

## The gift of believing

Dr. Christine King

The best Christmas present I've ever received was a bridle. My dad gave it to me even before I had a horse to go in it. You see, he believed in me and in my dream to have a horse of my own.

We'd always had horses. My mum rode, my brothers and sisters rode, I rode. (Dad was the only one in our family who didn't ride, but he supported our equestrian interests all the same.) I'd never had a horse of my own, though. So, one summer, during the school holidays, I worked in a factory and earned enough money to buy my own horse.

Just so that my story makes sense, I'll tell you that I grew up in Australia, where Christmas falls in the middle of the summer school holidays. That Christmas, long before I'd saved enough to buy my horse, my dad gave me a bridle, wrapped in a plain brown paper bag. (Dad was never one for formalities.) By anyone else's standards, it was rather ordinary: a plain leather bridle with a cheap nickel-plated snaffle bit (although it did have a shiny gold browband). To me it was absolutely beautiful, and I couldn't wait to find the horse who would go in it!

By the end of the summer holidays, I'd saved enough money to buy Banjo, a (to anyone else) rather ordinary Australian Stock Horse gelding. To me he was absolutely beautiful! He was a lovely light bay, with a star, a snip, and one white sock. He cost me \$275, but he was worth his weight in gold. I named him Banjo after Banjo Paterson, a famous bush poet from Australia's colorful past and the author of *The Man from Snowy River*, *Waltzing Matilda*, and numerous other Aussie classics.

(In case you're a fan of the movie, or just up for a bit of vicarious adventure on a cold winter evening, let me tantalize you with the first few lines of *The Man from Snowy River*: "There was movement at the station, for the word has passed around / that the colt from old Regret had got away / and had joined the wild bush horses—he was worth a thousand pound / so all the cracks had gathered to the fray..." Read on at [www.mountainman.com.au/mansnowy.html](http://www.mountainman.com.au/mansnowy.html))

Anyway, to get back to my more pedestrian tale, I bought Banjo with my summer work money just a week before school started. Throughout the school year I rode almost every day, even getting up at 4:30 am so that I could ride before leaving for school. We went to Pony Club every meet and went on trail rides the other weekends. We had many wonderful adventures together during my school years.

Banjo was my living model all through vet school, and he stood patiently while I poked and prodded and learned my way around a horse from a vet's perspective. He was the first horse I treated for colic (so I know how scary it can be when your horse colics!), the first horse I did any dentistry on, the first horse whose feet I trimmed, and numerous other firsts.

Banjo died at the ripe old age of 30, a few years ago now. I had long since moved away and made the difficult decision to leave him behind with my family, rather than hauling him interstate wherever my career took me. I've never regretted that decision, because he was well loved and well cared for at home. Still, I often thought of him and wished I could have him with me.

Dad has since passed away, too. Of all the memories I have of him, the most precious are about how he believed in me and my desire to have a horse of my own, and later to go to vet school. I didn't realize it at the time, but his simple belief that I'd succeed fueled the realization of my dreams.

This Christmas give the gift of believing in someone you love. Even if you think they're nuts to even try, let them know you're behind their efforts to reach for their dreams. You'll be giving that person more than you could possibly know.

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