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New Beginnings:

successful equine adoptions

by Carla McClain



Nikko, rescued by Equine Voices is now going blind, with Sylvia a starvation case rescued by Equine Voices who serves as Nikko's seeing eye companion

Most are lame. One is deformed. Another is blind. Several were starved. A few were headed for slaughter. One was impaled on a t-post. Many are unrideable. And none will be asked to carry a human being again.

Yet every single one of these once-throwaway-now-rescued horses has been adored, cared for, and eagerly adopted by the people who met them, who say their lives are immeasurably enriched by their equine presence.

"Well, yes, it's a big job, yes, you could say that, I guess," said Mo Grace, today the willing caretaker of seven horses and one mule who roam freely and live in peace and plenty on

her rural southern Arizona land. "But I don't look at it as a burden. It's beautiful out here and I love being with the horses, seeing them, touching them, hearing them call for their food in the morning. The truth is, I simply feel blessed to be able to do this."

You might think she had rehearsed that script with Angie Wilson, who has just taken in two rescued horses, to her nearby home on several grassy high desert acres.

"So far, it's been a dream come true, really. I always loved horses, wanted a horse, since I was a kid, but I never could do it. But you know what they say – if you have a dream, and it's

really important to you, it will happen... Well, it's true. These animals bring a lot of joy and peace to my life."

The odd thing is, neither Grace nor Wilson had much to do with horses for most of their lives, though they admired the species from afar. Grace frankly admits to being scared of the big creatures. "When I first started being around horses, only a few years ago, my knees were knocking. This was a whole new world for me."

What drew these two women into this unfamiliar world – and has done the same to so many – is Equine Voices Rescue & Sanctuary, a 10-acre ranch located in the foothills of the

Santa Rita Mountains in southern Arizona, where they started as volunteers. Though currently home to 48 once-doomed horses rescued from all over the West, Equine Voices has actually saved ten-fold that number – more than 500 – from slaughter, abuse, starvation, and abandonment since opening eight years ago. That could happen only by successfully finding new homes for well over 400 of them – no small achievement, as anyone doing rescue work knows.

“For every horse we adopt out, there is room for another to come in,” says Karen Pomroy, president and founder of Equine Voices. Simple but critical math for a sanctuary always filled to capacity. The never-ending, heartbreaking stream of horses needing rescue these days is why she must search aggressively for potential new caregivers and new homes everywhere and anywhere. She gets the word out in local newspapers, in email newsletters, on social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and especially among the legions of dedicated volunteers and visitors, who often forever join the cause.

“I used to get mail from Equine Voices and I always tossed it,” Grace admitted. “But one day I read one, then I went to one of their benefits, and I came away amazed at what they do, actually I was blown away.” She started volunteering at Equine Voices five years ago – mucking stalls, knocking knees and all. One day, the Sanctuary’s much-loved mascot, the huge draft horse Gulliver, wrapped his big old head around her while she was cleaning, and she was hooked.

“It was a done deal. I just fell in love with the horses and everything Karen was doing here,” she said. She left her career in the city 50 miles away, joined the small Equine Voices’ staff as an office assistant, then bought land within a few miles of the Sanctuary, effectively becoming a mini-branch of Equine Voices.

True to her kind nature, Grace reached out for the horses “with issues,” as Pomroy puts it – those least adoptable. Her first was Annie, a lovely chestnut with two club feet, useless for most humans and likely headed for auction, but an object of pure love to Grace. On her heels was Annie’s pal, Jennie, a mini-mule rescued by Equine Voices from a killer buyer the day before she was to be shipped to Mexico for slaughter. Then came Mikah, a big bay mare left homeless when her caregiver died of cancer. Next was Whisper, a white quarter horse rescued from near-death starvation, then Nikko, a tall, sweet, discarded roping horse, who arrived at Equine Voices as a standing skeleton, going blind. Serving happily as “Nikko’s eyes”



Left: Lacey yearling filly rescued from slaughter with new adoptees Ted & Angie Wilson

Below: Mo Grace, an Equine Voices volunteer and office assistant and Nikko, rescued from starvation in 2011 by Equine Voices



is Sylvia, a now-feisty youngster also rescued from starvation after abandonment near the Mexico border. She patiently leads Nikko, returned to robust health, everywhere he needs to go in his new digs - most notably to their abundant feed. Also joining Grace’s herd is Jezebel – found skinny and injured and wandering the city streets in Tucson late one night by police, who called Pomroy at 2 AM, who rolled out of bed to hitch the trailer and drive 50 miles to pick her up. No one ever reported a missing horse or claimed her, which is fine with Grace.

“I just want to keep making room for Karen to take in more horses,” she said. So she also adopted Tucker, emaciated, then impaled on a T-post during a windstorm. With vet and feed bills out of reach, Tucker’s caregiver turned to Equine Voices for help. Medical treatment healed the gruesome injury, and Tucker now eats his way through the day at Grace’s place. “He and Annie are in love – it’s a hoot,” she says.

However, the pressing need for new homes does not mean adopting a horse, mule, or donkey from Equine Voices is a simple thing. Hardly. You – not the horse – are the one under scrutiny. Pomroy does a thorough inspection of the new guardian and new home before approval. A legally binding contract must be signed guaranteeing Equine Voices first right of return if the adoption doesn’t work out. And occasionally, that does happen.

“One came back this week – no problem, that’s the way I want it,” Pomroy said. “I’m

very picky, very selective. We do all we can to protect the horses who pass through our gates.”

There will be no returns from Angie Wilson’s place, where the stunningly stylish Arabian, Mikey, and a young chestnut mare, Lacey, moved this summer from Equine Voices. Lacy was one of six foals born (and then discarded for slaughter) to mares used to produce the synthetic female hormone Premarin. Rescuing horses from that inhumane industry was why Pomroy founded Equine Voices in 2004.

“We have this land and we want to help Karen,” said Wilson, who continues volunteering at Equine Voices with her husband, Ted. “So we sat down and said, ‘let’s figure out how to make this happen.’”

With the help of 200 dedicated volunteers, Pomroy has not only stayed steady on this job, she has seen to it that the sanctuary remains stable and able as well. Equine Voices’ most immediate need is for more land to shelter more horses. If funds can be raised to acquire 10 acres adjacent to the sanctuary that are currently for sale, it would double the current acreage. That would allow the 18 mares Equine Voices saved from slaughter two years ago, who still reside in Canada, to finally come home. ☺

For more information:
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