

## **The purpose of manes.**

by Patricia Tocco

There is one place horsemen go for comfort - our horses' manes.

The mane is there to hold on to in times of peril - including if you feel you're about to lose your balance and hit the ground while mounted. "Grab mane" - the instructor will shout out to you. It's security.

Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. There is a great quote by Englishman William Camden ; "Betwixt the stirrups and the ground, mercy I asked for, mercy I found."

Sometimes, mane, stirrups and saddles are no match for a bucking horse.

If you bury your head in your horse's mane, you'll smell each horse's distinctive odor. It's not what you think - it's not offensive. It's the smell that would have you identify them if smell were your only sense. Breathe in and mark it so you can recall it.

If you bury your head in your horse's mane on a sunny Carolina blue sky day, you are filled with a sense of joy at being alive and having such a noble creature as your friend. Yes, they are there day in and day out requiring feeding and care. Non-horse people label it as work. That daily rhythm is our tether to the balloon of life. Sometimes you're soaring, sometimes you're crashing. No matter what, those daily chores keep you grounded.

If you bury your head in your horse's mane while laughing at something playful they have done, you share a special moment - a time of pure joy. My first horse used to bump me with his head when he wanted me to pay attention to him. The same horse would kick the stall door at feeding time. After I lost him, the barn was too quiet. I realized how adamant he was about letting me know exactly what he wanted. He lived up to the name Sherman (like a Sherman tank) that the riding stable (where I met him) had given him.

If you bury your head in your horse's mane crying - the tears will flow hard and long because this is your trusted friend and they won't judge you for showing your emotions. Standing there quietly, the horse will let you expend your grief. Eventually your tears will stop and you realize how lucky you are to have this place to seek comfort.

Horses like most animals live in the moment although that is not to say they don't have a memory. There is no worry of the future for them. Likewise they have no idea what is going on in the greater world they live in - I've never been more thankful for this.

My horses have no idea there is a virus attacking us. Their world is a safe haven for me - now - as it has always been.

I remember decades ago, deciding that riding looked like fun. I didn't know then what a wonderful journey I was about to take. All the things I've learned from horses are a gift - As are all the people I have met through them. And best of all, my horse's mane (albeit a different horse) is still there to hold onto and gain comfort from.