



**Chasing
Dream**

Backyard  Horses



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author of the bestselling Winnie the Horse Gentler series



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Chasing Dream

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Summary: Even though she has spent the week doing selfish things, nine-year-old Ellie asks God for help when her beloved horse becomes sick.

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To Katy Mackall, my first editor on all things animal

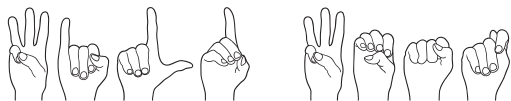
Backyard horses are the opposite of show horses. They don't have registration papers to prove they're purebred, and they might never win a trophy or ribbon at a horse show. Backyard horses aren't boarded in stables. You can find them in pastures or in backyards. They may be farm horses, fun horses, or simply friends. Backyard horses are often plain and ordinary on the outside . . . but frequently beautiful on the inside.



The Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

1 Samuel 16:7

1



Wild West

It's the most important race in the old Wild West. Ellie James and her speedy horse, Dream, step up to the starting line. Next to her, Cowboy Colt lopes in on Bullet, the famed cow horse. These two trusty steeds join fifty other horses. They're all itching for a chance to ride for the Pony Express. The winner of this here Wild West race will earn a spot on the Pony Express, America's new mail delivery system. Horses will deliver the mail across the United

States (since mail trucks and airplanes haven't been invented yet).

BANG!

The sheriff shoots his pistol. The horses are off and running!

Bullet and Dream take an early lead. It looks like they don't plan to give it up, either. Off they go—through the desert, into the mountains, across the wide-open prairies. Folks cheer as hooves thunder down Main Street. Riders gallop past the old saloon, past the sheriff's office, past the church with the white steeple.

Dream and Bullet are neck and neck as they cross the finish line. It's a tie!

"Hurray for Colt and Bullet!" the crowd shouts. "Hurray for Dream and Ellie!"

"Ellie?"

The Wild West fades back into my imagination. The dusty prairie becomes the tile floor of my

classroom in Hamilton, Missouri. Cheers are swallowed up by the stern voice of my fourth-grade teacher, Miss Hernandez. She looks surprisingly like one of the cheering prairie women from the Wild West.

“Ellie, answer me, please. Are you or aren’t you ready for it?” My teacher tugs on her ponytail, which is one of the best things about her. Her ponytail, not the tugging. Tugging means she’s losing patience with me because she caught me daydreaming again.

“Uh,” I begin. “Hmmm. Am I ready or not? Good question.” I’m stalling for time because all is not lost. I’m looking for my best buddy, Colt Stevens.

Lucky for me, my teacher has walked over to my desk. That means Colt is behind her. One of the best things about Colt Stevens is that he took up sign language when I did. We learned it so we

could talk to my little brother, Ethan. But sign language also comes in handy for helping each other out of trouble in the classroom.

I could sign *What?* to Colt, but Miss Hernandez knows a little sign language herself. So I just raise my eyebrows at my buddy.

Colt grins, then finger-spells *r-e-c-e-s-s*.

Recess? Cool. “You bet, Miss Hernandez!” I answer. “I am *so* ready!”

My teacher looks confused. She doesn’t have old wrinkles like my parents do. But her forehead squeezes wrinkles into it anyway. “Really, Ellie? Well, good for you. I’ll expect to see great improvement from you, then.”

Great improvement? At recess?

“Totally,” I say. Only my stomach is getting funky.

Colt is laughing now.

“I guess you’ve been studying, Ellie,” Miss

Hernandez says. “Because we all know that those fourth-grade math proficiency tests can be tough if we don’t study, study, study.”

Colt Stevens! Our teacher did not ask if I’m ready for *recess*. She asked if I’m ready for the state math tests. That answer is a big, fat no. I’d like to sign something mean to Colt for tricking me. Only his back is turned. I can see his shoulders bouncing up and down like he’s riding Bullet at a trot. He thinks this is so funny.

I gaze out our classroom window until the green grass turns into the dust of the Wild West again. Then I back things up:

Bullet and Dream are neck and neck coming down the stretch. They gallop lightning-fast toward the finish line. It sure looks like it’s going to be a tie . . . until Cowboy Colt starts laughing. His shoulders shake. He topples to

the side. And boom! Colt falls off his horse, landing in a soft mud puddle. Poor Colt is left behind in a cloud of dust as Ellie and Dream cross the Pony Express finish line.

Hurray for Ellie and Dream! The winners!

Miss Hernandez hands out more math homework. Our teacher is in the middle of another pep talk, explaining to the class how important those tests are to us and the state of Missouri and the whole entire United States of America when the speaker system comes on.

“Would somebody please find Ellie James?”

I blink a few times to make sure I haven’t imagined this. I haven’t. I’m in my classroom staring at the speaker like everybody else.

Slowly, kids turn and stare at me. Rashawn and Cassie look more worried than a pair of spooked horses.

From the speaker, a squeal, or maybe a scream, is followed by a shuffling of feet. There's a crash like a chair is being knocked over. Then I hear the voice of Principal Dwayne Fishpaw shouting, "*Now!* Tell Ellie to come right this minute! There's a horse in the library!"

*We know how much God loves us, and
we have put our trust in his love.*

1 John 4:16

Horse Talk!

Bay—A reddish-brown color for a horse. A bay horse usually has a black mane and tail.

Blaze—A facial marking on a horse (usually a wide, jagged white stripe).

Canter—A horse's slow gallop; a more controlled three-beat gait.

Cutting horse—A horse (usually a quarter horse) bred to separate cows from a herd. Some cutting horses also cut around barrels in barrel racing or compete in Western horse show classes and events.

English—A style of horseback riding that is often considered more formal and classic than Western style. Riders generally sit on a flat saddle, post (rise from the saddle) on a trot, and hold the reins in both hands.

Farrier—Someone trained to care for a horse's hooves. Farriers trim hooves and put shoes on horses, but many also treat leg and tendon problems.

Flanks—The indented part of a horse's body between the ribs and the hip. Flanks may be tender to the touch.

Foreleg—One of a horse's front legs.

Forelock—The piece of hair that falls onto a horse's forehead.

Gait—The way a horse moves, as in a walk, a trot, a canter, or a gallop.

Gallop—A horse's natural and fast running gait. It's speedier than a lope or a canter.

Gelding—A male horse that has had surgery so he can't mate and produce foals (baby horses). Geldings often make the calmest riding horses.

Habit—An outfit for horseback riding or showing, usually including some kind of tailored jacket and hat.

Halter—The basic headgear worn by a horse so the handler can lead the animal with a rope.

Hand—The unit for measuring a horse's height from the withers (area between the shoulders) to the ground. One hand equals four inches (about the width of an average cowboy's hand).

Hindquarters—The back end of a horse, where much of a horse's power comes from.

Hoof pick—A hooked tool, usually made of metal, for cleaning packed dirt, stones, and gunk from the underside of a horse's hoof.

Hunter—A horse that's bred to carry a rider over jumps. In a horse show, hunters are judged on jumping ability and style.

Lead rope—A length of rope with a metal snap that attaches to a horse's halter.

Lope—The Western term for *canter*. The lope is usually smooth and slower than the canter of a horse ridden English.

Mare—A female horse over the age of four, or any female horse that has given birth.

Muzzle—The soft portion of a horse's nose between the nostrils and the upper lip.

Nicker—A soft, friendly sound made by horses, usually to greet other horses or trusted humans.

Palomino—A horse that is cream or yellow-gold in color. Palominos may be found in a number of breeds, such as the quarter horse. Even backyard horses may be palominos.

Pinto—Any horse with patches or spots of white and another color, usually brown or black.

Post—To rise up and ease back down in the saddle when the horse is at a trot. This makes the gait more comfortable for the rider. English-style riders generally post at every step.

Quarter horse—An American horse breed named because it's the fastest horse for a quarter-mile distance. Quarter horses are strong and are often used for ranch work. They're good-natured and easygoing.

Quirt—A Western-style crop, or whip, with a short handle.

Saddle bags—Bags or pouches that balance across the back of a saddle and are used to carry supplies.

Saddle horse—A saddle horse could be any horse trained to ride with a saddle. More specifically, the American saddlebred horse is an elegant breed of horse used as three- and five-gaited riding horses.

Shetland pony—A small breed, no bigger than 10.2 hands, that comes from the Shetland Islands off Scotland. Shetland ponies are the ideal size for small children, but the breed is known to be stubborn and hard to handle.

Sorrel—A horse with a reddish-brown or reddish-gold coat.

Stallion—A male horse that hasn't had surgery to prevent him from mating and producing foals.

Swayback—A sagging back on a horse, or a horse with a deeply dipped back. Being swayback is often a sign of old age in a horse.

Three-gaited—Used to describe an American saddlebred horse that has been trained to perform at a walk, trot, and canter.

Throatlatch—The strap part of the bridle that helps keep the bridle on. It goes under a horse's throat, running from the right ear and loosely fastening below the left ear.

Trot—The two-beat gait where a horse's legs move in diagonal pairs. A trot is generally a choppy ride.

Western—A style of horseback riding used by cowboys in the American West. Western horseback riders usually use heavier saddles with saddle horns and hold both reins in one hand.

Whicker—A low sound made by a horse. A whicker is sometimes thought to be a cross between a whinny and a nicker.

Whinny—A horse's neigh, or to make a neighing sound. A whinny may be a horse's call to another horse or a cry of alarm.

Whorl—A twist of hair that grows in the opposite direction from the surrounding coat. This patch is usually on a horse's forehead.

Withers—The top of a horse's shoulders, between the back and the neck. The height of a horse is measured from the withers to the ground.



Sign Language Alphabet

A



J



S



B



K



T



C



L



U



D



M



V



E



N



W



F



O



X



G



P



Y



H



Q



Z



I



R



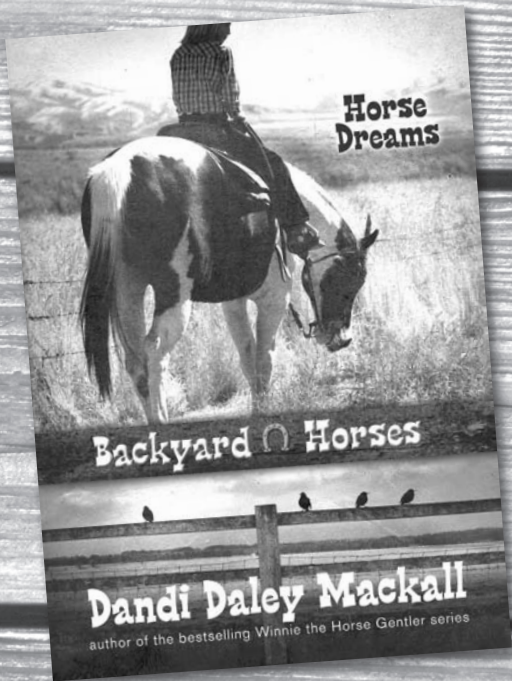
About the Author

Dandi Daley Mackall grew up riding horses, taking her first solo bareback ride when she was three. Her best friends were Sugar, a pinto; Misty, probably a Morgan; and Towaco, an Appaloosa. Dandi and her husband, Joe; daughters, Jen and Katy; and son, Dan (when forced), enjoy riding Cheyenne, their paint. Dandi has written books for all ages, including Little Blessings books, *Degrees of Guilt: Kyra's Story*, *Degrees of Betrayal: Sierra's Story*, *Love Rules*, *Maggie's Story*, the Starlight Animal Rescue series, and the bestselling Winnie the Horse Gentler series. Her books (about 450 titles) have sold more than 4 million copies. She writes and rides from rural Ohio.

Visit Dandi at www.dandibooks.com.

Backyard Horses

Read more about Ellie and her horse adventures in the Backyard Horses series.



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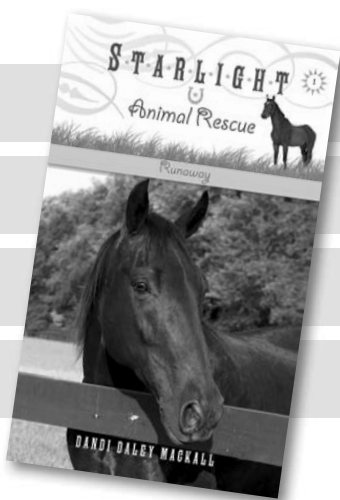
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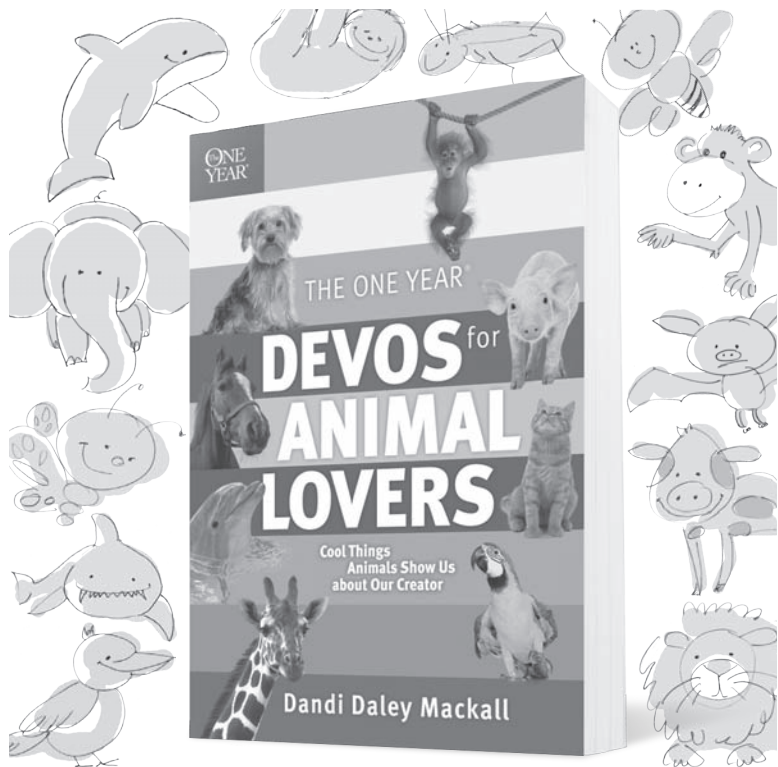
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