

How I Became a Commercial Barn Owner

BY [ADMIN](#) ON JULY 9, 2012 · [2 COMMENTS](#) [EDIT]

Eight years ago, I thought a pony was just a young horse. My first introduction to horses began that summer when my first born daughter, Alex, started attending various three year old birthday parties. A few of these parties featured pony rides, and invariably Alex would want to do nothing but ride the pony, get off, and get back in line – over and over again. You could tell she had the horse bug. Knowing nothing about horses, I started phoning around to see if any trainers would give lessons to my small 3 1/2 year old child.

After enduring laughter, and snooty rejections (7 is the MINIMUM age, don't you know!) we did find one trainer that would take her (in hindsight and fairness to the other trainers, around 7 IS a good age to start, and indeed, I'm starting my second son at that age).

This trainer had built quite a nice little barn in Elfin Forest, complete with a petting zoo, trails, and a dressage ring. Most importantly she had a nicely tempered pony/miniature cross named Midnight. I bought the smallest saddle, boots and breeches in existence (and they were still too big), and off we went



to weekly lessons. Again in hindsight, I don't think anything we did there was very safe! The trainer gave me a horse to ride in the same ring along with the trainer and Alex just to get a feel for horses – I did get a feel for horses and the ground, repeatedly, as the horse found new and inventive ways of dumping me off. He didn't have to try very hard, I wasn't that good! And we went on rather challenging trail rides – we must have made quite a sight, two horses and a tiny mini-pony cross! We actually had a blast, Alex and I, during the almost two years we were there. Things came to a head, however, when Midnight became pregnant and Alex had to ride Midnight's three year old foal named Sensei. Sensei means "teacher" in Japanese, and what he was good at teaching was how to fall off. At a full uncontrolled

gallop around the ring. After one too many full face plants (thank goodness five year olds are made of rubber!), Alex had enough and said no more.

So I found a new trainer by literally wandering around Showpark and asking who would train a five year old. This time we ended up with an actual GSDHJA trainer who went to county shows. And she actually had safety standards! Since Alex was still at the stage of doing everything (karate, soccer, skating, etc.) we had to squeeze in lessons before school. I still remember turning on the indoor arena lights at 7:30am in dark, cold, sometimes rainy January for lessons.



After a couple of years (and one very naughty owned pony later) we ended up at our current home, [Haven Farms](#), this time on the referral advice of a friend. Alex was older now and a larger barn with a social scene of riders at all ages was a real draw. We started going to many more GSDHJA shows, and Alex had a great time progressing through the various levels. While she had one main trainer, Alex would also be taught by other Haven Farm trainers which was nice as different trainers pick up on different things, and maybe teach the same thing in a slightly different way. We knew the riding facility had been for sale, but didn't think much about it since

any new owner would presumably want to continue with Haven Farm's 40+ horses.



Well, after we were at Haven Farms for a year and a bit, Lisa Halterman, Haven's head trainer and owner, was worried. The barn had finally been sold, and the new owner DID want to make changes. The next year was a bit of a Chinese water torture. We lost the use of one of two rings, drip. A turn out was taken away, drip. A nice courtyard barn area was taken over by

the new owner, drip. The horse walker got taken out to be renovated, but six months on, it still wasn't finished, drip, drip. The final straw for me was when the new owner replaced the footing in our now only ring, just weeks before the champ show, did it excruciatingly slowly, and then managed to screw up the new footing so badly that it was making our horses lame.

Then at last year's champ show, he gave Haven Farms 30 days to move out. Lisa scrambled in early November to find a new facility. We had a memorable wine and cheese get together, our last at the old barn, on the bleachers, in the dark (it was November!) where Lisa explained where we could move to. It wasn't going to be a great facility, and it became clear that the Haven Farms family would probably split up, each of us going our own way.

And that was really unfortunate because I had come to realize that we had a great group of trainers and students who all got along and all had a fun time riding and learning. So I made the fateful decision to see if there was some nearby property I could buy that could be our new home. Amazingly there was – it hadn't been listed on the market, and our offer would come in from the blue, and the place needed some maintenance. But in a twist of fate that I would only learn about later, the property's owners had decided to go back to work, and had received a job offer on the very day our offer to buy arrived. I think we did the shortest escrow known to mankind. But we still had to juggle here and there – we had a 20 day gap between being kicked out of the riding facility, and going to our new home. And that's why our entire barn ended up at Showpark temporarily and competing en mass in [Lance's Jingle Bells show](#) in December (his first, another lucky twist of fate for us).

But finally, January 1st this year, [Willow Creek Stables](#) was born. It's been a world wind of renovations, maintenance and updates since we arrived, but that's all behind us now and we are enjoying our new found home.

And that's the story of how I became a commercial barn owner. You hear how random some people's life journeys can be – now I understand it. I'm a computer programmer by education and as far removed from the horse world as could be growing

up. I am now enjoying horses first hand and through my kids. It's been a fun and interesting 8 years!

