

Equine Artist Saves the Day

A trip to Kentucky turned almost deadly as artist Jen Raynes struggled to attend the ASHA World Championship Horse Show.

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Artist Jen Raynes paints a Saddlebred. Have you heard that old saying about “suffering for your art?” Artist Jen Raynes had a momentous trip heading to Louisville, Ky., for the American Saddlebred Horse Association World Championship Horse Show. Although it’s the grandest event for the Saddlebred breed, Raynes had never attended before. She was making her inaugural trip at the behest of a Saddlebred fan she’d met at a Quarter Horse show in Arizona. There, she’d been convinced to create a painting of a Saddlebred onsite in Louisville and then donate it to the annual auction held during the championship show. It sounded like a win-win situation: helping out a good cause (benefiting the youth members of the Saddlebred Association), gaining exposure to a new audience of art lovers and a chance to witness one of the world’s most extravagant horse shows. Unfortunately, the trip from her home in California to Kentucky didn’t go as expected.

On her connecting flight from California to Chicago, a man suffered a heart attack. A call came over the intercom, “Does anyone have medical experience? Is there a doctor or nurse on board?”

“Well, I have medical training as a former firefighter. But I was waiting for someone else to volunteer because it’s been so long since I was a firefighter,” Raynes says, recalling her thoughts before she decided to jump in and help out. She gave him a baby aspirin, put nitroglycerin under his tongue and was able to stabilize him.

“I held my finger over his wrist to check his pulse and kept it there for over an hour,” she says. For hours after the emotional experience she says, “I could still feel his heartbeat in my hand.

Distracted by the events, Raynes exited the plane and walked 15 gates before suddenly realizing, the painting! The painting she’d begun work on for the auction – her whole reason for taking the flight, coming to Kentucky – was back on the plane. Needless to say, that prompted a quick about-face and a race back to the gate.

With her Saddlebred painting in hand, she was ready to catch her connector to Louisville. But the ordeal wasn’t over. Inclement weather delayed her flight. So Raynes had to stay the night in Chicago. She finally arrived in Kentucky, but more hardship awaited her at baggage claim. The airline didn’t misplace her suitcase containing her clothes. They didn’t misplace her prints of paintings she’d done of dogs. They misplaced her main potential for making any sort of profit on this trip: her suitcase full of horse prints, the artwork she was planning to sell from her vendor’s booth, was lost.

Nonetheless, the stalwart trooper headed to the showgrounds to set up and begin resuming work on her painting for the auction. Ever the optimist, Jen Raynes put a positive spin on the experience.

“The cool thing is I got a free flight since I helped the guy on the plane. And I got another free flight because of the delay in Chicago,” she offers.

Mind you, she’s doing all this for free to benefit the association of a breed she’s never seen compete. But you couldn’t tell it from her painting, which turned out to be an intensely colorful and unique work of American Saddlebred art.