

## Sweet Not Brave

*By Suzy Hopkins*

We needed a horse for my kids to ride with me and my retired show horse. I answered an ad for an Arab gelding. Arabs are slim sweet horses. They are the only horses who like people similar to the way dogs do.

I did a test ride in the owner's pasture with an ugly rainstorm approaching: dark clouds and gusty winds. Horses hate that weather if there are leafy trees around. When the leaves turn over from the wind horses think they are alive and it makes them nervous and jumpy. This lovely little guy just tried hard to do what I asked. My son, Mac, rode afterwards and had no problems. Sold.

For years we all rode Zaboe, even qualifying him for park ranger work. The only thing he wouldn't do was water. However, being a park ranger at Folsom Lake involved getting close to water. Folsom Lake is a reservoir for Los Angeles. They have only the Colorado River for fresh water. It doesn't last through summer as it makes its way of melted snow to Mexico. Therefore, so many feet of water was let out of this lake through the dam every day from July 1<sup>st</sup> to supply the thousands of residents and hundreds of farmers.

By September the lake was so low that the shore had vanished from its usual places. One day when I was on duty, riding Zaboe, we had to go to where a tiny creek had formed where that part of the lake had been. Zaboe refused to cross the creek no matter how I encouraged him. The other ranger rode her horse over the creek to show Zaboe it was okay. Nope. Not happening. I dismounted, and stepped over the creek. I pulled on the reins from the other side encouraging him. He finally decided to jump over the shallow creek and landed with his front feet ON MY FEET. I was smacked to the ground like one of those inflatable toys that you punch and they fall back, bouncing right back up. I didn't bounce right back up. My ankles were swelling becoming too painful to continue on patrol. Luckily I had on my boots that went to the knee which kept the swelling limited.

Zaboe had no idea he had caused my pain. At the barn when I untacked and had finished washing the sweat off Zaboe he drank his fill at the water trough sinking his face up to his eyes. When he was done he sweetly kissed me like a dog does. The difference being a horse's tongue is as big as a New York steak.

Sweet!