

A Train Ride

By Pete Dillingham

Elephants, hippos, snakes and monkeys were the menu of the day as my six year old son, Paul, and I wandered through the zoo. Our path was slowly working its way toward the exit when Paul noticed a miniature train carrying its passengers around the other boundaries of the park. The whistle, wheels, colors and a line of waiting passengers lured my son (with me in tow) to the ticket platform. Children from six to sixty eagerly waited as conductors escorted their riders to and from the safety of the tiny railroad cars. My son was captivated.....I was sure I was looking into the eyes of a 20th century "Casey Jones". Suddenly I saw an opportunity to develop Paul's independence"Son would you like to ride that train by yourself?" I asked. His answer was an immediate "yes" and I soon found myself watching Paul being guided to a dwarf train seat in the open box car. As the train edged ahead, I saw a look of uncertainty cross my child's face and I briskly walked with the caravan of cars. Much to my relief, his expression change from confusion to composure and the train, with Paul, eased confidently onto their journeys.

Controlled challenges can nourish the growth of humans or horses and should be embraced. "Horses!" you say "How the heck did we get from toy trains to horses?" Developing a good horse is like raising a good child. Challenges can be positive. Examples of controlled "challenges or skirmishes" a rider can teach their steed are; crossing water, confronting dogs, not running to the barn, standing still when being mounted, not arguing with other critters when the saddle is on, not seeing "boogers" when the wind blows a piece of paper. The list of ideas is limited only by one's imagination.

The arguments for embracing these kinds of conflict are:

1. We teach the horse to adjust to the real world.... as opposed to trying to make the world adjust to the horse.
2. The rider becomes a better horseman by discovering good problem-solving techniques and
3. The horse and rider cultivate better communication, trust, and a stronger bond between the two.

The lessons we learn from a child can teach us to become better horse persons.....and the lessons we learn from horses can teach us to be better human beings. Life gives us joys and plenty of challenges. If we willingly confront or embrace difficult issues, we will become stronger.....and reach the goals that our Creator put before us.