

I Have Shrapnel in my Fingers

By Cindy Hale

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It's bad enough that as a horsewoman I'm often plagued with horse slime stains on my clothes, smegma under my fingernails and an aroma of pyrethrin fly spray lingering on my skin. Now, thanks to my obsession with creating mosaics, I've also become the walking wounded. Every now and then I'll spontaneously bleed, usually from my hands or fingers. Upon closer inspection I'll discover a microscopic fleck of a glass shard that, once plucked from my epidermis, leads to a prodigious eruption of blood. At least my blood loss and ouchiness isn't in vain. This is a snapshot of my most recent mosaic. It's of two horses digging in to a red feed tub that's full of carrots. I think what I like best about it is the bright, bold colors and the close, intimate view of the horses' faces.

There's a great deal of serenity that comes from creating mosaics. Like a lot of crafts, the almost mindless process of assembling tiny pieces into one large piece has a soothing effect on the human psyche. The hard part is also the most creative part: Conceiving the scene that I want to produce, then drawing it freehand and selecting the most appropriate colored glass. Once that's done, I turn on the radio, flip on the electric fan, and begin snapping glass pieces with my nippers and gluing them in place. I become a drone, clipping, chipping and dipping glass onto wood. And yes, along the way I'm also occasionally maiming myself.

There have been numerous occasions where I haven't liked what I've done. Maybe the "grass" ended up being the wrong shade of green. Or I put too much metallic silver in a gray horse's mane. Trust me, I'm not above grabbing a small hammer and a flat-nosed screw driver and chiseling off the offending pieces and starting that section all over again. Hours of work can end up on the floor, like so much wasted confetti.

Maybe that's why I was a good horse show competitor. I wasn't happy with just putting in a round in a jumping class that was merely good enough. I wanted 8 perfect take-off spots and a handful of smooth flying lead changes. In my flat classes, I wasn't about to just be mediocre. I took some risks. I'd press my horse into an extended trot in an equitation class so I could nab the open spot on the rail. No one was going to bury me! At the collected sitting trot, I'd literally will my body into holding its position, regardless of whether I was aboard one of our warmbloods that moved like a Cadillac or one that was about as comfortable as being jostled down a bumpy road in a jalopy. I wanted that blue ribbon, and I was willing to suffer for it.

And thus, I tolerate quite a bit when I'm trying to churn out a decent horsey mosaic, even if I end up with shrapnel in my fingers.

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