

A CHILDREN'S STORY:  
THE INVESTIGATION, WRITING AND REVIEW

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for Graduation with Honors  
to the Department of English  
at Carroll College, Helena, Montana

by

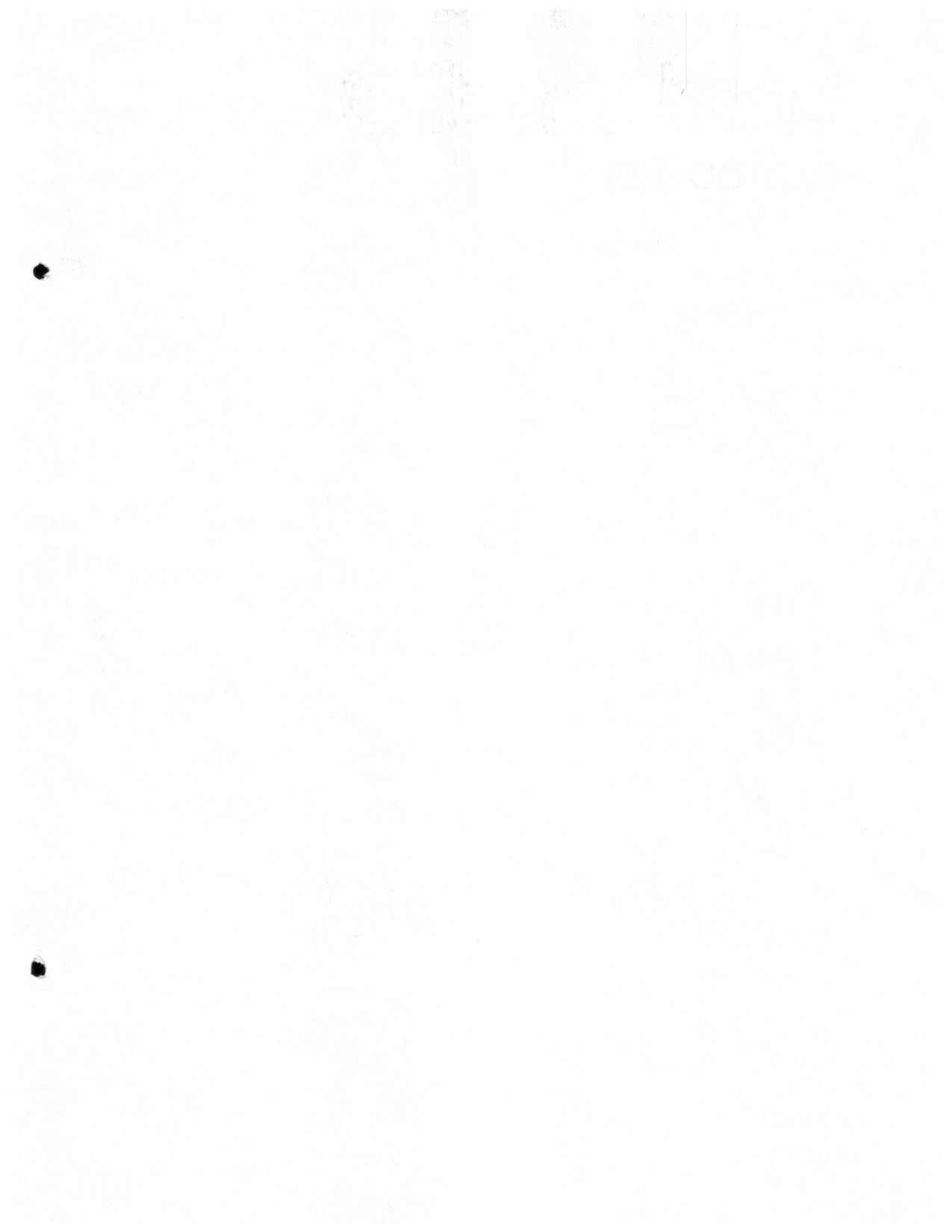
LeAnne M. Heidinger

March 24, 1981



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SIGNATURE PAGE

This thesis for honors recognition has been approved  
for the Department of English.

*Sister Miriam Clare Ressler*  
Director

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Reader

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Reader

March 24, 1981

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## PREFACE

Creativity. The world of literature, especially children's literature, thrives on it. The foundation of any literary work, however, lies not in the author's creative talents but in his ability to seek out a topic. The creative process is not complete when the pen is put aside. The true artist offers the work up to a scrutinizing panel of some sort. Only then has the creative process gone full cycle.

The scope of this thesis includes the initiation and completion of the three stages involved in writing and illustrating a children's story.

The first stage, investigation, determined suitable reading material for children reading at the fourth grade level. Methods employed to obtain this data from a group of eleven fourth grade students were: (1) a written questionnaire and (2) the "brainstorming" technique.

The actual writing and illustrating of a children's story comprised the second stage of this thesis. The content of the story was dictated by the results compiled from the investigation stage.

The final stage of this thesis consisted of reviewing the story and illustrations with two groups of fourth grade students. Their feedback enabled me to determine the areas in which I had succeeded or failed in making reading an enriching experience for the fourth grade level reader.

This minor work has inspired me to pursue children's literature on a larger scale.

## CHAPTER ONE

"...the final consideration in selecting books for a ...child or a group of children must be the children themselves..."

Zena Sutherland  
May Hill Arbuthnot  
Children and Books

It is my belief that this quotation must be exercised not only in selecting, but, more importantly, in writing books for children. Who knows better what fourth grade children want to read than the fourth graders themselves? With this in mind, I centered my investigation in a fourth grade classroom.

I met with eleven students from four different home-rooms who attend the Northside and Frontier grade schools in Wolf Point, Montana. (Wolf Point is located on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Northeast Montana. Classified as an agricultural community, Wolf Point's population is under five thousand.) These children then received a questionnaire designed to discover their reading likes and dislikes. The students' responses to the questionnaire appear on the following page.

I am a...Boy (4)  
 Girl (7)

I am...9 years old (8)  
 10 years old (2)  
 11 years old (1)

I am in...fourth grade (11)

If I could read about anything I wanted, the things I would read about are...

Horses (6)  
 Mysteries (4)  
 Motorcycles (3)  
 Sports (2)  
 Joke Books (2)  
 Dogs (1)  
 Charlie Brown (1)

My favorite stories and/or books are...

Black Beauty (4)  
Stormy (2)  
Whistle in the Graveyard (2)  
Snow White (2)  
Billy and Blaze (1)  
The Three Pigs (1)  
Hardy Boys (1)  
The Littles Take a Trip (1)  
Are You My Mother (1)

If I were to write a story for my friends to read, my story would be about...

Black horses (4)  
 Mystery (3)  
 Animals (3)  
 God and good things (1)

The things I don't like to read about are...

Outer space (3)  
 Scary stories (2)  
 Spiders (2)  
 Ghost Stories (1)  
 Fairy Tales (1)  
 Animals (1)  
 Snakes (1)  
 School books (1)

I like to read. (7)

I only read because I'm supposed to. (4)

After the students had completed their written questionnaires, I conducted a "brainstorming" session. ("Brainstorming" is an oral question and answer period which follows a very informal format.) Through this technique I became more aware of both the reading habits and interests of this age group.

Compiling the data provided by the students proved very interesting. As evidenced on the preceding page, these children preferred reading about horses. It is interesting to note that only two of the children live on farms or ranches. With this in mind I chose the topic for my children's story---horses. The first step of the investigation stage had been completed.

In order to determine how to approach and treat the broad topic of "horses" I thumbed through a number of books geared to the fourth grade readers. Fiction, "how-to" and informational books seemed to be the most popular types of books for children in this age group. My decision to combine these three approaches into one children's story brought the investigating stage of this thesis to a close.

## CHAPTER TWO

The following chapter contains the product of my investigation. The illustrations and text combine to present to the fourth grade reader an invitation to the world of fiction, information and "how-to."

The story is written and illustrated from a ten-year-old boy's point of view.

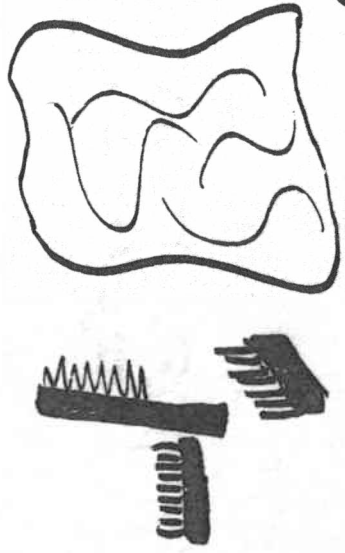
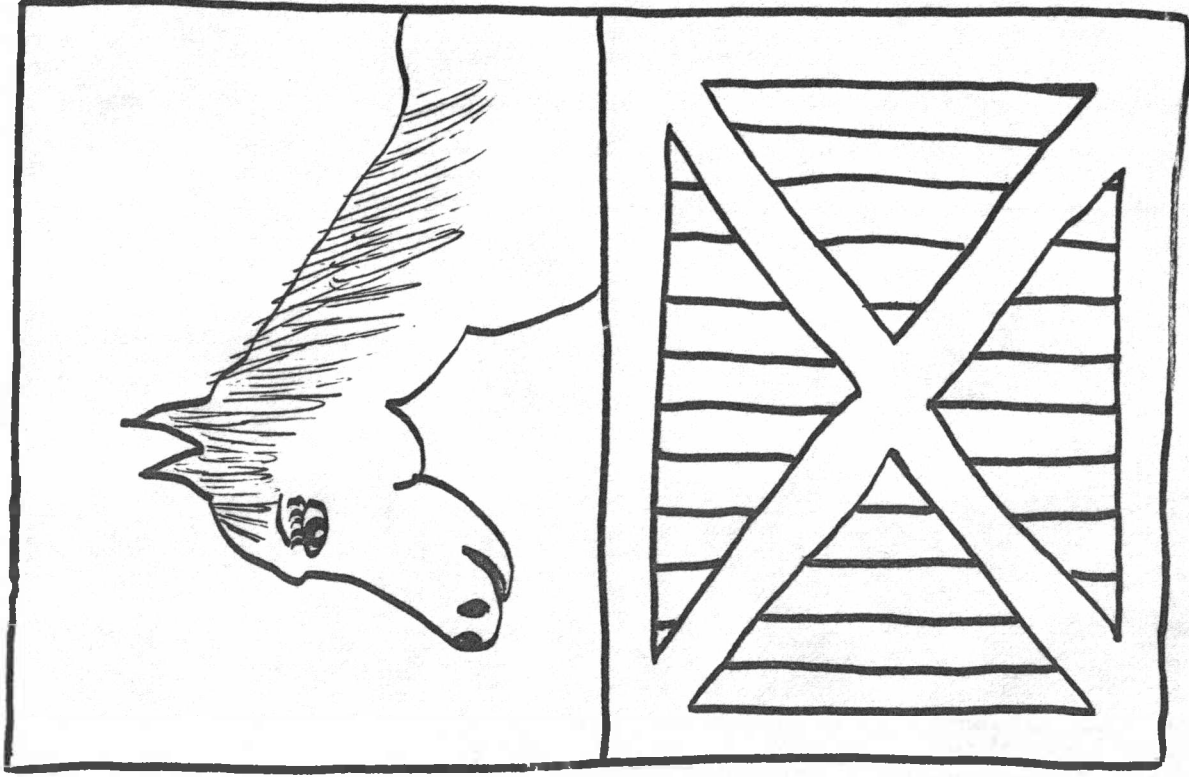
The story is filled with facts and information about the different kinds, colors and sizes of horses.

The story touches on the basic needs of a horse; stall, food and grooming.

The manner from which I approached the writing of this thesis enabled me to dispense information and instructions to children on how to care for a pet horse. At the same time the child is invited to love and care for his imaginary pet.

# **I Have a Pet**

## ***Equus Caballus***



Story  
and

Illustrations

by

LeAnne Heidinger

Pets.

Lots of kids have them. I don't.

But I would like one. I wouldn't want just any pet, though. I would like a horse.

Think of all the things that horses can do that regular pets, like cats, dogs, and goldfish, can't do. Horses can help around the farm, pulling plows and wagons. They can eat the grass in the backyard so it will never need mowing. And best of all, horses can give piggyback rides for hours at a time.

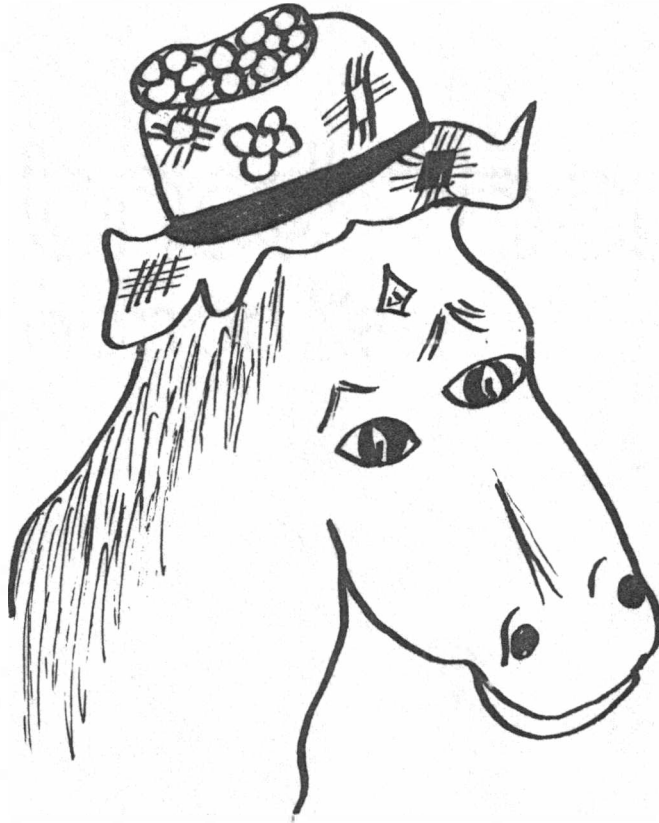
But...

I don't live on a farm. My backyard is crowded with an old swingset and teeter-totter. And my big sister says I'm too big for piggyback rides. I'm only ten years old, but you know how big sisters can be.

There is only one place I'll ever be able to have a pet horse and that is in my mind. In my mind I can make my horse any size, color and breed I want. I can name my pet any name I want. And together we can do everything a real horse does with a boy who is ten years old. Like riding piggyback when my big sister is not looking!

I have read a lot of stories about horses. I have even written a couple all by myself. The first one I wrote tells us all about the numerous kinds and colors of horses and the different jobs they do.

Would you like to read it? It goes like this...



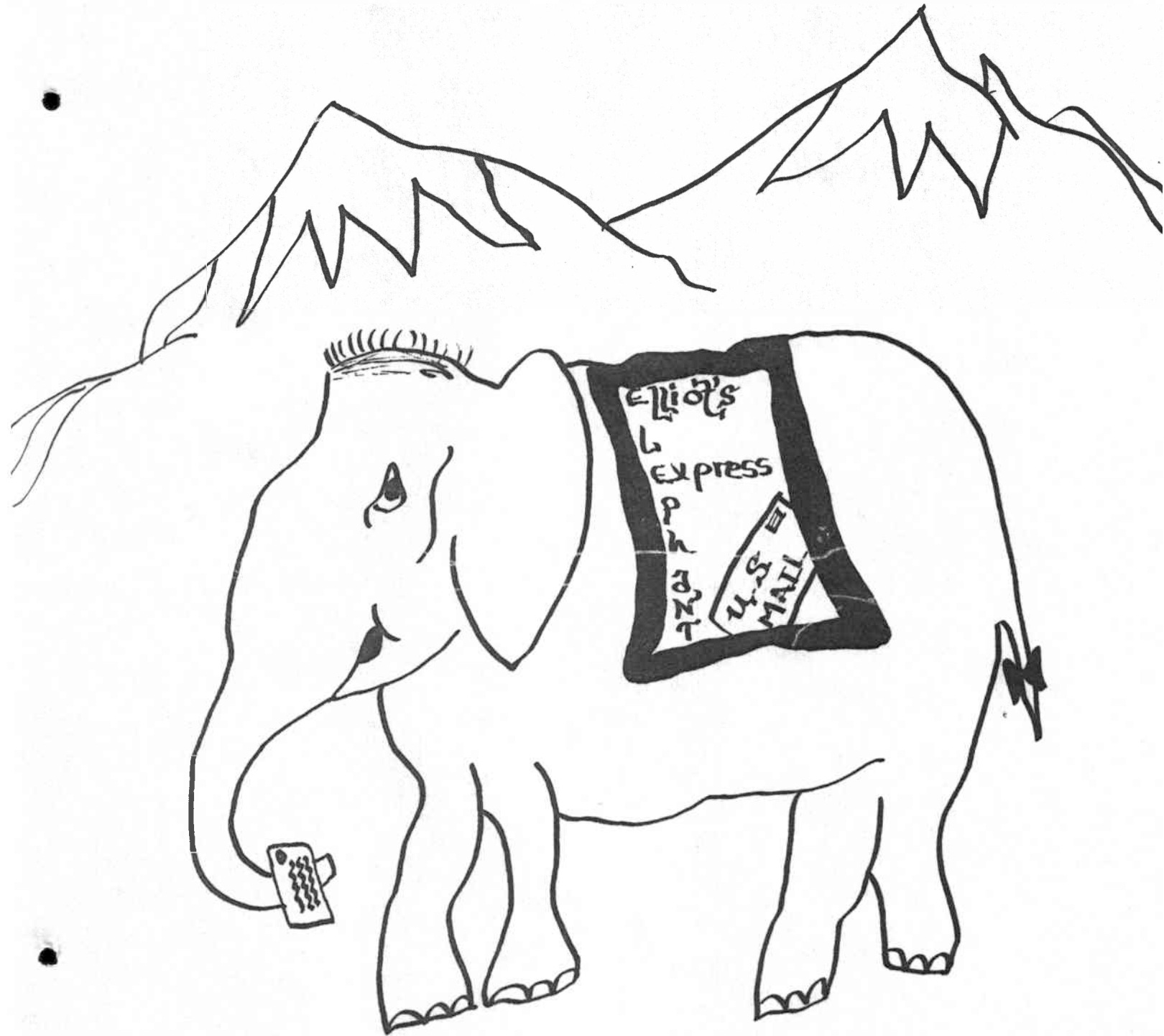
I have a buddy  
 Who loves to eat hay;  
 He wears a straw hat  
 And, boy, can he neigh,  
 He's an EQUUS CABALLUS  
 According to some,  
 But to me he's Brandy,  
 My horse and my chum.

Horses have been around for many, many years. Without them we never would have had...

Bandana-masked robbers holding up rickety stagecoaches. (But there probably wouldn't have been any rickety stagecoaches, either!)

Without horses the mail wouldn't have been carried by pony express. Can you imagine having your letters and packages delivered by Elliot's Elephant Express?

And think how funny cowboys wearing ten gallon hats would've looked riding camels during the long and dusty cattle drives.

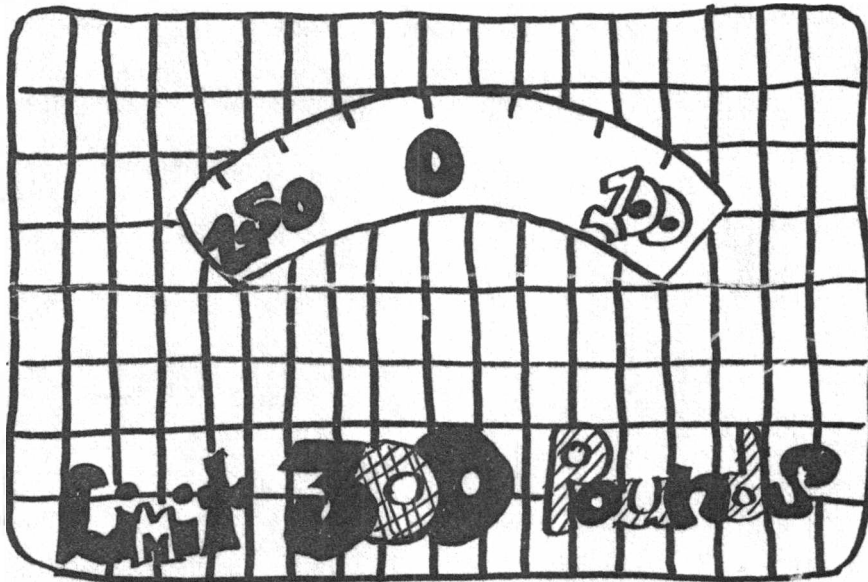


People and horses are alike in a lot of ways. For instance, both come in many different sizes.

Some people, like Abraham Lincoln, are tall. Horses can be tall, too; up to 80 inches tall. (That's almost 8 feet tall!) But horses aren't measured with rules and yardsticks. They are measured in "hands". One hand equals 4 inches. So a tall, tall, tall horse can be 20 hands high.

There are short horses, too, just like there are short people. But if a horse is shorter than  $14\frac{1}{2}$  hands it is called a pony. There is a rare breed of horse called the Falabella which is very, very small. Smaller than the pony! These horses, like very, very short people, are unique and special so they should be very proud of their size.

In weight, people and horses are pounds apart. You would never ask a horse to step on your bathroom scale.



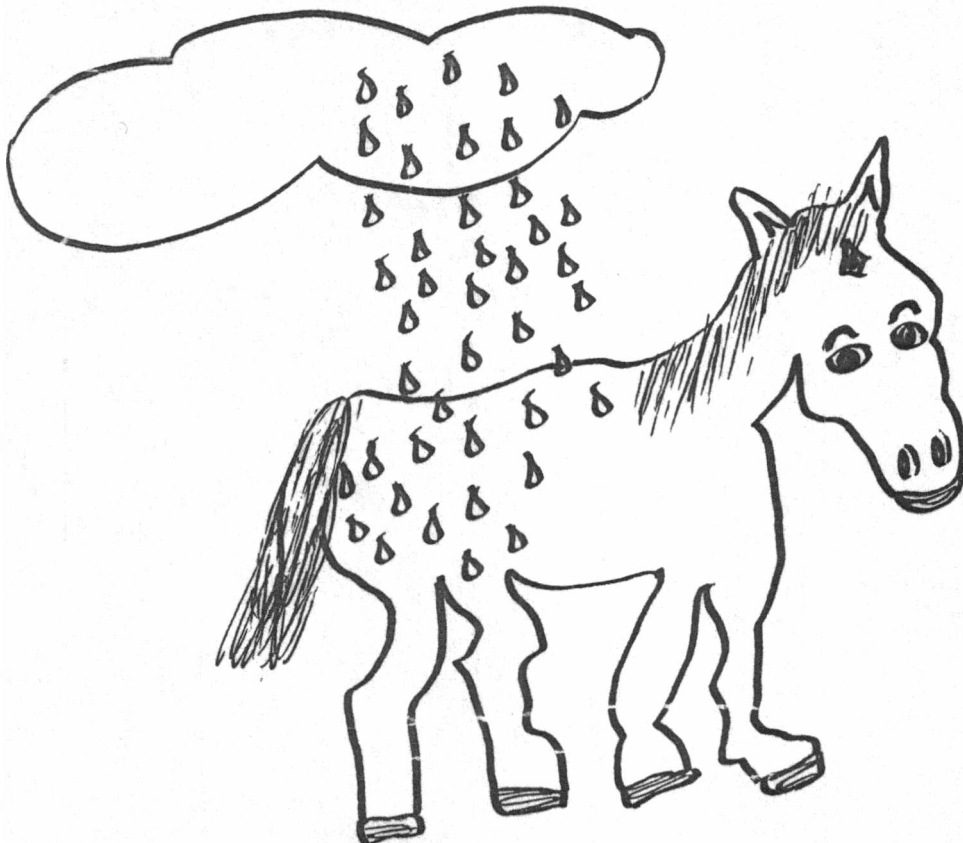
Why not? Because some horses weigh over 2,000 pounds. Even the smallest ponies weigh over 300 pounds.

People and horses are alike in another way. God created people in lots of colors. Some are Red. Others are Black. Some are Yellow. And still others are White. But no matter what color the skin is on the outside, the stuffing on the inside is the same for all people. The same goes for horses. Only horses come in more colors.

Some horses are just one color. Black, brown, bay (reddish-brown), gray, white and chestnut (yellowish-brown) are some of the solid colors horses can be.

Other horses mix colors and have spots. The only permanent spots people have are freckles and moles.

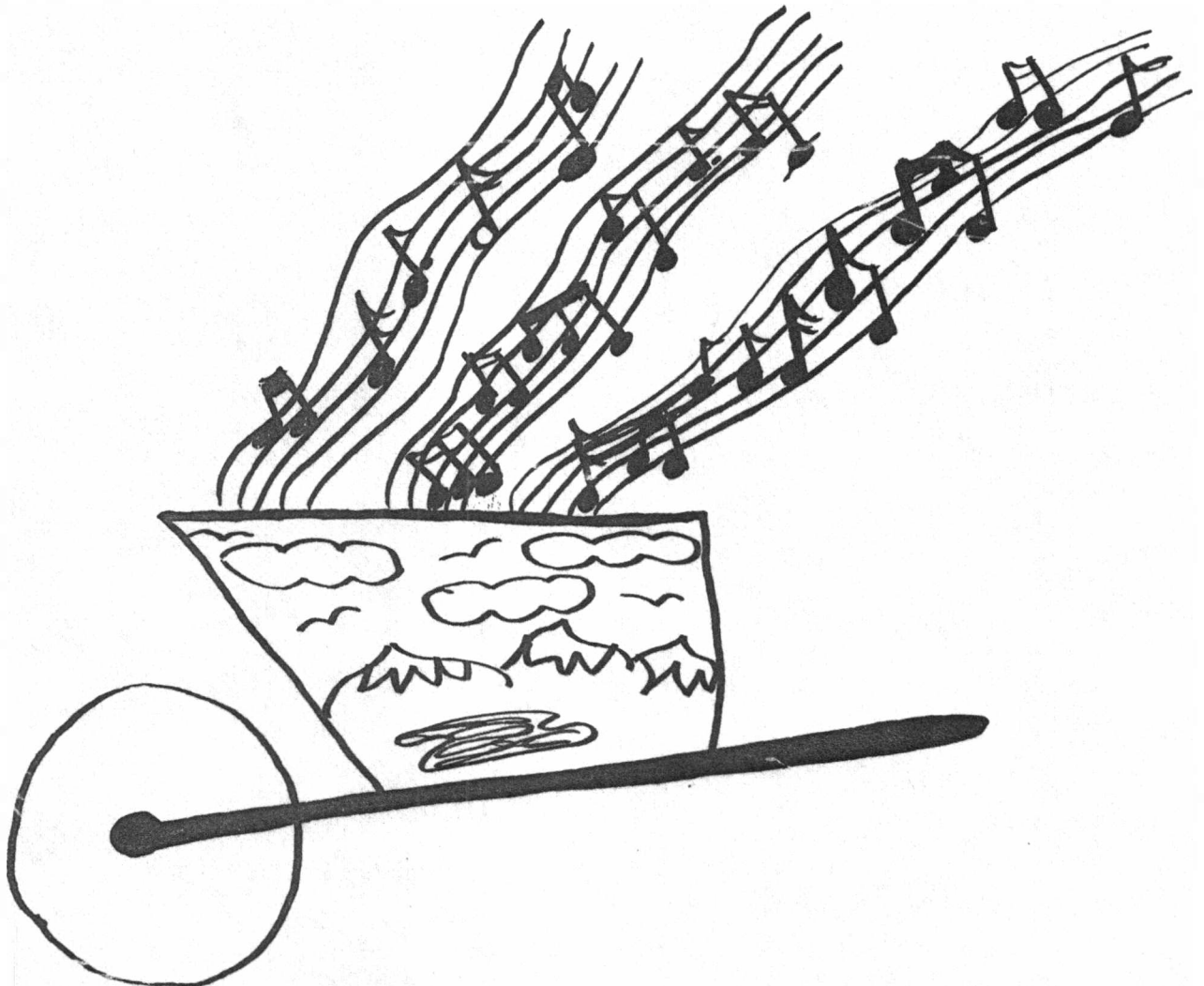
Appaloosa horses are sometimes called "raindrop" horses because of their spots. Their coats are a solid color with dark brown or black leopard-like spots.



Palomino horses have golden coats. The mane, the long hairs that look like a scarf on the horse's neck, and the tail of the Palomino are a silvery blonde color that looks like butterscotch syrup.

Pinto or Paint horses are those that wear spotted black coats. The spots can be any color. Except black, of course.

People and horses are alike in still another way. Some people can paint beautiful pictures of animals, mountains and sunrises. Other people have trouble painting the garage door. (But they still try!) Some people can sing as melodically as a choir of robins perched in a golden willow tree. Other people find it easier to carry a tune in a wheelbarrow. (But they still try!)



The point is some people are better at certain things than other people. The same goes for horses.

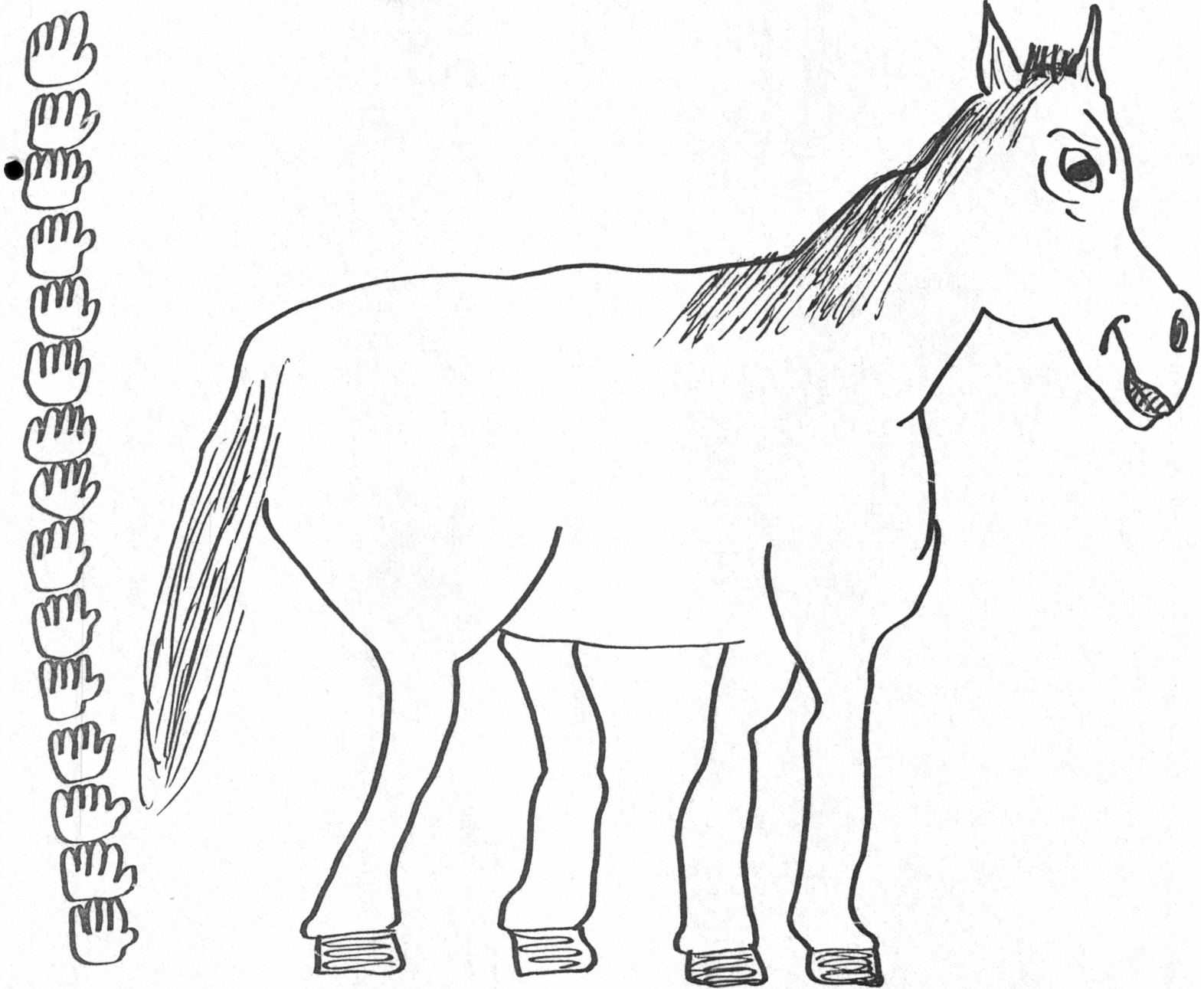
There are three kinds of horses: heavy horses, light horses and ponies. Each of these is especially good at one thing.

Heavy horses are the biggest, tallest and strongest. They are especially good at pulling things---plows, wagons in parades and old-fashioned sleighs in the winter time.

The largest heavy horse is a Shire. This breed of horse stands 18 hands tall (that's 6 feet!) and weighs over 2,400 pounds.

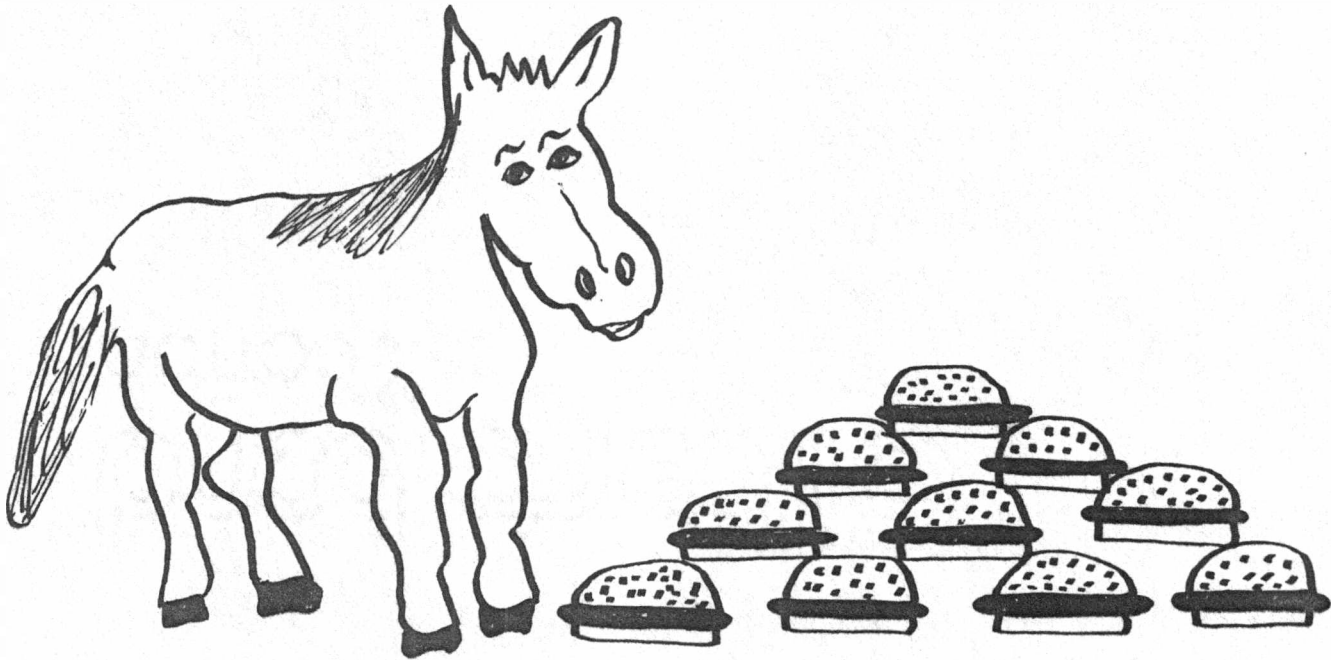
I wonder how big I would be if I ate hay and grain three times a day like a horse does!

The middle-size members of the horse family are the light horses. These are the horses you see in the circus doing fancy jumps and riding tricks; at the horse races, and in rodeos. They usually grow to be about 15 or 16 hands high (about 5 feet) and weigh about half as much as heavy horses, 1,000 pounds.



The most common breeds of light horses are quarterhorses and American saddle horses. I'm not sure why they're called quarterhorses but I think it is because all day long they eat

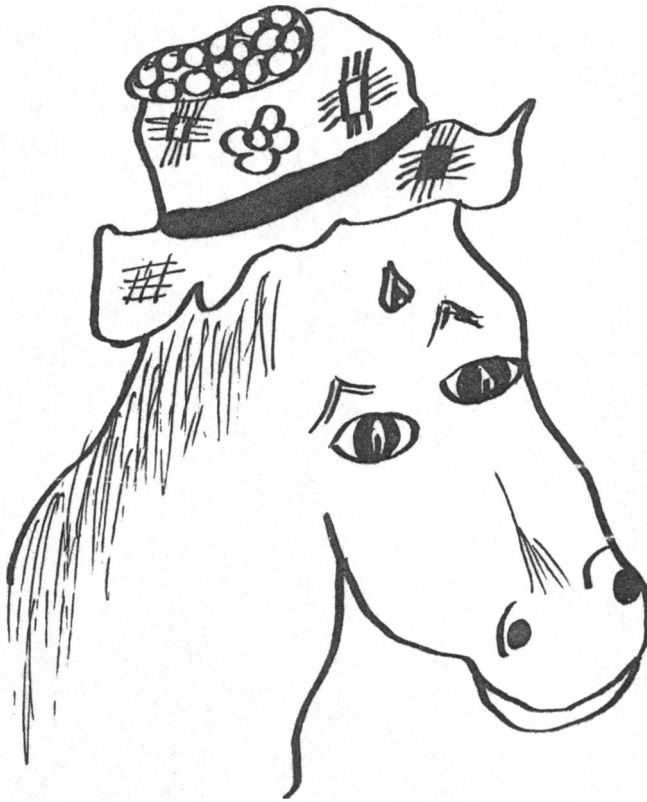
quarterpounders with cheese. Their quarterpounders are made with barley, though.



The smallest horse, but my favorite, is the pony. Ponies are just about my size. Only bigger. They stand about 12 hands tall (4 feet) from hoof to shoulder. They tip the scales at 500 pounds.

Shetland ponies are just the right size for me (and you) to ride. I think it was nice of God to make little horses for little people like us. Now if He could only make cauliflower littler for us...

Horses have been around helping people both in work and play for a long, long time. Without them, think how different life would be:



Without horses we have  
 the blues  
 How could we use all  
 those U-shaped shoes?  
 Without horses we would  
 not savor  
 Food without that  
 horseradish flavor.  
 Without horses frowns  
 and scowls would abound  
 For never again could  
 we horse around!

I bet you didn't know there were so many kinds and colors of horses. Neither did I until I had read books about them. I think the best horse for me would be a bay-colored Shetland Pony. I would call my horse Brandy.

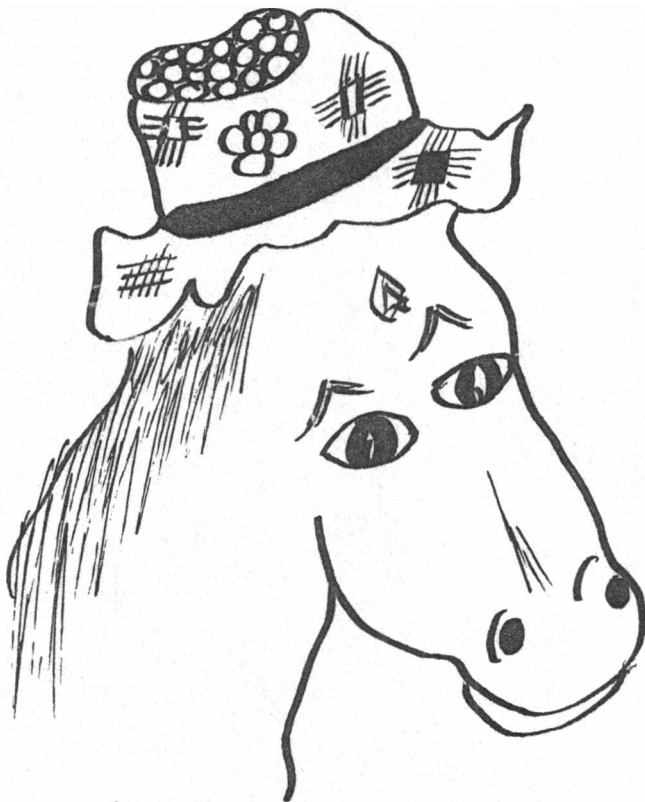
What kind and color of horse would you like? What would you name your pet horse?

Horses, like any other pet, need special care and attention. They have to live in nice, comfortable stalls;

sharing a bedroom with a ten year old boy would never do!  
The owner must keep the horse's stall clean and see that his  
pet eats the right foods, no pizza or popcorn balls. These  
are just a few of the responsibilities of horse owners.

After reading a lot of information on how to care for a  
horse, I wrote a little story.

Would you like to read it? It goes like this...



I have a buddy  
Who needs special care;  
He can chomp on oats  
But chokes on eclairs.  
He can sleep standing up  
Or snooze lying down,  
He's my horse Brandy,  
An all-around clown.

Horses have been around helping people for a long, long time. They have pulled heavy farm equipment, brought happiness and fun to carnival crowds, and pleasure to the many boys and girls who love to ride them. People show their thankfulness for them by taking special care of their horses.

Both people and horses have certain things they need to stay healthy. These four-legged creatures need much more than orange-flavored vitamins, more than cheeseburgers and chocolate milkshakes, and more than toothpaste with fluoride to keep healthy. So do people!

Horses and people both need a place to call "home". "Home" means different things to different people. To some, "home" means a big, red, brick house with five bathrooms and three color televisions. To others, "home" is simply four walls filled with a big family, home baked chocolate chip cookies and enchanting bed-time stories.

"Home" to a horse means a cozy, clean and dry place where eating in the living room is allowed. A horse's home is called a stall. A stall doesn't have to be very big, about ten feet long and ten feet wide. Ten feet, remember, is about 2½ bicycles long. A stall doesn't need televisions or chocolate chip cookies. Instead, the best stalls are carpeted with a one foot layer of straw or sawdust. It is on this blanket of bedding that the horse sleeps. Horses may sleep either lying down or standing up. They can even sleep with their eyes open! Wouldn't it be great if you and I could sleep and still watch our favorite television show?



Horses and people both have another need; food. People need food from four food groups...fruit and vegetable, bread and cereal, milk and milk products, and the meat group. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are the three meals most people eat; for each meal there is a favorite food. For breakfast I like ham and cheese omelets. Lunch is especially delicious when Mom makes

grilled cheese sandwiches and thick, creamy tomato soup. Golden fried chicken, plump corn-on-the cob dripping with butter, and lumpless mashed potatoes and gravy is my favorite dinner. Do you, too, have favorite meals?

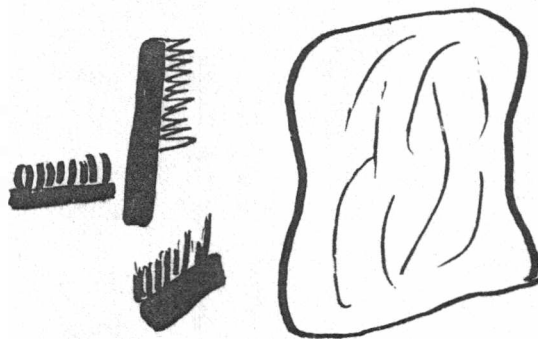
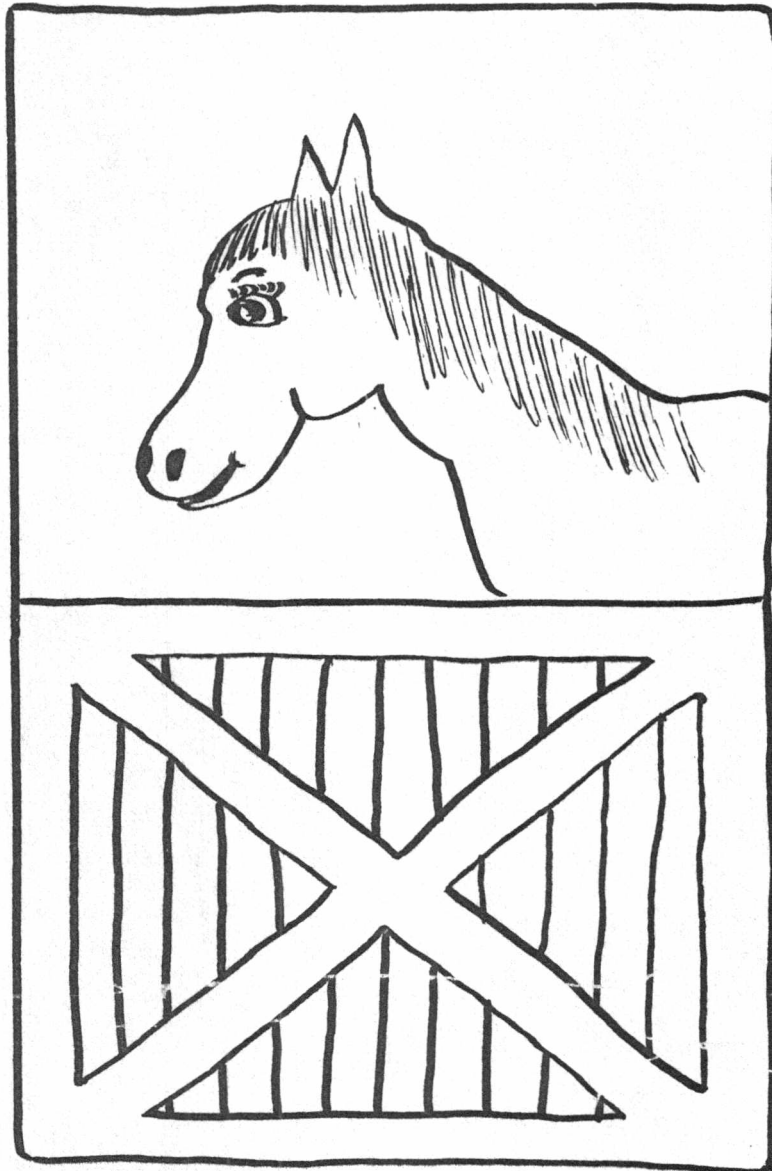
Horses, like people, eat at least three times. They, too, have a favorite food. Most horses would rather chomp on oats than anything else. I doubt if horses, though, like oatmeal with raisins!

A horse's stomach is eighteen times bigger than a human's stomach, so they can eat a lot more. A horse usually dines on 4-12 quarts of oats, drinks 12 - 20 gallons of water and slowly chews on 14 pounds of hay per day. Horses also need salt. Many horse owners put salt blocks in the stalls or pastures to make sure their horses get enough salt.



It is important that both people and horses keep themselves groomed. People do little things to make themselves look nice. These little things are all a part of grooming. The well-groomed person wears a hard-to-hide smile, takes a bath or shower when Mom says it's time, and washes behind the ears without being told.

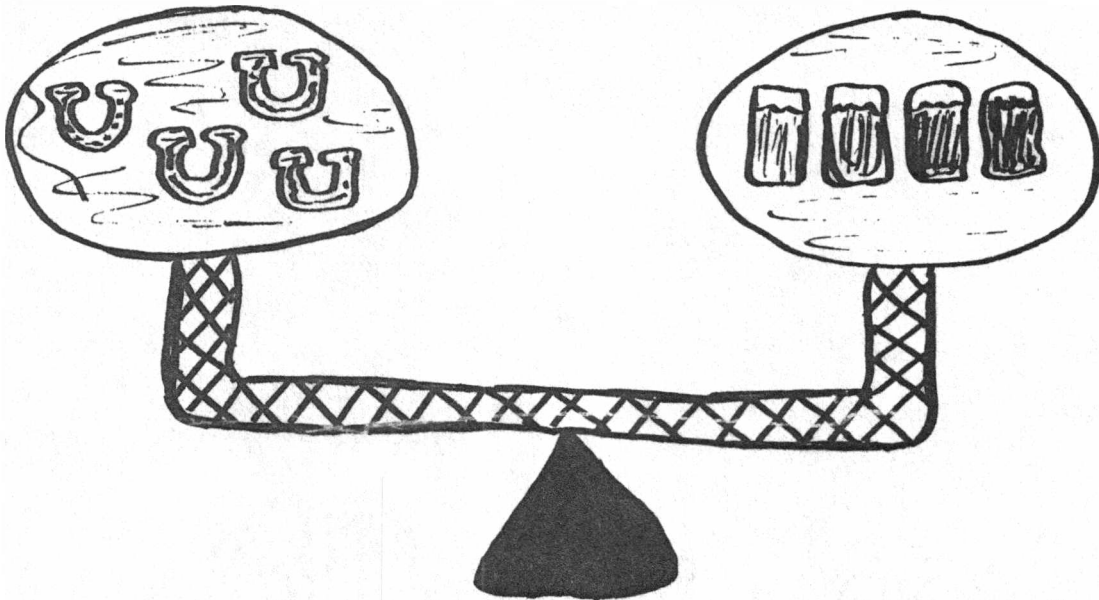
Horses need to be well-groomed, not just to look nice, but to stay healthy. The grooming of a horse centers around two strokes---brushing and wiping. The brushing stroke cleans away ground-in dirt and flakey dandruff. A soft cloth used in the wiping stroke leaves a shimmery sheen to the horse's coat like Mom's just waxed kitchen floor.



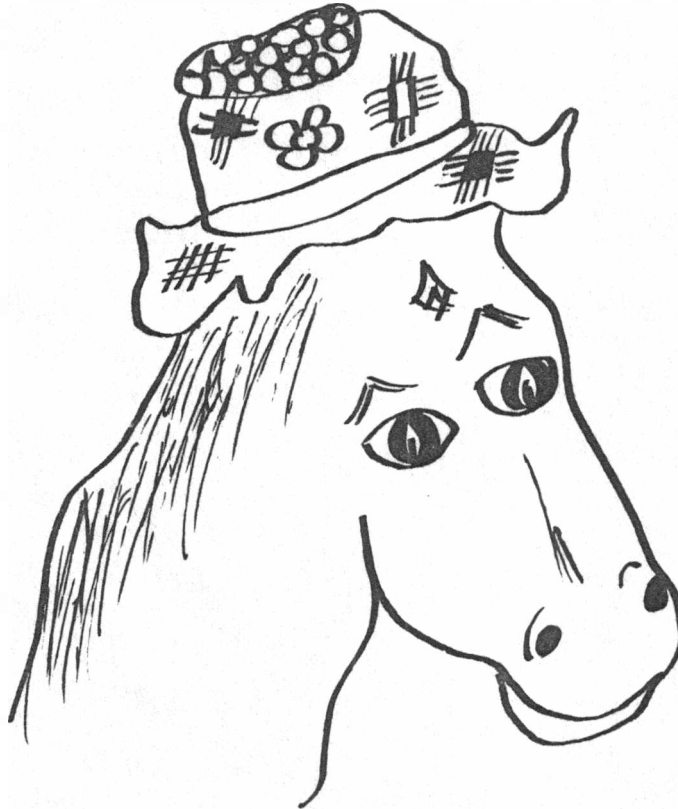
Another absolute must for a healthy, happy horse is shoes. Not all people in all parts of the world wear shoes. But that's okay because horses need to wear two pairs of shoes. After all, they have four feet! Horse shoes don't have shoelaces or buckles. They're not slip-ons, either. Horse shoes are made of steel and fastened with a special kind of nails so they won't hurt the horse's hooves.

Sometimes I think my mom wishes my shoes were fastened to my feet with nails. That way I wouldn't be able to run barefoot or lose them.

The best shoes for most horses are very light. At eight ounces, these U-shaped shoes weigh no more than a regular glass of water.



These are just some of the important things horses need to stay healthy. Here are a few others:



Carrots, kind words  
and kisses  
Help a horse grow proud  
and strong,  
Apples, attention and  
good wishes  
Help a horse know right  
from wrong,  
Horses need care from  
you and me  
So they may trot along  
happily!

They work on people, too!

So you see, having a real pet horse would mean a lot of work. It would also cost a lot of money, more than my three dollar weekly allowance would cover. These are some of the reasons owning an imaginary horse called Brandy is the only way for me to have a pet horse. That way, some days when I

have lots of time, we can go riding through thick, green, clover pastures. We can go on picnics. I can bring an oat and hay casserole for Brandy and a bologna and tomato sandwich for me. And, of course, we can go for long piggy-back rides. But on the days I'm busy with important things like after school snacks, television and homework, I wouldn't have to worry about Brandy feeling hurt because I didn't have time for him.

I don't think I'm ready to have a real pet horse. Not yet, anyways. Maybe when I turn twelve I'll be ready. Maybe I won't be ready until I'm really old, like around eighteen. When the time does come, though, I'll be able to pick out the horse I want and take care of it properly.

Until then I'll be happy keeping Brandy corralled in my mind - and loving him.

### CHAPTER THREE

The content and illustrations of I Have a Pet Equus Caballus, as stated earlier, were aimed at the child reading at or around the fourth grade level. It seems only natural, therefore, that the most qualified critics to review the story would be students presently reading at that level.

I made arrangements for the teacher and students who aided me in the first stage of this project to serve as my reader-panel. Due to the elements of time and distance I was unable to return to Wolf Point, Montana and participate in their evaluation of I Have a Pet Equus Caballus.

I submitted a copy of the story along with a questionnaire to my very young, but astute, panel of critics. The questions asked, along with the children's responses, appear on the following page. (NOTE: There were thirteen students in attendance when this questionnaire was administered, rather than the original eleven present during the first one.)

Did you like the story?

Yes (12)  
No (1)

What did you like best?

"All of it" (10)  
Elliott's Elephant Express (2)  
Pictures (1)

Could you understand all the words?

No (10)  
Yes (2)  
"I could understand most of them." (1)

Was there something you didn't like about the story?

No (8)  
"It was hard to understand." (4)  
Yes (1)

Did you like the pictures?

Yes (13)

Would you read this story if it was in your library?

Yes (9)  
No (3)  
"Not really." (1)

Do you have any suggestions or ideas that would make this story better?

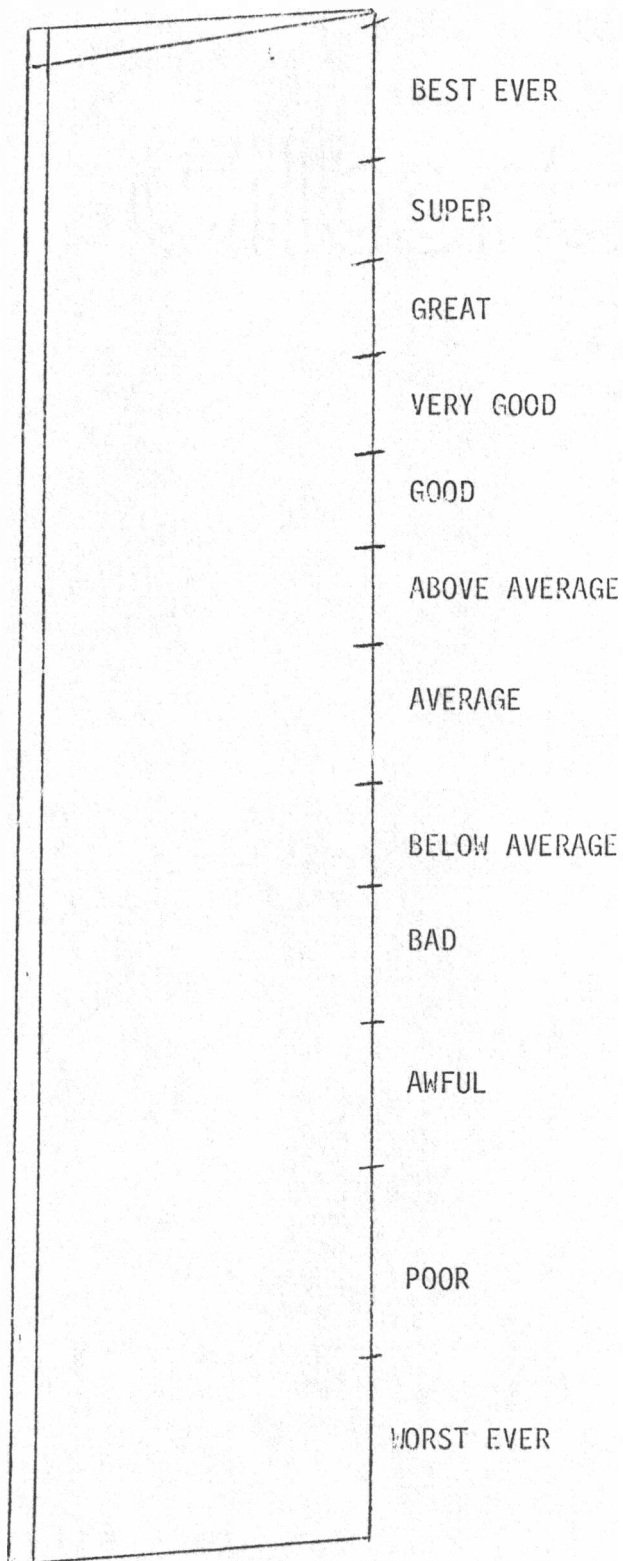
No (9)  
"More pictures" (1)  
"More story" (1)  
No answer (2)

I received the completed evaluations from the children by mail. It was not until this time that I realized the questions were vague. The monosyllabic responses of "yes" and "no" attest to the fact that the wording of the questions discouraged the children from elaborating on their answers. For this reason, even though the children's evaluations were very positive, I decided to submit the story to a second group of fourth graders.

Linda Hilton, a senior Elementary Education major, agreed to use my story in one of her reading groups. Miss Hilton is currently student teaching at Lincoln Elementary School in Helena, Montana.

Five girls and two boys reading at the lower fourth grade level served on this second review panel. These students spent three days reading I Have a Pet Equus Caballus. During this time they also answered questions on the story and did exercises in vocabulary building. When they completed the story and exercises, the students were asked to fill out a "How Does It Measure Up?" form. This form is the criteria by which Miss Hilton and the students evaluate their reading material. The comments, criticisms and suggestions of this second group appear on the next page. (NOTE: Two of the seven students did not complete the written form.)

HOW DOES IT MEASURE UP?



I've just finished reading...  
I have a Pet Equus Caballus  
 by LeAnne Heidinger.

Using the scale on this sheet  
 I would rate it...

- Best ever (2)
- Super (1)
- Good (1)
- Above Average (1)

This is because...

- "I liked the name of the horse." (1)
- "I love horses and it told me all about horses." (1)
- "I liked the poems and the whole story." (1)
- "It told us about horses and what they eat." (1)
- "This story told me about horses." (1)

The thing I liked best about the story was...

- "The little stories the boy wrote." (1)
- "The quarterpounder joke." (1)
- "The poems." (1)
- "Everything. I liked it all. It was very good." (1)
- "The horse discription (description) color." (1)

The thing I didn't like about the story was...

- "Reading the long pages." (1)
- "The poem on page 2." (1)
- "I like everything." (1)
- "Nothing." (1)
- "No answer." (1)

If I could change something in the story, it would have been...

- "The name. I would call it I have a pet horse or all about horses." (1)
- "More pckers (pictures)" (1)
- "I would change the poem on page two that's really dumb." (1)
- No answer. (2)

Receiving permission to come and "visit" with my critics, I attended their class. The seven students, Miss Hilton and I participated in an informal, yet informative, discussion on I Have a Pet Equus Caballus. On the basis of this meeting, along with the two previously administered questionnaires, I arrived at the following conclusion.

## CONCLUSION

I Have a Pet Equus Caballus was reviewed by twenty fourth grade students. Of these, nineteen stated they "liked" the story (95%). The children cited subject matter ("...about horses..."), "pictures" and "poems" as their reasons for enjoying the story. Sixteen out of the twenty students (80%) stated that they would read this story if it was in their library. The children's dislikes of the story can be attributed to the vocabulary used in the text. Four students found parts of the story hard to understand. One student found one of the poems "dumb" because she did not understand three of the words.

Suggestions offered by the two groups of students were few. Two students would like to "see more pictures." One student wanted "more story." Another student suggested a new title. Fifteen (75%) of the children made no individual suggestions.

The children from Lincoln Elementary School suggested a glossary in the back of the story would make some parts of the story easier to understand.

Overall, I was very pleased with the fourth graders' reactions. On the basis of their evaluations I would judge I Have a Pet Equus Caballus as suitable reading material for the fourth grade reader.