

...and I never cried again. Not really.



This picture was taken at Smokey's Stable in Huntington Beach the day I broke my arm. That horse doesn't look too menacing at first glance, but see that look he's giving out his left eye? See those ears laid back?

Yeah, I'm going down.

My cousin and I used to ride at Smokey's Stables every weekend back in the '70s. One of our parents would drop us off at a hole in the fence that lined the Bolsa Chica Wetlands. Then we would walk a narrow trail that lead to the small, dank stable.

Smokey was a legend in Huntington Beach back then. I only caught a glimpse of him once. He was wearing a plaid flannel shirt and trousers pulled up across his stomach. He stood outside his trailer smoking a pipe wearing a plaid flannel shirt and trousers pulled up across his middle, he stared at us as we mounted our horses and gave them a kick down the trail.

That was the only thing kids really knew about Smokey for sure was he smoked a pipe— that, and he was a BB gun owner and wasn't afraid to use it on trespassers.

On this day the ride started off just like like every other ride, but at the end we decided to take the horses into the arena for some barrel riding. Now, I had ridden the trails of

Bolsa Chica week after week for years and knew their every turn, and so did the horses. But I hadn't ever been in an arena with a horse and I certainly had no idea that once my horse saw the barrels he's bolt wildly to them out of instinct or spite, or maybe both.

I slid off the back of the horse and landed on the soft dirt of the arena. Collecting myself after the fall I took a minute and as I sat there I watched the horse run the barrels over and over again without me—kicking up dirt and working up a good froth around his mouth.

I got up and took off my jacket to look at my right arm. It broke my fall, but now throbbed just above my elbow. It showed no outward signs of being in trouble and after a quick examination of it by the stable manager, my cousin and I were sent down the winding trail, back to the fence to wait for my aunt to pick us up.

When we got in my aunt's car, I tearfully told her what happened. She looked at my arm and my eyes swollen and red from crying and decided dinner at Bob's Big Boy would be the best medicine. "You're fine," she said over the blare of the AM radio. "You'll feel better once you eat something."



It's true, in 1977 a fried shrimp platter and a strawberry silver goblet shake from Bob's Big Boy could cure a lot of things. But not this time. I remember sitting in the tall red booth at Bob's and watching my shake melt; the whipped cream and cherry slowly trailing the pink shake down the side of the silver goblet. I couldn't even touch it.

That's when my aunt knew for certain: it was broken. She took me by the arm (my good arm) through the restaurant, past the hostess stand and waiting area, back to the pay phone in between the restrooms and called my mom at work.

She told her about the horse, the crying, the shrimp platter, the melted strawberry silver goblet shake and they concluded it must be broken and agreed to meet at the emergency room.

Later that night in our living room, as my brothers drew lighting bolts on my cast and my cousin drew a pretty good sketch of me falling off a horse, I heard my aunt retelling the story to my parents. She was apologizing to them for not taking me directly to the hospital.

"It's Suzie," she explained. "You know, she cries over

everything." You see I was the youngest of the horde of brothers, cousins and neighbors and sure, I probably let the drama flow a bit more than anyone else, but it was ALWAYS for perfectly justifiable causes and blatant injustices.

When I heard her explanation I was seized by rage— as much as a 10-year-old could possibly be seized by rage— and I made a solemn, ardent oath to myself sitting there on my parents' crushed velvet couch that I would never cry again. Ever.

I told my daughter this story over enchiladas on Saturday and at the end she leaned in as if there was going to be more and then said, "Well, did you?"