

KATIE TOSSES A RINGER

By Felix Mayerhofer

Chapter 1: Clang Goes the Horseshoe

Katie Spangle was feeling great. School was out and this was the first day of summer vacation.

“What are your plans for the summer?” asked her father, as Katie fed the chickens.

“They’re going to have a craft class at the park,” she answered. “I thought I’d run over and check it out.”

“Good idea,” he said.

Arriving at the park Katie saw a notice tacked on the bulletin board:

HORSESHOE LESSONS BEGIN AT 9:00 A.M.

Katie thought it sounded like fun and decided right then and there to sign up for horseshoes instead of the craft class.

Walking to the horseshoe pits, Katie and a few boys were met by the recreation director. He taught them different ways to pitch a horseshoe then everyone was given a chance to throw. Most of the boys knew how to play, so they did all right. When it was Katie’s turn,

a boy from her class called “BB,” short for “Billy the Bully,” said with a smirk, “This is a boy’s game, you’re probably too weak to even pitch a horseshoe much less make a ringer.”

No matter how hard Katie threw, she couldn’t get the horseshoes anywhere near the stake. BB snickered every time she threw. He tried to make her cry but she wouldn’t give him the satisfaction.

Katie was really discouraged by the time she got home.

Sensing something was wrong, Katie’s mother followed her to her room. Sitting next to her on the bed, she gently asked, “What’s wrong Katie? Is there anything I can do to help?”

Katie nodded her head and told her mother everything.

“Your muscles just need to be developed,” her mother explained, “but the more you practice, the stronger they’ll get. As for BB, ignore him! It will drive him crazy.”

Katie laughed. “Thanks Mom,” she exclaimed, “I feel better already.”

The next morning Katie arrived at the park with a new feeling of inner power. She walked straight to the horseshoe pit, picked up a horseshoe and threw it with all her might.

The airborne horseshoe flew straight and clanged against the stake. The sound of metal against metal was music to her ears. All the boys cheered---except you know who.

“That was pure luck,” razzed BB with a scowl on his face. Katie completely ignored him.

Now that she could reach the stake, her next goal was to throw a ringer.

Chapter 2: Muscle Girl

Katie came into the house singing like a bird and told her mom and dad what she'd done.

"I had a feeling you'd reach the stake today," her father said, handing her a heavy package.

She excitedly tore off the wrapping, and to her surprise found a new set of horseshoes and stakes.

"Wow," she said, "This is fantastic! Now I can practice after I come home from the park."

Before she had a chance to say another word he handed her a second gift. She couldn't imagine what it could be. Hurriedly opening the box she found two 3-pound weights.

"Those will help build up your arm and wrist strength," her father said. "By the end of the summer you'll be able to toss the horseshoes across the playground--and the bully too, all at the same time." Katie got a big charge from that and gave her mother and father a hug.

With renewed vigor Katie was the first one at the horseshoe pit every day. A few days later the recreation director announced they were going to start a softball league.

"Anyone interested follow me to the ball field," he said. To Katie's amazement, every boy took off across the field leaving the horseshoe pit to her.

Katie continued to improve daily and began making ringers regularly. She pitched all day, first at the park and then at home. By placing white rags on top of the stakes she could see to shoot after the sun went down. The more she practiced the stronger and more accurate she became. As the weeks passed, every shot Katie threw was a ringer.

The annual county fair had opened and Katie and her parents were looking forward to seeing the events. They arrived early the first day of the fair and walked around the grounds looking at all the displays. Walking off by herself, Katie saw a stand with a sign across the top that read--

HORSESHOE TOURNAMENT SIGN-UPS.

Katie stopped and asked the man sitting there, "Am I too young to sign up?"

"No," he responded. "Even though this is a senior division tournament, we allow all ages to enter. It starts tomorrow morning at 9:00 a.m. If you decide to enter, you'll have to follow the senior rules."

Katie didn't think that would be a problem, so she excitedly signed up.

"One other thing," the man said, "you have to bring your own regulation horseshoes."

"Thanks," answered Katie, "I'll do that."

When Katie met her parents she told them about signing up.

"Isn't that a little out of your league?" her father asked.

"It might be," responded Katie, "but I'd like the experience of competing in a tournament. When we go home, I want to try something with your help."

Chapter 3: Horseshoes With Wings

When the family arrived home, Katie and her folks headed straight for the horseshoe pit in the backyard. Handing her father a blindfold, she said, “Dad, tie this over my eyes, then point me in the direction of the other stake.” Holding a horseshoe in her right hand, she slowly extended her arm back in preparation, swung it forward and smoothly let the horseshoe fly. As her mother and father looked on in disbelief, she heard the familiar clang against the stake.

Jerking off the blindfold she saw that her suspicions had been right. She could toss a ringer both by sense and sight.

“Phew!” said her dad, “It looks like you’re more than ready, but I think it would be a good idea if you studied your rule book before you play.”

“I will,” she answered. Katie continued to practice until dark, then went over the rules and got to bed early.

Awakening the next morning she laid thinking, *what did I get myself into?*

Arriving at the fairgrounds with her mom and dad, Katie went straight to the horseshoe pit.

An official blew his whistle, announced who each of the contestants would play and to which pitcher’s box they’d been assigned.

Katie noticed that almost all the men were quite old. She knew the present champion had won the championship for the last 23 years, and was the favorite to win again.

As Katie walked up to the pitcher's box, a gray-haired man came forward and was surprised to see his opponent was a young girl. "Is this a joke?" he asked in a troubled voice.

"No," she answered.

"I'll talk to the officials immediately," he said, "this is not fair to you. I've had too much experience to play someone so young." He then hurriedly left.

After speaking to the officials the man returned and told Katie, "They said there aren't any age limits to play. I wasn't complaining, I just didn't want to take advantage of you. By the way my name is Tom Quirk."

"I'm Katie Spangle," she answered. Katie could tell that Mr. Quirk was a kind man.

"Well, I guess it's time to start," he said.

Tossing a coin for the choice to throw first, Katie won.

Katie's smooth pitch of the horseshoe sliced through the air and made a ringer.

"I'll be 'doggone!'" exclaimed Mr. Quirk. "I hope that was pure luck on your part? If not, I'm in big trouble!"

The game went on and to Mr. Quirk's surprise, Katie beat him with straight ringers.

"Are you from outer space?" he asked in a kidding way. "I've never seen pitching like that in all my years, and here I was worried thinking I was too good for you."

Chapter 4: The Unstoppable Tornado

Katie defeated player after player until she and the champ were the last two finalists.

Word had spread that a young girl was beating everyone by making ringers every time she shot. And who did this final match attract? None other than Billy the bully, who still had that smirk on his face.

Katie and Mr. Snerdly the champ went to their pitching platform.

“Good luck youngster,” said Mr. Snerdly to Katie.

She smiled and said, “Thank you.”

Katie again won the toss of the coin.

She remained calm as she threw the horseshoe to begin the match. All eyes were glued on the shoe as it sailed through the air embracing the stake for a ringer. The audience roared. The horseshoe championships had never attracted such a large crowd.

“Good shot,” Mr. Snerdly said to Katie, as he took his turn.

Both contestants were champs and equally matched. The suspense grew as the score changed hands time and again.

BB roughly pushed through the crowd close to Katie with the sole purpose to distract her, as he began making remarks about her ability every time she shot. He tried to make her nervous so she wouldn't win the championship and it was difficult to ignore him.

“I'm getting tired,” thought Katie to herself. “This stress is wearing me down and having BB here isn't helping.”

BB's loud comments attracted the attention of two fair policemen who each grabbed an arm, and personally escorted him outside the main gate to the cheers of the crowd, bringing a much needed smile to Katie's face.

The score was tied as a confident Mr. Snerdly took his last shot. It looked good, but instead of sliding in for a ringer, the horseshoe careened off the top of the peg and leaned to the side. There was a gasp from the audience with the champion frowning in disbelief.

Chapter 5: Success or Failure

Katie looked at the leaning horseshoe expecting it to fall around the peg at any moment, but it didn't move an inch. Mr. Snerdly was now leading by one point. She knew if her final shot was a ringer she'd win the match and the championship. Her nerves were on edge as she prepared to make her last pitch.

Allergic to the hay at the fair, Katie became teary-eyed just as her big shot took off. Looking through half closed eyes she knew the toss was going to be a winner.

The audience couldn't believe what they saw! Katie's jaw dropped and Mr. Snerdly almost swallowed his false teeth. Katie's horseshoe had shattered on impact.

"You're disqualified!" shouted Mr. Snerdly. "I win!"

Recovering from the shock, Katie responded, "You're wrong Mr. Snerdly!" Whipping out her rulebook, she read out loud: "Rule 11 of the 'Playing Rules' says a broken shoe shall be removed and the contestant allowed to pitch another shoe in its stead."

Nodding his head in agreement, Mr. Snerdly said, "You're right little lady. Do you have an extra shoe?" he asked.

Katie was stunned. "No!" was her reply. She hadn't thought about bringing extra horseshoes. What was she going to do?

A hush fell over the crowd knowing this could be the end of the match.

Pushing his way through the crowd Mr. Quirk came toward Katie.

Placing a set of horseshoes in her hand, he said, "Take my shoes Katie."

Katie smiled from ear to ear and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank you Mr. Quirk," she said in appreciation.

Returning to the pitcher's box, Katie took a deep breath and let the horseshoe fly. The hypnotized audience watched it cut through the air as if guided by an invisible hand. Katie heard the familiar ring and knew she had won. The crowd cheered as Mr. Snerdly's face turned as gray as the hair on his head.

Mr. Quirk came through the excited crowd to congratulate Katie. "I knew you were a space alien!" he exclaimed with a laugh. "My only hope is that you left some of that star dust on my horseshoes, so I can pitch them with the same magic, and be a champion like you."