

*A Rhetorical Device Used to Emphasize Meaning:
Equine Edition*

by

JAMI KIMBRELL

I mean no posthumous harm to the horse. It is an animal. It grinds food with teeth the length of crayons. Surely it lacks the capacity to haunt me from horsey heaven for saying I never wanted to be a horse, for saying I never wanted to run toward a star-filled sky. I imagine the horse's longed-for horizon carries no semantic meaning. It is there, like the horse, to draw a line between me and the other side.

“A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!”—*Shakespeare*

I mean no posthumous harm to the horse that killed my sister. Its hoof walls were sore, and the October-hot asphalt was unforgiving. The crowds were loud. Children in cowboy hats shouted and waved wads of cotton candy in the air like pom poms. Distractions happen, my mother said. Never expect too much from an animal.

“No one ever came to grief, except honourable grief, through riding horses.” —*Churchill*

I mean no posthumous harm to the horse that killed my sister while everyone watched. The spectacle of it all, the horse in full sprint, my sister's loss of balance, the quiet, the way a bystander covered my sister's face with his flannel shirt. It is almost too much to speak ill of a mere animal. When you expect too much from an animal, it is the horse that will disappoint. Horses do not understand how hard we humans fall.

Behind the Scenes with Jami Kimbrell

PR: Can you tell us about yourself and how you got into writing?

JK: I grew up in a VERY big family in a VERY small town in the deep South, and I grew up around storytelling in all forms. I was always amazed at the tales I heard around dinner tables and bonfires and in kitchens and pastures and churches. Storytelling came naturally. How could it not? Finding a way to put stories into words on the page was a different thing altogether and that took time because I did not pursue a degree in creative writing. Instead, I went to law school and have been practicing as a trial attorney for 20 years. What could have been a career that ended my desire to write became a career that gave me more stories, and for that I'm surprised and grateful.

PR: Can you share the context for your flash prose piece?

JK: Weeks before my 7th birthday, my 13 yr old sister was thrown from a horse during the rodeo parade in our hometown. She died days later after suffering a severed brainstem during the fall. The fall happened in broad daylight in front of people who had known my sister and my family for their entire lives. I've spent a lot of time thinking back to the day my sister fell. And I've spent a lot of time thinking about what my life looked like after that day, how my parents changed, how it changed my life and impacted the way I viewed and related to horses. Writing about this part of my past feels both necessary and compulsive and the more years between me and that day in 1984, the more I've tried to reach a place of forgiveness, but then I'm always left with the question of how to forgive an animal. I realized only in the last few years after reading so many poems and essays by writers I love and admire like Joy Harjo and Pam Houston that I needed to come to terms with how much I did not love horses the way everyone else did. At first, I was confused. Then ashamed. Ultimately, I felt alone. So I started writing about the process of forgiving horses which included forgiving myself for never loving them. The form I use to write these pieces is disjointed by design, to reflect how none of it makes sense to me even still, how I have to repeat to myself sometimes the reality of what occurred and the reality for which I will never truly have answers.

PR: What advice would you give other writers to stay motivated?

JK: Since writing is not my “job” per se, it’s always been difficult to balance writing with my career. For that reason, motivation for me is about not quitting. It’s that simple. Write whenever you find the time to write and don’t beat yourself up if you don’t get as much time as you think you need. Write anyway and write until the no becomes a yes. You will be so glad that you did.

(thanks, Jami!)