


# Against All Odds

## The Story of a Champion's Will

By Kenda Lenseigne



It's difficult to know where to start. To sum up in a few glossy pages a decade of ups, downs, highs, lows and a relationship tightly knitted together is not an easy task, so the Cliff's Notes version is what you're about to read. This story is about a horse, and the ten-year idyllic adventure I have had with my ONE. I'll preface the story by noting that I'll not bore you with all of the accolades, titles and championships won. The list, although impressive in this small fish bowl of a sport, tends to be a bit repetitive and monotonous. The real heart of this story is about partnership.

Did you ever stop to ponder the word 'horseman' or 'horsewoman'? There's a reason the word 'horse' always comes first. Note that, as I sit to write this, the horses in my barn are fed, but I've not eaten dinner yet.

Lieutenant Justin came into my life as a playful, but hard-headed six year old in 2004. He was tubby, and had been living a life of leisure as the trail horse of a teen-aged girl. He arrived at my barn in my mom's horse trailer. Having just purchased him for less than a song, she unloaded him and said to me, "Now this is a 'Kenda' horse". I looked him over, and quickly scowled at the golf ball sized bump on his front knee, his pancake feet and robust belly. This "Kenda horse" was not one I would have chosen out of a hundred others, but after some thought I trusted her, because sometimes, Mom just knows best.

Justin's general level of loathing for gunfire was at the top of the Richter scale. There were many days that ended long after dark with both of us dripping sweat, and me wondering if he was really going to take to this sport. After several months of failed training sessions I began to question my integrity as a horse person. My selfish desire to participate in the sport was starting to override my horse's voiceless plea to STOP THE NOISE! I believe it's irresponsible sports-and-horsemanship to continually force a horse to do his job if after a certain time he has told us emphatically, "No". You just don't get a willing worker that way. You get a resentful one that does the job because you tell him to, not because he wants to.



*STOP the noise!*

Time passed. Finally, he saw the light, and the noise was no longer an issue. Justin and I were like peas and carrots! We drove. We shot. We won. Rinse and repeat. He carried me to the highest pinnacle of the sport, and he did it

several times over several years. There are no words to explain this level of partnership between horse and human: all I have to do is think and he works the pattern like he's on rails. It's a language that is unspoken, a complete trust in one other, and a give-give relationship. There's no taking. After a decade together, in 2014 Justin and I celebrated our tenure by adding another overall World Championship title to our name.

Little did I know at the time that it would be his last.

In May 2015, Justin shattered his back leg in five places. He was doing what he loves best, gliding around a barrel after running his first five targets. It was a warm, sunny spring day, with just four of us at a practice. Justin had stood tied to the fence most of the day and was my last horse to ride before quitting time. I didn't ask him to run hard, just a lofty gallop to knock the rust off and prepare for the Regionals in a few weeks. A big wide circle, a beautiful turn, a snap, and then a three-legged shuffle. I remember every second of that pivotal moment. It was as if time stood still. That instant in time was the last moment I have spent on his back. In a flash, life as I knew it changed forever.



*Comminuted fracture of the P2 in 5 places*

My vet, a no-BS kind of friend, called with the results of the X-rays, and confirmed what I secretly knew but had struggled to believe. He said to me, "You have two options. One is a very complicated surgery that may or may not be successful, and it's very expensive."

Then the phone went silent. "And the other option?" I asked.

"We put him in the ground." He quietly mumbled the words like it was hard for him to say them. My heart hit the floor. His last words were hard to hear, hard to imagine, hard to face.



*A behind the scenes glimpse of a friendship*

I considered how Justin had given ten years of outstanding service, wearing out shoes, saddle blankets, and road miles so that I could build my career, shine a little in the spotlight and have some fun. Talk about a one-sided relationship! There was no question in my mind. I would give him a chance. I wasn't about to abandon him now.

Justin spent seven days in the hospital after having seven screws and two plates installed to patch his pastern back together. I visited him every day, sitting in the corner of his stall for hours, crying my eyes out and reflecting on our time together. Here before me was my champion; my gentle giant with a somber face, IV tubes sticking out of his neck and a ski-boot sized cast on his leg. I will admit that up until that point I didn't have much education on broken legs. All I'd really known is that horses don't usually survive. It's not the break that kills them, but the complications in recovery.

My vet told me that we would know if there were any laminitis symptoms sometime between two weeks and two months, so it was time to just wait it out and keep him as comfortable as possible. "If Justin uses his casted leg and gives his other legs a rest, he will be OK," he said. It was Day Four in the hospital when I snuck up to his stall and peeked in. He was resting his good leg and had shavings in his mane and tail! I've never been so happy to see him covered in stall bedding. He had finally lain down! At this point in my life, it's the little things that we call accomplishment. Forget the spotlight, I want a messy tail!



*Justin had many visitors to sign his cast*



*Lieutenant Justin 2014 World Championship*

*We lose ourselves in the things we LOVE  
We find ourselves there too  
- Kristin Martz*

November 2015 marks six months post surgery. As a preventative measure, I used RevitaVet light therapy on his “good” hooves every day to keep the blood flowing and to prevent complications. As a person who, despite the world crashing down around me, tries to see the positive in all things, I realized two things. Had this happened at the Regional shoot I had planned to attend, the decision to save his life might have been different. I wouldn’t have been able to transport him home for the surgery. It would have been difficult to financially afford the surgery and the months of in-hospital care, he would have had to have before he was ready for transport back home. And secondly, Justin is retiring from mounted shooting at the top of the sport, as the 2014 World Champion!

His surgeon said that, given the severity of the injury, Justin is an anomaly in surgery and recovery. An anomaly, yes, that is my knobbed-kneed, flat footed, broken-legged, little, hard-headed horse. He has defied all odds and will seal his place in CMSA™ history as the newest member of the CMSA™ Hall of Fame and a champion in all things. He is the reason I am able to enjoy the life that I live, that I get to ride and shoot every day as a job. I have so much to be thankful for because of our time spent together, and I am blessed to have him in my life.

He will live out his days in retirement. Back to being tubby, spoiled and living a life of leisure, Justin wins again. He has come full circle.



*“Give a horse what he needs and he will give you his heart in return”*

*-Unknown Author*



*These are just some snaps of Justin doing his favorite thing, relaxing - this is not Justin the athlete, its Justin in his comfy pants*