

# **The Partially True Story of an Andalusian Encounter**

**By Tiffany Mapel**

Having grown up around horses and spending many years showing them in 4H, horses were a big part of my life. My childhood years were spent riding and showing in both Western and English. My grandparents ran the National Mustang Association, so we always had Mustangs around to train. Whenever I saw horses at the annual Stock Show in Denver, Colorado or in parades or rodeos, I was usually able to identify their breed and could get a feel for their temperament just by looking at their eyes and their mannerisms.

One weekend, my family and I went to the Rocky Mountain Horse Expo in Denver. It is a horse lovers' paradise. There were booths, displays, places to purchase model horses, and of course, the live action performances of horses and their riders. It was a place where a horse girl truly felt at home, immersed in all things equine. It was at this Expo where I saw my first Andalusian. Up until that point, I had only seen Andalusians in pictures of breed books. No one I knew owned an Andalusian. And there he stood before me in one of the public barns.

This magnificent Andalusian took my breath away. I stood transfixed in the presence of this regal horse and the rest of the world fell away. Time stopped. What struck me most was how tall this horse was. I was used to Quarter Horses and Mustangs, and the occasional Arabian. This Andalusian was easily 16 or 17 hands tall. His muscular legs had plenty of bone, and his freshly-shod polished gray hooves were much bigger than my Quarter Horse's hooves. The Andalusian exuded power and nobility, clearly descended from mounts of kings and queens of the past.

He stood there calmly—neck arched, eyes soft, and fully tacked and ready to go. He wore beautifully crafted Iberian tack, also the likes of which I'd never before seen in-person.

Both his saddle and bridle were festooned in decorative silver, and his exquisite silver bit was a work of art in itself. His coat was white with subtle dappling on his shoulders and flanks. He was also a bit flea-bitten—not overly so like some flea-bitten grays who appear almost roan, but just the right amount for his handsome coat. His luxuriant mane and tail were both long and wavy; his mane a mix of silver and white, and his tail pure white almost reaching the ground. His long wavy forelock rested squarely on the bridge of his nose, as he peered out from his warm brown eyes. His knees, hocks, and muzzle were shaded a medium gray, balancing out the white of his coat. He was the most perfectly colored and proportioned horse I'd ever seen, like an artist created him.

Where was his rider or handler? Why was he tacked and ready just waiting here? Why is this splendid horse unattended? Should I hop on and take him for a spin? I would get in so much trouble, but the thought did cross my mind. “Let’s see what he can do—does he yield to leg pressure or shifting weight in the saddle? How sensitive is he to the touch of the reins?” I dreamed of riding this elegant Iberian beauty. I longed to see him perform.

I stood there for a long time admiring this horse, my family moving along without me through the barn area. I tried to imagine how smooth he was to ride. I was so used to the predictability of Quarter Horses, the sure-footedness of Mustangs, and those dancy Arabians. What would an Andalusian be like to ride?

I put my hand up to his muzzle, and he blew warm air into my hand. This woke him up out of his relaxed state. He gently wrapped his head and neck around me, moving me toward his saddle. I understood as I grabbed the pommel and cantle and swung my leg over and sat down, all in one fluid motion. His neck arched as he gathered himself and immediately began to prance out of the barn. No one stopped us or got in our way. I couldn’t believe I was actually here!

Astride an Andalusian! The saddle was so comfortable, and I barely had to touch the reins. This horse knew what he was doing. He took me on a tour of the show grounds. He entered an arena in a barn that wasn't occupied. In the dim light he performed a Spanish Walk for me. Then he transitioned into a collected Piaffe, his wavy mane bouncing with his cadence as he pranced in place. Next, he trotted forward and then half-passed across the arena and went into an exhilarating Passage. This powerful extended trot was like nothing I'd ever felt on the back of a horse before. Once he crossed the arena, he ended with a soft canter out of the arena and barn. From there, we rode a short distance to a cross-country course. He trotted over to the start box and went in. A brief pause before he burst forward into a canter. We were going to do the course! I squeezed my legs tighter around him and held on. Up and over jumps we went! Over logs, through water, up and down some berms. I had never done this on any of my horses. This was an event I could take up! We were having so much fun!

When the Andalusian completed the cross-country course, he circled back to the public barn. His trot slowed to a light jog as he took me back to where we started our adventure. He stopped at his post, and I slid out of the saddle. I glimpsed a nameplate on his saddle as I dismounted: "*Magnifico.*" His sides heaved with his breath, and my pulse seemed to match. "Thank you, Magnifico," my hand on his neck. Just at that moment, my sister appeared and caught my attention. "We've been looking everywhere for you!" she exclaimed. Magnifico winked at me, and I patted his forehead. "Thank you," I whispered to him again and rejoined my family. It was an Andalusian encounter that I would treasure forever.