

Jigs: “I’m Not a Beginner’s Horse”

by Elizabeth Anderson



Eight or so months after I got him, a communicator came to the barn and I, a non-believer, thought, “Why not? It will be entertaining.” So at the appointed time, Jigs stood at the rail facing the communicator, who wrote furiously to keep up with what was coming at her. Every so often he would stamp his right front foot and simultaneously blow out air—something I hadn’t seen him do before (and haven’t seen since). When she finally put down her pencil, she sighed, looked at me, and said, “Well, he says he’s not a beginner’s horse!”

And he wasn’t, but of course he’d had no choice in who he’d been passed on to, and now he was fully frustrated. Originally trained for the track but then sold at three to be schooled as a jumper, he was sold again at six to a high school girl who was a natural athlete with an excellent seat, and then, when he was nine, she went off to college and he was sold to me, a rank beginner who was anything but a natural athlete. So just about every three years, he’d had to make a major adjustment to a new person and a new routine, and this last change was clearly trying his patience. He was ready to enjoy his prime, but his life had been taken over by this woman who knew nothing.

I took lessons, of course. I went to the barn every day. I read all the horse magazines and

went to some clinics, and slowly some of the green wore off. After a year or so, we moved to a different barn (which quickly proved to be a spectacularly bad fit) and then on to another one, which he clearly loved (who wouldn't? He finally had a south-side stall with a run and they fed lunch in the middle of the day!). We settled in.

Then one day as I was grooming him in the cross-ties, I was suddenly aware that he was different. Some kind of shift had occurred—very subtle, very hard to describe, but definitely...there. His eye had a different look, and he seemed more willing to engage with me—he felt more open, as if he'd let go of something. For several days I puzzled over this new attitude, and then it clicked. About three months before, we'd passed the three-year mark. His internal calendar had apparently warned him that it was time to expect a big shakeup, but then nothing happened. I hadn't gone away and been replaced by someone new. I still came every day, took lessons, and supported him with good shoeing and excellent vet care when anything cropped up. Barn life continued, with lunch, and life was pretty good.

We're in our tenth year now. We made one more move—to the CEC pasture, where he is unbelievably happy and where of course I see him every day. I've never become a very skilled rider, but he told a communicator recently that "there's more than riding," and I think he might be OK now with being a beginner's horse.