

Mamas let your daughters GROW UP to be cowgirls



Sometimes, as a parent, you can prepare for those big moments in a kid's life. You see them coming like a herd of angry, stampeding elephants. You can brace yourself. You can practice your speech. You can make sure you have your running shoes on.

But, the hard part of parenting comes when those moments quietly sneak up on you.

On our recent trip to a dude ranch in Arizona, my daughter Emily, had – what I can only guess was – an experience she'll remember her whole life.

Being on the verge of horse crazy, she couldn't sleep the night before our first big trail ride. She hadn't ever been out on an open trail on a horse, and after a short skill test from our Wrangler, she got the nod and was able to go with us. It was the perfect day for a ride. Not too hot or windy, Larry (my husband), Emily, our Wrangler, and I headed out to wander the dry riverbed just outside the ranch. The young Wrangler, Rob, turned to us and said, "I'm going to take you on my favorite trail."

Yeehaw!

We all said and Emily laughed, patted her horse's neck, and pointed out the butterflies as we slowly walked our horses toward the mountains.

As we moseyed up a mountain peppered with cactus and wildflowers, it started to occur to me that we were going up pretty high.

Once we reached the top the view was spectacular and, after

investigating an abandoned copper mine, we started our descent down to meet other riders for breakfast on the trail. The only path down was rocky, steep, narrow and unstable, and just became more dubious with every step.

The line of riders went like this: Wrangler, Larry, me and Emily, in the rear. After her horse stumbled slightly she gave out a shriek of fear and hunched down in her saddle, clinging to its horn.

"You're okay, doll," I assured her. "Poquito (her horse) has walked this trail a million times." Larry and Rob were pretty far ahead of us at this stage and didn't notice Emily's little world had gone from Little House on the Prairie to Friday the 13th in a very short time.

"I want to get off!" she howled. Her dad heard that and gave a quick, "No! You're okay." "I want to get off NOW!" she screamed and flipped her heels out of her stirrups. Her face was red and wet with tears and her hands were white from holding on to the saddle so tightly.

Now, I knew she was fine. Larry knew she was fine. Rob the Wrangler knew she was fine. Even Poquito seemed more interested in grabbing a quick snack off the trees than in the shaky path in front of him, but Emily didn't know. She wasn't convinced she wasn't going down, and with every step she got more afraid. "I want to get OFF!!" she demanded.

I turned around and calmly, but firmly told her, "Em, there is NO way we are letting you get off that horse. Take a deep breath, put your feet in the stirrups, lean back and hold on."

I was sure, "You can do this!"

I knew if she got off that horse and walked it down, that would be it. She would probably be afraid of horses her whole life. There was a chance she wouldn't want to go back on a trail ride again, ever. I knew she was going to love being a cowgirl and soon reach full-blown, horse crazy status—but only if she stayed on her horse.

So I was Ice Queen Mom, "Stay on your horse and ride it down." She cried and pleaded with us to let her get off the whole way down to the vista, her horse stumbling a few more times—and with each misstep another scream. Wrangler Rob would shout a "You're doing great, Darlin'" every now and then and her dad and I comforted her, but stayed firm—getting off wasn't an option.

She ate her breakfast in reproachful silence. I began to doubt our decision a little, what if this backfires? What if we were wrong? But I just felt so sure in my (mean Ice Queen Mom) heart that making her do it was the right decision. But, what if...

When it was time to get back on our horses and ride back to the ranch, Emily walked over to Poquito and gave him a kiss on his soft fuzzy nose. She climbed on and we headed back to the riverbed. "Look at that butterfly, Mom!" She said as a yellow and black beauty fluttered by. "Do you think we can go back to the mine tomorrow to find some bats?" she asked, as we slipped through the gate into the corral.

"Do you want to go back up?" I asked her. "Yeah, I really want to see a bat," she said.

We didn't get back up to the mine, but we did go on an equally treacherous trail ride the next day and she sat high in her saddle with a confidence I hadn't ever seen before in her. She seemed to have gained five years maturity in one day.

It's rare in parenting you see the results of your decisions so quickly. Usually these things take years to pay off and even then, you might not even realize their impact. Your kid at twenty might decide not to cheat on a test, or at thirty, might help a stranger in need because of a lesson you taught them. You might not be there to see it. So, Larry and I basked in the moment of seeing our daughter learn and grow – just for a moment.

Today I'm listening to Mat Kearney's "Won't back down."

Mat is my new favorite signer / songwriter.