different shoes to pass the course, all of them for various applications or soundness issues present with horses. In addition to learning how to trim and shoe horses, I learned about operating a farrier business itself and customer relations.



Another important lesson I learned at Cornell was the anatomy and physiology of horses' limbs, and the technical terms used for referring to injuries and soundness issues. These skills allow me to interact with and understand veterinarians so as to create a better working relationship between myself as a farrier and equine vets.

My instructor taught us fun things as well, like basic blacksmithing skills unrelated to the farrier trade. I have found that I enjoy making steel tools and decorations, and will continue to do so as a hobby.

After graduating Cornell's Farrier program in December of 2009, I started college at SUNY Cobleskill, majoring in Equine Science. I just finished my first semester, and have one and a half years to go before I get my degree. I will use this degree to become more knowledgeable about horse nutrition, training methods, and breeding/genetics and apply it to my skills as a farrier. I will also pass along this knowledge to my customers. In this way, I will be all the more helpful to them and their horses' health.

Upon graduating farrier school, I have made more connections with local farriers and word has spread all the more that I am open for business. My business has continued to grow over the past several months, and keeps growing every week.

Also after graduating I applied for the scholarship available through the Jameson Albright Foundation for Farrier Scholarships. This is a significant scholarship available to a single graduate or future student of farrier schools per year, and only for those absolutely dedicated to the farrier industry. The money from this scholarship is to be used towards paying off any loans an individual would have to take out to pay for going to farrier school, or to pay for the future expense of attending a farrier school. Kim, Brooke, and Erica, the three women who make up the foundation, reviewed my application and decided upon me as the recipient of the award. They personally delivered the scholarship award to me at my home, which I felt incredibly honored to have happen. Knowing that I am the only person in the country this 2010 year to receive this scholarship was the greatest honor of my life. I thank all of these women very deeply for selecting me. They are wonderful people, and I am thrilled to have met all of them.

The knowledge I gained at Cornell and will learn at Cobleskill could fill many books, and it will take me a lifetime or more to fully understand all of it. That is my goal, to spend the rest of my life dedicated to the farrier industry and to expanding my knowledge as a horse-shoer. This career is what I am made for and what I truly love doing.