

## RO-DE-O ROZY

A heartfelt story about one woman's strength and inspiration.

BY CINDY K. ROBERTS

She walked into the bar with her date, tossing her blonde mane while making a dramatic entrance . . . sat her lanky frame down on a barstool, crossed her long-silky legs and ordered a glass of Robert Mondavi Chardonnay. Her body dripped with bling-bling . . . twenty-four karats and no less. She took a sip of her white wine and then a puff off of her Virginia Slim. While making casual conversation she mentioned that she shopped at Lord and Taylor; I shopped at the Farm and Home Center. She asked me who my favorite designer was and I simply replied, "Wrangler." She smiled and squeaked, "Ralph Lauren." Clearly she was high-maintenance.

She continued to chat politely while keeping an aloof demeanor. This was not your usual female shark. She was a good tipper, cordial and she knew how to work the room in a captivating fashion. She said her name was Rozy; that was fourteen years ago when we first met; I was working undercover as a bartender.

Rozy flew to Key West and married the man of her most sensational dreams. He was an entrepreneur and successful businessman that could support her delectable taste in designer clothing-which matched her impeccable-classy style. The happy couple returned to the United States to announce their blissful nuptial moment . . . and the wine flowed while cigars were passed around.

Sadly, Rozy then faced a major challenge in her life. She began to lose her vision from a rare eye disease called, "fever." Six years ago Rozy lost all of her sight. Due to the trauma to the eye there is little hope that Rozy will ever see again. It was a traumatic experience with a devastating effect on her. Determined to deal with the disability on her own terms, Rozy went through a very trying time as waves of emotion swept through her. Feeling bitter about her fate, Rozy wished she had never been able to see at all and began to question her faith in God. Filled with feelings of anger and resentment, Rozy was devastated to accept her new world of darkness. Until one day, she met a woman - whose son had been completely blind since birth. The woman convinced Rozy that she is fortunate to be blessed with remembrances of an early morning sunrise and the twilight of twinkling stars. The woman went on to explain - Rozy's own life is indeed richer to behold the memory of a full moon rising, a bright and vivid rainbow after a storm and a volatile volcano erupting. Rozy then realized that her opportunities to experience the ocean tide drifting to shore, blackened clouds before a tornado as well as to have witnessed the many brilliant snowfalls, are just a few of God's greatest gifts. Her vivid memory is a recollection of a colorful and dazzling world filled with vibrant flowers, ruby-red sport cars and the beauty of ocean view property beholden from a vacation hotel room. Rozy developed a new perspective on life with a sense of purpose, gratitude and a new

meaning. She created a positive attitude with eminent strength that is a great inspiration to her many friends. Rozy's enormous energy enabled her to maintain a routine of shopping, working out and juggling phones at the family business. She is now a passionate Q.V.C. shopper and she knows the latest fashion designs. She is a smart dresser, a classy woman unique with her own style matching her vivid-grace. Her radiant charm and charisma will light up any room and she is loved and admired by many. Her tastes in audio books consist of mysteries, thrillers and tales of espionage. Listening to tales of adventure drives her spirit on, Rozy thrives on listening to a sensational story. After recently listening to an inspiring and thrilling book, Rozy compared her own life to the main character - took inventory and decided she wanted to shake things up a bit in her own life.

This is where I come in. We both shared a longing for adventure that drew us closer in our friendship. We enjoyed dinners with Margaritas while talking horses. We kept up in the latest gossip with the bar patrons that we both knew. Becoming closer to Rozy has allowed me to have a better understanding about her disability. One afternoon, I called her from my cell phone as I was trail riding on my mule in the woods. Rozy heard my mule plunk through the creek water and clip clop up the rocky ledge. Rozy decided that she wanted to be a part of this. The next afternoon, I took her shopping and Rozy quizzed me about her ability to try horseback riding. We wasted no time, purchased two tickets to ride the carousel ponies inside the mall and decided this would be a good start.



Onto the next step, Rozy had no prior experience other than a pony ride at the park and a beach ride while on a vacation. This would require a very patient and knowledgeable individual to agree to work with Rozy. At Rozy's request, I approached riding instructor Paul Mareschal ([WWW.FRESHSTARTHORSES.COM](http://WWW.FRESHSTARTHORSES.COM)) with the idea of working with her. Without hesitation, he agreed to start her on riding lessons. We talked about what came first and how to introduce the first lesson to Rozy. Paul realized that he would have to think on his feet and keep commands clear to Rozy as she developed her sense of balance as well as her seat. Paul introduced an excellent mount to Rozy, a quiet mare that was used as one of his lesson horses.

After the first two lessons of working with Rozy on the lunge line, I never believed she would become a rider. Things were not coming together as I hoped and I was disappointed. Rozy questioned me after each ride about her progress. I was honest in saying to her that I felt she had a way to go yet before she was able to leave the barn. I took her home and set up a western saddle in her exercise room. I placed her hand on the different parts of the saddle and explained to her the function of each part. I had to paint a mental picture for Rozy to help her have a better understanding about her riding lessons.



Rozy then sat in the saddle while I explained how to apply her lower leg during different movements. We talked about seat bones, calves, thighs and a relaxed seat until I was blue in the face. I then went home and said my prayers for my friend Rozy to succeed.

Next week, lesson number three was amazingly different. Rozy placed her hand on the horse's neck, took hold of the mane and placed her foot in the stirrup. Rozy stepped up on the sorrel horse and sat with ease on the mare's back. Paul was very pleased and proceeded to shout commands across the arena. Rozy was riding independently for the first time. Rozy used seat and leg aids as she circled the horse around the perimeter of the arena and I was thrilled. After that session, Paul nicknamed Rozy, "Rodeo Rozy." Rozy upscaled her new name to RO-DE-O ROZY. (I swear. The girl has Hollywood flowing through her veins.)

The entire experience has been challenging and rewarding for Paul to be able to work with Rozy. Paul took the extra time to explain to Rozy in a visual sense where she is and talk her through obstacles. Paul knows that Rozy is dependent on the horse's movement to tell her which direction the horse is moving. "There are so many things that she has grasped . . . that I didn't think she would be this far along," admitted Paul. "As a teacher, I've learned to be much more patient. Rozy has taught me a lot. To help her along, I have taken other parts of her life when from the time she was a sighted person to use as examples and it has helped a lot. This has been a very positive experience for me."

Paul doesn't cut any slack for Rozy either, he insists that she do it all from the saddle. This will make the riding experience safer and enjoyable for everyone. At the last lesson, Paul got after Rozy for wearing too much bling-bling. "Jewelry is not a

requirement for riding young lady. In fact, it can get you into trouble.” Paul continued, “If a bracelet or earring would get hung up on a piece of tack, the results could be damaging. So leave your jewelry at home.”

Serious boot shopping was in order to get Rozy outfitted properly. The day after her fifth lesson, my friend “Giddyup” and I took Rozy to Chuck’s Boots and then the real fun began. I searched for boots for Rozy while Giddyup described each boot in detail to help her decide on a purchase. Boots were scattered everywhere and there was a whole lot of giggling going on in aisle four. Giddyup selected a new pair of Justin cowhide boots and Rozy decided on a pair of Justin pink lizard boots . . . I was the designated driver.



Paul has a new lesson plan mapped out for Rozy. The next lesson will contain obstacles set up in the arena, such as barrels, poles and a tarp. Paul will work with Rozy and talk her through each obstacle. As her riding skills develop, Paul will then work on her timing. Rozy will learn how to pick up speed while maintaining balance and control of her mount. This is critical to be able to maneuver quickly through a barrier on the trail.

As a friend, to watch Ro-de-o Rozy learn, grow and accomplish has been an inspiration to me. Even

though she is now sight disabled, her fortitude of strength and determination continue to shine through. I feel blessed to have her as my friend because I too, have learned from all of this. Ro-de-o Rozy has the backbone, grit and determination to succeed - and I am proud to call her my friend. Thank you Rozy. It’s been a wonderful ride.

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