

# BACK IN THE SADDLE

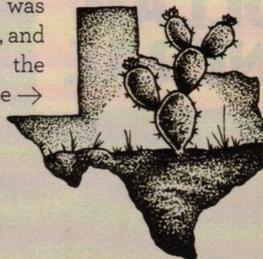
A big-city girl wrestles with her decision to move back home to her Texas roots, until a brush with a horse (literally!) transforms her

by TULA KARRAS

**I STOOD AT THE SIDE OF A HORSE NAMED Wyn,** a paintbrush in one hand and a palette of colors in the other. The musty aroma of animal sweat was in the air, and flies were buzzing all around. I stroked Wyn's glistening hair and spoke softly to him; this was part stalling tactic, part reassurance (to him and myself) that I wouldn't ruin his gorgeous coat. The guide had told us the horses enjoyed being painted,

especially the ones who couldn't be ridden anymore and craved socialization.

I was at the stunning Miraval Resort & Spa in Arizona, thanks to my good friend Rabia, who had organized a group trip for her birthday. Rabia was a luxury travel agent, and we'd handed her the reins in planning the →





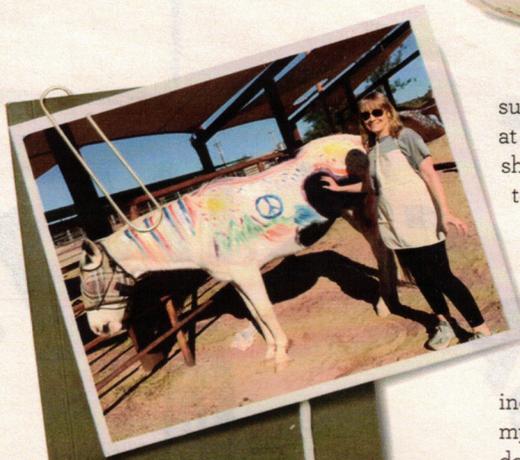
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**HORSE SENSE**

Painting a horse helped Tula Karras confront her fear of making mistakes.

itinerary. Along with spa treatments, she'd picked Horse Painting. *Horse Painting?* The resort's website clarified things...sort of: "Tap into your creative spirit by using a horse...as your canvas to remind [you] to stay present and grounded in [your] storytelling." It seemed a bit bizarre, but possibly fun. Plus, I could use some grounding. My life was in seismic flux.

A month before, I'd made the tough decision to leave New York City. The place that had wooed me in my 20s with its legendary energy and shaped me into a savvy magazine editor in my 30s was too hard for a single woman in her 40s.

My goals of buying a home, meeting a husband and living an easier life seemed more attainable in Texas, where I'd grown up. I was missing out on my niece and nephews' childhoods and was acutely aware that my parents were aging—New York would always be there, but they wouldn't. So I quit a job I loved, bought a one-way ticket to Austin and started a death march of tearful good-byes. I was terrified that I was making a mistake, but I was more terrified of losing precious time with my family and digging myself deeper into debt.

So there I was, rudderless in the desert and about to paint a horse. Of all the decisions I'd made recently, this seemed the most insignificant. So why was I having a hard time making the first brushstroke? I wasn't afraid of horses; I'd ridden as a child and knew not to spook them with

sudden movements (a skill I later honed at New York City bars when celebrities showed up—one must act aloof so as not to scare off the rarely seen creatures).

I glanced at my friends, who were already applying bold strokes. Nick, a former SoulCycle spin instructor who was equal parts court jester and spiritual guru, was dabbing his horse with blue dots. Rabia was painting stripes. *OK, let's do this*, I ordered myself. At least I'd have an amusing anecdote to trot out at parties ("Let me tell you about the time I painted a pony!").

I looked at the mountains in the distance and recalled a perennial piece of creative-writing advice: *Write what you know*. I figured the same logic could apply here, so I brushed on a mountain range capped by a yellow sun. I blotted on a cloud and raindrops. After the rain, another sun: Symbolically or literally, the sun will come out eventually. I was satisfied with my efforts...until I eyed Nick's horse again.

He had transformed every inch of his horse's coat into a museum-worthy oeuvre using a brilliant indigo hue he'd mixed up. I was mesmerized—and chastened. I'd essentially painted the weather forecast onto poor Wyn, while Nick had unleashed true art. I needed to up my game. I frantically ran red, white and blue stripes down my guy's mane as a makeshift flag. As I drew a peace sign, the guide called out, "Time's up!"

*There!* I pushed aside my frustration and thought about my afternoon plans: pool time with a frosty cocktail. The clouds would roll in soon, and I didn't want to miss the sunny hours.

"Now, let's share our thoughts about the paintings," said the guide. *Horse hockey!* I thought. *We have to talk about our work?* Our friend Jeff kicked off the show-and-tell with a bang: He'd painted an homage to his baby, Ava. "The wings represent the freedom I want her to have to be whoever she wants. The red heart represents the love she has surrounding her." My eyes filled with happy tears.

Then Nick debuted his work, and he might as well have raised a curtain to the sound of trumpets: "I let my brush flow along the lines of the horse, allowing the horse to guide my design. I tried not to think about making it perfect, and

it turned out beautifully." Yes, it had.

I felt the hot flush of fear, the dread of having to showcase my preschool hieroglyphics. Why did it matter so much? These were my friends! I tried to reverse my thinking, flooding myself with affirmations: *You bake delicious baklava. You've never forgotten a family member's birthday. You rinse out recyclables before putting them in the bin. A subpar landscape painting on a horse is not a summation of your value.*

"OK, Tula, tell us about your horse."

Tears rolled down my cheeks, and my voice cracked with emotion. "Well, I'm feeling pretty embarrassed, like I did the exercise wrong. Everyone else painted things that were meaningful and personal, and mine is just a picture of mountains and the weather. It's not original or creative." I became aware of how pathetic I sounded. I'd morphed into a caricature in a movie about middle-aged women finding their mojo at a five-star resort—only instead of flirting with the hot stable boy, I was boohooing because my picture wasn't good enough. Even I would give this film only two stars.

By now, everyone had gathered around me, earnestly pointing out how joyful and full of life my work was. "There's no right or wrong way to paint a horse," the guide said, adding that it was a gift to feel emotional. Although it didn't feel like much of a gift, I tried to take her at her word. We hosed off our horses, and I watched the colors turn muddy as they mixed with the dirt. I was relieved that the exercise was over.

Later, nursing a margarita by the pool and watching the clouds slowly close in (I'd known they would come), I felt disappointed. I'd thought I'd buried my personal demons of insecurity and competitiveness years ago through countless therapy sessions, late-night talks with friends and raw journal entries. How was it that I hadn't developed enough confidence to revel in trying something new and outside my wheelhouse? I'd turned an off-the-wall exercise into a measurement of self-worth.

I thought about other times I'd felt

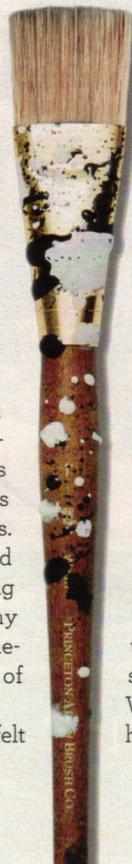
shame, questioning my decisions and my value: prom night, staring at my dress hanging in the closet with the tag still on (I'd purchased it as a lucky charm, hoping my crush would ask me to go); telling my boyfriend I was ready to take our relationship to the next level only to have him break up with me that night; interviewing for a position at *Vogue* (yes, *Vogue!*) and freezing when asked for column ideas. But I had to admit there'd been just as many times when my gambles had paid off. Heck, I'd landed alone in New York City at 23 with \$900 in my pocket, no job and just one friend...and I was leaving with a stellar résumé—including a stint at *GH*—and dozens of amazing friends. All proof that risks (and hard work) could pay off big-time.

Suddenly, I understood why the exercise had done a number on me—it had brought into sharp relief the fear that my decision to leave New York was "doing it wrong." I'd arrived at a blank canvas in my life. The act of trying this small new thing—painting a horse—mirrored the huge new thing I was doing in reality.

Deep down, I knew my move was the right one. I'd been living safely but not all that happily for the last few years, settling into a life defined by past accomplishments but not many new ones. I hadn't been dating much; I'd shelved my book manuscript; I'd even turned down a big job running a magazine. I'd succumbed to inertia and fear, and now I was doing something about it. Scary, but brave. There was no guarantee that trading Manhattan skyscrapers for the rolling hills of Austin would deliver what I longed for, but if the past was any indication, there was a good chance my wager would yield something beautiful and colorful, even if I didn't yet know what that would look like.

At that moment, Nick, Jeff and Rabia appeared. "How you doing, Boo?" Nick asked.

"I'm good," I said, and I meant it. I looked up and saw that the clouds had moved away toward the mountains and were no longer blocking the sun. Just like the vista I'd painted on Wyn. I turned to my friends and said hopefully, "OK, what's next?" ♦



**NexGard<sup>®</sup>**  
(afoxolaner) Chewables

CAUTION: Federal (USA) law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.

**Description:**  
NexGard<sup>®</sup> (afoxolaner) is available in four sizes of beef-flavored, soft chewables for oral administration to dogs and puppies according to their weight. Each chewable is formulated to provide a minimum afoxolaner dosage of 1.14 mg/lb (2.5 mg/kg). Afoxolaner has the chemical composition 1-Naphthalenecarboxamide, 4-[5-(13-chloro-5-(trifluoromethyl)phenyl)-4,5-dihydro-5-(trifluoromethyl)-1H-imidazo[4,5-b]pyridin-2-yl)-2-(2,2,2-trifluoroethyl)amino)ethyl.

**Indications:**  
NexGard kills adult fleas and is indicated for the treatment and prevention of flea infestations (*Ctenocephalides felis*) and the treatment and control of Black-legged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), American Dog tick (*Dermacentor variabilis*), Lone Star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*), and Brown dog tick (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*) infestations in dogs and puppies 8 weeks of age and older, weighing 4 pounds of body weight or greater, for one month.

**Dosage and Administration:**  
NexGard is given orally once a month, at the minimum dosage of 1.14 mg/lb (2.5 mg/kg).

**Dosing Schedule:**

Body Weight	Afoxolaner Per Chewable (mg)	Chewables Administered
4.0 to 10.0 lbs.	11.3	One
10.1 to 24.0 lbs.	28.3	One
24.1 to 60.0 lbs.	68	One
60.1 to 121.0 lbs.	136	One
Over 121.0 lbs.	Administer the appropriate combination of chewables	

NexGard can be administered with or without food. Care should be taken that the dog consumes the complete dose, and treated animals should be observed for a few minutes to ensure that part of the dose is not lost or refused. If it is suspected that any of the dose has been lost or if vomiting occurs within two hours of administration, redose with another full dose. If a dose is missed, administer NexGard and resume a monthly dosing schedule.

**Flea Treatment and Prevention:**

Treatment with NexGard may begin at any time of the year. In areas where fleas are common year-round, monthly treatment with NexGard should continue the entire year without interruption.

To minimize the likelihood of flea reinfestation, it is important to treat all animals within a household with an approved flea control product.

**Tick Treatment and Control:**

Treatment with NexGard may begin at any time of the year (see **Effectiveness**).

**Contraindications:**

There are no known contraindications for the use of NexGard.

**Warnings:**

Not for use in humans. Keep this and all drugs out of the reach of children. In case of accidental ingestion, contact a physician immediately.

**Precautions:**

The safe use of NexGard in breeding, pregnant or lactating dogs has not been evaluated. Use with caution in dogs with a history of seizures (see **Adverse Reactions**).

**Adverse Reactions:**

In a well-controlled US field study, which included a total of 333 households and 615 treated dogs (415 administered afoxolaner; 200 administered active control), no serious adverse reactions were observed with NexGard.

Over the 90-day study period, all observations of potential adverse reactions were recorded. The most frequent reactions reported at an incidence of > 1% within any of the three months of observations, are presented in the following table. The most frequently reported adverse reaction was vomiting. The occurrence of vomiting was generally self-limiting and of short duration and tended to decrease with subsequent doses in both groups. Five treated dogs experienced anorexia during the study, and two of those dogs experienced anorexia with the first dose but not subsequent doses.

**Table 1: Dogs With Adverse Reactions.**

	Treatment Group			
	Afoxolaner		Oral active control	
	N <sup>a</sup>	% (n=415)	N <sup>b</sup>	% (n=200)
Vomiting (with and without blood)	17	4.1	25	12.5
Dry/Flaky Skin	13	3.1	2	1.0
Diarrhea (with and without blood)	13	3.1	7	3.5
Lethargy	7	1.7	4	2.0
Anorexia	5	1.2	9	4.5

<sup>a</sup>Number of dogs in the afoxolaner treatment group with the identified abnormality.

<sup>b</sup>Number of dogs in the control group with the identified abnormality.

In the US field study, one dog with a history of seizures experienced a seizure on the same day after receiving the first dose and on the same day after receiving the second dose of NexGard. This dog experienced a third seizure one week after receiving the third dose. The dog remained enrolled and completed the study. Another dog with a history of seizures had a seizure 19 days after the third dose of NexGard. The dog remained enrolled and completed the study. A third dog with a history of seizures received NexGard and experienced no seizures throughout the study.

To report suspected adverse events, for technical assistance or to obtain a copy of the MSDS, contact Merial at 1-888-837-4251 or [www.merial.com/nexgard](http://www.merial.com/nexgard). For additional information about adverse drug experience reporting for animal drugs, contact FDA at 1-888-FDA-VETS or online at <http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth>.

**Mode of Action:**

Afoxolaner is a member of the isoxazoline family, shown to bind at a binding site to inhibit insect and acarine ligand-gated chloride channels, in particular those gated by the neurotransmitter gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), thereby blocking pre- and post-synaptic transfer of chloride ions across cell membranes. Prolonged afoxolaner-induced hyperexcitation results in uncontrolled activity of the central nervous system and death of insects and acarines. The selective toxicity of afoxolaner between insects and acarines and mammals may be inferred by the differential sensitivity of the insects and acarines' GABA receptors versus mammalian GABA receptors.

**Effectiveness:**

In a well-controlled laboratory study, NexGard began to kill fleas four hours after initial administration and demonstrated >85% effectiveness at eight hours. In a separate well-controlled laboratory study, NexGard demonstrated 100% effectiveness against adult fleas 24 hours post-infestation for 30 days, and was >95% effective at 12 hours post-infestation through Day 21, and on Day 25. On Day 28, NexGard was 91% effective 12 hours post-infestation. Dogs in both the treated and control groups that were infested with fleas on Day 1 generated flea eggs at 12- and 24-hours post-treatment (0-11 eggs and 1-17 eggs in the NexGard treated dogs, and 4-90 eggs and 0-118 eggs in the control dogs, at 12- and 24-hours, respectively). At subsequent evaluations post-infestation, fleas from dogs in the treated group were essentially unable to produce any eggs (0-1 eggs) while fleas from dogs in the control group continued to produce eggs (1-141 eggs).

In a 90-day US field study conducted in households with existing flea infestations of varying severity, the effectiveness of NexGard against fleas on the Day 30, 60 and 90 visits compared with baseline was 90.0%, 99.7%, and 99.9%, respectively.

Collectively, the data from the three studies (two laboratory and one field) demonstrate that NexGard kills fleas before they can lay eggs, thus preventing subsequent flea infestations after the start of treatment of existing flea infestations.

In well-controlled laboratory studies, NexGard demonstrated >97% effectiveness against *Dermacentor variabilis*, >94% effectiveness against *Ixodes scapularis*, and 93% effectiveness against *Rhipicephalus sanguineus*, 48 hours post-infestation for 30 days. At 72 hours post-infestation, NexGard demonstrated >97% effectiveness against *Amblyomma americanum* for 30 days.

**Animal Safety:**

In a range of safety study, NexGard was administered orally to 8 to 9-week-old Beagle puppies at 1, 3, and 5 times the maximum exposure dose (6.3 mg/kg) for three treatments every 26 days, followed by three treatments every 14 days, for a total of six treatments. Dogs in the control group were sham-dosed. There were no clinically-relevant effects related to treatment on physical examination, body weight, food consumption, clinical pathology (hematology, clinical chemistry, or coagulation tests), gross pathology, histopathology or organ weights. Vomiting occurred throughout the study, with a similar incidence in the treated and control groups, including one dog in the 5x group that vomited four hours after treatment. In a well-controlled field study, NexGard was used concomitantly with other medications, such as vaccines, anthelmintics, antibiotics (including topical), steroids, NSAIDs, anesthetics, and antihistamines. No adverse reactions were observed from the concomitant use of NexGard with other medications.

**Storage Information:**

Store at or below 30°C (86°F) with excursions permitted up to 40°C (104°F).

**How Supplied:**

NEXGARD is available in four sizes of beef-flavored soft chewables: 11.3, 28.3, 68 or 136 mg afoxolaner. Each chewable size is available in color-coded packages of 1, 3 or 6 beef-flavored chewables.

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