

Pokey



The Fastest Horse on the Ranch
by R.L. Ron Brinegar

Arizona Cowboy Poet

A Bedtime story for you

Bedtime stories are the best part of growing up. I always loved listening to my Grandfathers stories, they always had a good ending.

Credits: 2010

With loving thanks to Alice Ford, better know as “Aunt Alice.” to all of our family. Without her encouragement, suggestions and enthusiasm this story would not be possible.

This is a story about a horse without a name. This little horse lived on the ranch with two sisters and his Mother. He was a very small horse, so small that some of the other horses made fun of him. They said he could not run fast because he was too little. The bigger horses never played horse games with him because he was so small. But I will tell you a story about this little horse. His name is “Pokey.” He did not have this name in the beginning of this story, but I will tell you how he got his name, and how he became a hero, and how he saved his little friend who lived on the ranch. But I'm getting ahead of the story that starts on a cool morning on a big ranch far-far away in Nevada.

Pokey was a pretty brown and white horse known by the cowboys as a "Paint horse." He spent his days playing horse games and dreaming of being bigger some day. He had a friend that also lived on the ranch; a pretty little girl who made his heart feel as light as a feather whenever he saw her playing in the yard. He loved her very much. She was small just like him and she would run and play and laugh just like he did. All the other horses liked her too; they would show off when she would come to the corral to sit on the fence and watch cowboys train the horses. She came to the corral almost every day; he made sure he was done playing horse games so he could be with her.

His heart would flutter every time he saw her and he felt joyful to hear her laugh. He wished she could speak horse -talk but she only made human sounds. Besides, she would never stand still long enough to learn his horse language. Once, he tried to get her to talk. He nickered to her and hoped she would understand, but she just laughed and he felt good to see her smile. To his eyes, she was very pretty. She had light brown hair and lots of freckles on her face.

Her eyes sparkled when she laughed. She was always laughing and having fun just like him. One day she brought an apple with her. When she put her hand through the fence, he walked over and carefully tasted an apple for the very first time. It tasted so good that he licked his lips with a loud smacking noise. She laughed with joy and he felt good seeing her happy. They became very good friends after that and shared many apples together.

It's true he was small and had much to learn; his two sisters looked after him along with an older horse in the pasture named Cobre'. "Co-bray," meant copper in Spanish. His friend Cobre' was a beautiful copper colored horse, and was a good friend and teacher. Cobre' taught him how to be a good horse. Cobre' taught him to stand tall; hold his head high and always look proud. Some evenings Cobre' would tell stories about cowboys on the range and the adventures he had when he was a young horse like Pokey.



Cobre' told him about range fires, mountain-lions, bears, rattlesnakes and how to watch for danger on the trail. He told him not to worry about being little because he could do some things that bigger horses could not do, and besides he could be as big as he wanted to be in his heart. Cobre' told him to be proud of whom he was. There would always be bigger horses and smaller horses than he was. Cobre' told him if he always did the right thing, he would be as big as any horse in the world no matter what his size.

He wasn't really afraid of the cowboys at the ranch even though he acted like it. Cobre' told him the cowboys were good friends of horses. Still, he tried to stay as far away from them as he could. His mother didn't seem to mind cowboys; she even would let them come up and pet her. Sometimes they would sit on her back and she would take them for a ride.

He liked cowboys too, but he would never let them sit on him even if they were friends. He didn't want any part of that. He would always stay just out of the cowboys reach, and he would never let them sit on him even if his friend Cobre' said it was okay.

One day he and his mother and a cowboy went for a ride and he tagged along behind them. This cowboy was one of his favorites. He knew his mother liked him too, because she nickered loudly whenever she saw him come into the pasture where they stayed. Sometimes, the cowboy would bring apples with him and give one to him and one to his mother. He loved apples but he didn't want to get too close to the cowboy just in case he tried to sit on him.

That day, they all rode high into the mountains near the ranch. He walked behind his mother and watched everything she did so he could learn how to be a good cow-horse. He trailed along behind until they reached a high meadow. It was a very beautiful meadow with new grass and wild flowers everywhere. They stopped besides a small creek so they could taste the fresh grass that grew wild in the meadows. The cowboy sat under the tree and watched him play and jump around. He was good at playing.

Sometimes he played like he was the fastest horse alive; so fast that other horses seemed to stand still as he ran past them. He would run full speed one direction and then turn and run another direction, as if to say, "See how fast I can run, no-one will ever catch me."

He was always having fun but he still stayed close to his mother because his she always made him feel safe. Whenever the cowboy walked his direction he would turn his head and step back to hide behind his mother just so the cowboy wouldn't sit on him. The cowboy would smile or laugh and sometimes he would sit under the tree and sing a song. When the cowboy would start to play his guitar and sing, he would stop playing and listen. It made him happy to hear the cowboy's soothing voice.

Summer went by fast. Then one day a man drove up in a truck and walked over to the corral to look at all the horses. He told the ranch foreman he'd be back to get the extra horses and take them away after the roundup. He said he wanted to take Pokey and a few other horses to work for the Carnival. Pokey didn't know what a Carnival was but he didn't want to go anywhere. He would miss his mother and he would especially miss his little friend. He heard the ranch foreman say, "The little paint horse would be a fine choice to work at the Carnival."

One early morning all the cowboys left to go on a round-up, and this time his mother was going too. Pokey wanted to go even if he didn't know what a round-up was. His Mother told him that he would stay at the ranch this time with his two sisters and his friend Cobre' with some of the older horses.

Several days past by; then one early morning he saw his little friend saddle up a horse and ride away from the ranch. He was concerned because she was so young and she shouldn't be out riding alone. He waited all day for her return. He knew it would soon be dark and he was getting worried. Then he saw the ranch horse trotting back to the ranch alone. Where was his little friend? It would be dark soon and she would be in danger if she were in the mountains all alone. He had to find her, but first he had to get out of the corral.

He had to get out of the corral and he knew just how to do it. His friend Cobre' told him how to escape if he wanted to. If he pushed hard enough on the gate it would open just enough for him to get through. The bigger horses were too wide to fit through the opening, but he would be small enough to fit through the gate. He went over to the gate and pushed hard but couldn't get it to move.

He nickered to his friend Cobre' to come over and help, Cobre' leaned on the gate and finally the gate began to move a little. Cobre' pushed on the gate again and Pokey slipped through. He was free! Now he had to find his little friend before darkness fell. He headed for the high meadow where his mother and the cowboy took him one day. He arrived at the meadow at dusk but his little friend was nowhere to be seen. Where could she be? He looked at the ranch below and saw a storm coming from the west. He didn't have much time left; the storm would bring cold winds and perhaps snow. It would be very dangerous for his little friend to be alone in the mountains in a snowstorm.

If only his friend Cobre' was here, he would know what to do. He went higher up the trail nickering every so often just in case his little friend was close-by and she would hear him.

He crossed the creek where the water was moving fast. Cobre' told him that slow moving water meant it was deep and fast moving water was shallow and made for safer crossings. After he crossed the stream, he stood on the high bank and sniffed the air. He felt his heart beat a little faster when he caught a whiff of his little friend. Quickly he headed towards the upper meadow, and there in the distance he saw his little friend sitting beneath a tall pine tree. She was rubbing her eyes and crying.

Just as he headed into the meadow, he froze with fear. He caught a glimpse of a mountain lion crouching low in the tall brush near the pine trees. He knew had to act quickly to save her. Pokey knew how dangerous a hungry mountain-lion could be. His friend Cobre' had told him all about them. He told him they were the most dangerous of all the animals in the mountains, more dangerous than bears or wolves.

When his little friend spotted him, she leaped to her feet and started running towards him, unaware of the mountain-lion hiding near the trees about to spring forward. He bolted towards the direction of his little friend; he had to get to her before the big cat attacked.

Pokey ran full speed into the meadow as the lion raced towards the little girl from another direction. The lion was so intent on catching his friend he didn't notice Pokey running right at him. He charged the lion from his blind side and knocked him off his path.



The mountain-lion rolled several times in a big cloud of dust. The big cat was startled but regained his senses. In an instant he leaped high into the air towards Pokey with blazing speed. Pokey stood his ground and reared up on his hind legs to strike the lion in mid air. The big cat fell to the ground dazed and surprised by Pokey's bravery.

The lion decided he was over matched and quickly disappeared into the brush. Pokey was shaken by the encounter with danger, and forgot all about his concern of being close to a person. Should he run away and tell his Mother? Or stay here with his little friend? Then he remembered the storm and knew they should go back to the ranch together.

He had never before let a human get close to him, but she ran up so fast and threw her arms around his neck. She hugged him tightly with tears in her eyes. He felt good when she hugged him and to his surprise, he no longer was afraid. He was proud that he was the reason she would return safely to the ranch.

The sun was setting and darkness was fast approaching. They would need to act quickly. If only his little friend could understand horse talk, he would tell her they would ride back to the ranch together. He whinnied his alarm as if to say “let's hurry.” She hugged him tightly and said “I'm so happy you found me,” He nickered his approval and pawed at the ground as if to say “let's go now.” He tossed his head in the direction of the trail heading back to the ranch. Just then a loud noise split the air with loud thunder as lightning flashed about.

Pokey smelled smoke and his sense of danger knew that a lightning fire could be racing up the mountain. Quickly he tossed his head and nudged his little friend again with his muzzle. She climbed on his back and away they went. He headed straight for the mountain stream. His instincts told him they would be safe there.

In moments the fire raced up the mountain side but he and his little friend were safe standing in the wide stream. The fire raced up near the water's edge and stopped when it reached the sandy edge. She hugged him tightly around the neck, “You saved my life again.” His heart swelled with pride; now they would head back to the ranch where they both would be safe.

It was dark when they reached the ranch. “I can't tell anyone I was gone” she said. “It's a good thing you can't talk; I'd be in lots of trouble if father knew I went riding by myself.” She put Pokey away in the pasture and returned with some extra grain.

The next day his mother returned to the ranch with all the other horses. He noticed the pickup truck from the carnival in the driveway. “I'm here to take the horses away,” he heard the man say to one of the cowboys.

He was afraid he was going to leave the ranch and wondered where he could hide from the Carnival man. Just then he saw his little friend come out the house running towards the corral. “Father, you can't sell this horse, he saved my life.” Her father listened quietly. “How could this little horse save your life,” her father asked. She told him how she went for a ride by herself. She told him how she got stranded and lost when another horse ran off and left her alone on the mountain

She said this little horse found her on the mountain and she told her father about the mountain lion and lightning fire and how they rode to the river and waited safely in the stream for the fire to pass.

Her father said, “That’s a pretty tall tale, you sure have a big imagination.” She replied, “But father its true, this is the fastest horse on this ranch.” With tears in her eyes she said, “Please don’t sell him to the Carnival; he saved my life.”

Her father laughed again and said, "see that tree at the far end of the pasture?" "You can race Cobre'." "In his day, Cobre' was as fast as any horse on this ranch." "I'll have Ol' Tom take Cobre' around that far tree and back to here." "If your little horse here can stay within 20 yards of Cobre', then we might just keep him". Her Father smiled again and said, "You forgot one thing though, your little horse has never had a saddle on him, he's never been trained". "He's very shy and has never let any of us get close to him." "I just didn't have time to train him."

"That's Okay father, I won't need a saddle, you'll see". Her father watched as Ol' Tom turned Cobre' away from the corral and started trotting slowly towards the tree. Without a word she leaped on the back of the little horse and away they went running straight towards Cobre'.

Ol' Tom spurred Cobre' and the race was on. As Cobre' closed in on the big Oak tree they were right behind. Cobre' had the heart of a champion and was always a ranch favorite. His good looks, speed, strength, and disposition made him one of the favorite horses on the ranch. They were trailing behind the fast pace set by Cobre'.

The little horse knew Cobre' was big and strong, and he ran for all he was worth. His little muscles rippled in the sunlight; his hoofs digging hard into the dirt throwing desert sand high into the air.

Then his dream came true. It seemed that Cobre' was almost standing still as he and his little friend flew past.

After all, when he played horse games in the pasture, no one could match his speed. Besides he felt that his little friend believed in him so much, he could not let her down. Even Cobre' once told him that he could be as big as any horse in the world if he always did the right thing.

They returned to the corral way ahead of Ol' Tom and Cobre'. Her Father could not believe what he had seen. The little horse he had never paid any attention to had just won a race against one of the fastest horses on the ranch. "Well I'll be; I would never have believed it if I hadn't see it with my own eyes", her father said. "Looks like this horse will stay on the ranch after all." "He's your horse now, what are you going to call him," he asked? She didn't blink an eye and replied; "I think I'll call him **Pokey**, the fastest horse on the ranch." Then she and Pokey trotted around the corral with heads held high. No one would ever call him slow again. He was Pokey, the fastest horse on the ranch. Well almost, that is, I forgot to tell you the rest of this story.

Its true Pokey was the fastest horse on the ranch, at least on this day. But I'll share another secret with you. Cobre' never really tried to win that race! You see, horses have a way of spreading goodness and Cobre' knew how he could make everyone happy even if he had to lose a race to his little friend Pokey. I guess there might be more than one horse hero in this story after all.

The End



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The definition of a cowboy can be summed up in one word, "Freedom". He spends his life living as free as possible. Open ranges are gone now, but a cowboys soul roams free as the wind over wide open ranges he may only see in his dreams. The cowboy sees the world in simpler terms; decisions are made with honor and a notion to do the right thing. He's the first person to offer to help and the last one to ask for it. There is a cowboy saying that goes " A good Horse is never a bad color". Just do your job as best you can and you'll have the respect that you deserve, it doesn't matter who you are or what you look like.