

SECOND CHANCES

AMAZING HORSE RESCUES

LYNNE M. CAULKETT

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Second Chances: Amazing Horse Rescues

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Back cover photograph by Kim Aursland of Black Oaks Ranch

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my dear friends Kathy Chmielewski and Laura Clark who have been not only my sounding boards, my fact finders and my inspirations, but have been my Guardian Angels. Everything I know about horses, I have learned from them. And what I have learned about friendship from knowing them leads me to believe that we are much more than friends.

We are sisters.

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PREFACE

Throughout the years many books have been written about famous and amazing horses. From the wild mustangs out West to the Triple Crown winners, from National Velvet to Misty of the Chincoteague, America has had a love affair with the equine world. While young children dream of owning their own ponies, teenage girls yearn to adorn dressage clothing and imagine themselves sailing over the jumps in the prestigious horse competitions. Adolescent boys have aspirations of becoming cowboys and riding the open range.

Who among us has not fantasized at one time or another in our lives about living on a ranch with wide-open spaces, horses quietly grazing against the azure sunrise, rolling hills and cascading mountains surrounding us? The image conjures up a life of living in harmony with nature, a pleasant escape from the hectic busy lives we lead. Those of us who are fortunate enough to own horses know what a wonderful experience it can be and how much pleasure these gentle giants bring to our lives. While many of us cannot pack up and move to the hills of Montana or to the valleys of Kentucky and Tennessee, having our few acres of rich green pastureland in which to raise our horses is a dream come true.

You can go into your public library and pick up a book on just about every kind of a horse there is. Inside the covers you will find stories of young colts who grew into prize winners, horses who have grown so attached to their owners that they can almost read each other's minds, and horses with heartwarming stories, like the beloved Black Beauty. They are books that you have probably read over and over.

Our home library contains many of these horse books, and it gives me great pleasure when I see one of my grandchildren remove a book from the shelf and ask me to read it to them. I have boxes and boxes of horse magazines that I subscribe to, and even the youngest of the children will occasionally pull one out and sit

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and look at the pictures. They all have their favorites. The pages of my books and magazines are dog-eared and worn, and I wouldn't have it any other way. A book, beautifully bound, that sits on a shelf and never gets opened is useless.

The vast majority of the horse population today is kept on a leisure basis. There are many activities that owners and non-owners alike can participate in. A look in your local phone book and newspaper will produce an array of riding stables and schools that offer lessons, shows, races, organized events and clubs. Whether you are a rider or a spectator, the equestrian world offers something for everyone.

But what about the horses you don't read about? The horses who endure pain and suffering at the hands of those who should not be allowed to own one of these beautiful creatures. It happens more often than we think. There is an entire population of horses that lead lives totally different from the stories we read in the books with happy endings. I, myself, own two loved and pampered Appaloosa's who were rescued from cruel and contemptuous people. In repeating my story to others, many people have come forward with stories of their own. Each story mirrors the same mistreatment. Horse abuse comes in a variety of circumstances. Neglect is by far the most common type of abuse. Neglect involves a huge scope of situations. There are, of course, severe cases where police intervention is required, as in cases of physical abuse, but in most cases owner ignorance is the leading cause of horse neglect. Financial issues can be another reason.

As for owner ignorance, most people simply do not realize what is involved in the care of horses. They purchase a home in a rural area with some grassy property, and they think they should buy a horse. They are usually people who have never owned a horse before, and do so without first educating themselves. They buy first and think later. They equate it to owning a cat or a dog. They think, simply put a little food out once a day and the horse will thrive. They soon find out that caring for this new animal entails far more than that. And not having the experience and background in horse nutrition, these owners can cause a variety of horse ailments that go undetected until they are so severe that the horse's life is in danger.

In these types of cases, seizure of the animals by authorities

is not always warranted. If the owners are open to education, the Humane Society or rescue association can go and teach them how to properly care for their horses. Many times this guidance will solve the problem. In cases like these, with supervision and direction, the owners can turn the situation around and become responsible owners. It is only when there is no cooperation between the owner and law enforcement that seizure becomes necessary.

Money problems can also be a factor in neglect cases. When purchasing a horse, novice owners do not calculate the cost of ownership. Aside from feed costs, which can run between fifty and one hundred dollars a month per horse, there is the cost of hay, worming medications, supplements, a farrier service every six to eight weeks for trimming or shoeing, and veterinarian bills for regular vaccines as well as special injections like West Nile Virus vaccine.

It can be overwhelming for the first-time owner who buys a horse on a whim without prior knowledge of what it takes to keep a horse healthy. Those who own more than one horse can rack up astounding bills in a month where both a vet and a farrier are needed. In cases like this, especially when the farrier and vet visits are cut due to a strained budget, those horses are at high risk to develop hoof and leg problems, as well as exposing them to life-threatening diseases. If a person cannot afford to cover the expenses of total care, then the horse should be sold or donated to a new owner who has the resources to care properly for the animal.

And then there are the people who blatantly batter horses. Authorities usually find that in these cases, the abusers have either experienced violence earlier in their lives, or they are individuals with severe control or psychological problems.

Fortunately, there are people who devote themselves to seeking out the battered horses and, after a period of rehabilitation, find themselves with loyal, dependable companions. Organizations like the Horse Protection Association of Florida exist so that malnourished and starving horses receive proper nutrition and care to bring them back to health. This particular organization, founded by Morgan Silver in 1990, depends on volunteers and private donations to care for these horses. They are crusaders for abused horses and they have had an impressive success rate during the past thirteen years.

These are the horses that I have decided to write about.

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Beginning with my own experience, it is my hope that these stories will not only win your admiration for the angels of mercy who have rescued these animals, but will open your eyes to another world of horses. The society of Thoroughbreds, show, trail, and pastured horses who, after years of exploitation, mishandling and starvation, have maintained their spirit and have triumphed over the abuse to become trusting, faithful pets to their new owners, against all odds.

The heroes in this book are not only the caring rescuers who devote time and money in restoring a good life to these horses, but the horses themselves who somehow find the strength to endure what they have to in order to survive. Each story that you will read is true. Names may be changed to insure privacy, but the accounts actually happened and the horses are real. Their stories will touch your heart. Even if you don't own a horse, you will come away from this book knowing that these courageous animals truly are creatures of God. He has given them each a spirit that could not be broken, a spirit we can all draw strength from.

My own Cheyenne and Navajo are proof that, with diligence and hard work, these stories can have a happy ending. It can be an uphill struggle to rehabilitate an abused horse, but the rewards are bountiful. To all the owners and horses who have won the battle, my heart and my congratulations go out to you.

Building trust and overcoming the fears of an abused horse can be a slow process. There are many stumbling blocks and it is at times a losing battle, but with perseverance it can be accomplished, as you will see in the following stories. When those barriers are broken down it is astonishing that the once-broken spirit of a horse can flourish and rebound. Those same horses who, a year or so before, could barely walk or hold up their heads, are now running through the pasture, heads held high. Impossible? No. A miracle? Definitely!

This book will take you on a journey of many miracles. There is no other word to describe these stories. And when you reach the final page, I am sure you will wholeheartedly agree with me. It will leave you with an admiration for the horses and, hopefully, with enough contempt for the people who abused them that, together, we can pass along the message that animals who have been mistreated deserve a "Second Chance."

1

NAVAJO

I first set my sight on Navajo back in the summer of 1997. My husband Jim and I had retired to Spring Hill, Florida, from the suburbs of Detroit earlier that year. We had moved to be closer to my parents. My dad had been diagnosed with a blood disorder, and being close to him was important to me. It was a decision Jim and I both agreed on and have never regretted. Little did I know at the time that horses were about to become a very important part of my life.

Pulling up stakes in Michigan had been difficult. We left behind our three grown children and several grandchildren. Making it somewhat easier was the fact that not only did my parents live in the area of Florida where we retired, but also two sisters, a brother, my grandmother, my aunt and uncle, and longtime friends Ken and Kathleen Chmielewski.

Ken and Kathleen had been high school friends of Jim's back in Michigan. After graduation, marriage, and Ken's time in the Air Force, they moved to a farm in Kentucky where they raised horses. Kathy's family in Michigan had been horse people and she had been around horses since she was a small child.

Ken drove a semi truck for a living, but when knee and back problems plagued him, he was forced into an early retirement and the couple eventually made the move south. They lived for a while in a home on the Gulf of Mexico, and later purchased twenty acres in New Port Richey, Florida, where they built both a home and eight-stall barn. Once they moved their horses, who were being boarded on a piece of land that Kathy was leasing, to the completed property, the newly named "Black Oaks Ranch" was up and running.

It was at this ranch that I met and became enamored with Navajo. This gentle gelding would be the first horse that my

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granddaughter Kayci and grandson, Brandon, would later ride on their visits here from Michigan.

Navajo is a white Appaloosa gelding (male horse). He stands slightly higher than fourteen hands (each 'hand' is the equivalence of about four inches), which is a moderate-sized horse. In certain lights when Navajo is body clipped, some dark spots on his skin are visible, which is a trademark of an Appaloosa. He has a slight sag to his back, a short cropped mane, a nose that is scarred from too much sun exposure, and eyes that are somewhat glazed over from old eye injuries, one of them blind. But to me he is the most beautiful horse that I have ever seen.

It isn't his outward appearance, although he still looks good in the show ring dressed in his black saddle and bridle with silver accents, but rather the soft, gentle manner of this horse that captures everyone's heart who meets and gets to know him.

The first time I mounted and rode Navajo was during the summer camp that Ken and Kathy hosted the year after we moved to Florida. Each June, Black Oaks Ranch opens camp to both children and adults. During the four one-week sessions, Kathy instructs her students not only in riding, but also in the history, and the care and grooming of horses. Each person is assigned a horse for the week and given responsibility for that horse. I was lucky enough to be asked to act as a counselor that summer, and ended up coming back for all four sessions. My twelve-year-old granddaughter Kayci, visiting from her home in Michigan, attended the first week of camp along with me.

Camp begins each morning with the students grooming and readying their horse for the arena workout. Manes and tails are combed until they are soft and tangle free. Bodies are stroked with bristly brushes, making the horse hair glisten. Legs are rubbed down, hoofs wiped clean, and each horse is misted with fly spray. Finally, saddles are cinched up and bridles are put on. The horses are led out of their stalls, lined up, and each child is hoisted onto his or her horse and escorted into the riding arena. Navajo is usually assigned to one of the beginners. Many mornings I would help the child who was to ride Navajo for the week. The gelding always stands patiently and quietly, thoroughly enjoying his grooming session.

Some of the pupils are advanced children who have attended camp previously, and some are beginners. Kathy divides them into groups with the counselors attending to one group while Kathy instructs the other. One by one, the rules of riding are given and the more experienced riders give examples of the correct posture, foot placement, walking, trotting, and cantering. Each new student follows in line and, at a given time, is able to practice what they have learned. About an hour-and-a-half is spent in the arena, allowing plenty of time to develop each lesson. The children soon learn that Navajo is a follower, not a leader. Whatever the horse in front of him does, he will do. It is as if he is playing a game of Follow the Leader.

Once the children have been given enough time in the ring, the riders file out and are given lemonade before the trail ride begins. Horses are watered and everyone is lined up with a partner. The trail ride includes walking the horses parade style, two-by-two, up the drive onto the pavement, and throughout the neighborhood. After a few blocks, the horses are led into the wooded trails that surround Black Oaks Ranch. The woods are usually cooler than the arena and the quietness is enjoyed by all. The steady clip-pety-clops of the hooves are mesmerizing, and the soft-spoken conversations from one rider to another make the relaxing ride pleasurable for both students and adults. Often, Kathy will quiz the children while riding about breeds, colors, and other horse facts. Sometimes, someone will strike up a camp song and the campers will happily join in.

The day continues after the trail ride with lunch, both for the horses and the students. Once all have eaten, each horse is given a shower, watered, and put out to pasture or into stalls with their afternoon ration of hay. The afternoon lessons consist of a classroom-type setting in the barn where the children and adults alike learn more facts about horses. Chairs are dragged in from around the barn or the kids find a seat on a bale of hay. Kathy instructs the kids on horse anatomy, barn etiquette, grooming, and the parts of the saddle and bridle.

Being not only a horse lover, but also someone who has rescued many horses, Kathy devotes one afternoon session to describing some of her rescues to the children. Her explanations illustrate not only the enormous amount of work that goes into owning a horse, but the responsibility we have to treat these gra-

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cious animals in a humane way.

Kathy places a great deal of emphasis on the fact that when you purchase a horse, it is a lifetime commitment and one that should not be taken for granted. “Unfortunately,” she explains, “some people do not look at it this way, and end up treating the animals as objects rather than living beings.” The children are usually appalled at the stories Kathy tells them about the abuse that the very horses these children have encountered at camp have gone through. It makes them very sensitive to the needs of the horses and teaches them a valuable lesson.

The afternoon classes end with a question-and-answer period and then the tired, but happy, campers prepare to leave. Treats are offered to their horses, goodbyes are said, and parents begin to arrive to pick up their sons and daughters. All of the kids look forward to the next day of camp and arrive early or on time.

Usually on the third day of camp, the children are given a special treat. Small paper cups filled with washable finger paints are handed out by the camp counselors. Soon little fingers are dipping into colors of red, yellow, blue, purple, and green, and each horse is painted and decorated by the child who is riding him or her that week. The counselors make their rounds to assist the busy artists, and put their own touches on each horse.

As each finished work of art is completed, Kathy begins judging the horses based on originality and creativity. The children anxiously await the results, with the winner receiving a small gift or token. Once the prize has been awarded, the horses are paraded through the neighborhood with their proud riders for the neighbors to enjoy. It is what most of the children consider to be the best day of camp.

Giving the horses a shower afterward can prove to be quite a large task, though. Darker colors of paint, like red, are especially hard to wash out. But that doesn't dampen the spirits of these happy campers. Kathy makes a contest out of it and chooses teams to wash each horse. Counselors then decide which team has cleaned up their horse the best and that team wins. There are no prizes for that contest, but getting sprayed with the water in their bathing suits while washing the horses is enough of a bonus for the hot, sweating kids.

On the last day of camp, the children are gathered in the

riding arena for an hour of games. One of the favorites games of every camper is the Egg on a Spoon race. Each child, mounted on her horse, is given a tablespoon and a small rock (much cleaner than an egg!). The riders must begin walking their horse, having one arm extended holding the spoon. When Kathy gives the word, they must start trotting. If children drop their stone, then they are excluded and must ride their horse into the middle of the ring and stand while the other riders continue. The last rider with a stone still on his or her spoon wins a prize.

The second game is also enjoyed by the kids. Each child removes his or her riding boots or shoes. The boots and shoes are taken by the counselors and thrown into the far end of the arena. Children mount their horses at the opposite end and, when the signal is given, ride as quickly as they can three-quarters down the field to a waiting counselor, dismount from their horses, and run to find their footwear. Once the boots and shoes are completely on their feet, they run back to their horse, mount up and race to the finish line. The first child back to the start line wins.

Competition gets very fierce with the older children who have attended camp in previous years. They are quick to spot their competitors' shoes, and try to throw them over the fence before the other child can get to them. There is a lot of screaming and laughing during this race. Even the horses seem to enjoy the race and try to get their riders back to the finish line as fast as they can. All in all, the games and races are a perfect ending to a perfect week of riding.

A written test is given to all of the students after the arena games and trail ride. There are three different tests, one for beginners, another one for the intermediate riders, and a third one for the advanced people. Kathy decides who will get which test and each child finds a quiet spot in the barn and sits down to complete the test. While there are no failing grades, it does allow us to see what each child has learned from the experience.

In the meantime, Kathy and the counselors set up the award ceremony for the children and parents who will be attending. Once the tests are graded and the awards are sorted, the campers and parents, video cameras in hand, are called together by the picnic table outside the riding arena to enjoy pizza and soda before the awards are handed out.

The award ceremony is the completion of camp for the

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week. Awards are given to each child based on how they progressed in camp for that particular week. Awards like the Most Improved Rider, Horsemanship, Rider of the Week, Best Camper, etc. Some of the older riders are advanced to the rank of counselors for next year's camp. Each child is called up separately and is presented with an envelope with their certificate, ribbon, and a photo of them on their horse. Kathy talks about each camper and praises them for the job they did for the week.

Camp is over until the next group of campers arrives the following Monday morning and the routine begins again.

It was at this 1998 camp that I met Navajo. It was evident immediately that the young children loved him. Kathy usually assigned one of the beginners to Navajo. His gentle laid-back personality matched the ability of the youngsters. He was a seasoned camp-trail-show horse who knew what he was supposed to do and could easily lead the inexperienced child through the arena exercises. Navajo definitely had a mind of his own, but he was a smart and obedient horse who could be trusted with even the smallest of children.

Being all white in color, he stood out in the riding arena. He carried his mounts regally and on command would walk, trot, and canter with ears forward (denoting he was happy and content) and tail busily swishing away flies. It is hard to believe that this confident, secure horse had been minutes away from the slaughterhouse just a few years before that. Had it not been for the quick thinking of a horse-loving friend of Kathy's, I would never have met this amazing horse.

At the time of this particular camp, Kathy had owned Navajo for about seven years. She came across him quite by accident. In an interview with Kathy in August of 2003, she described to me how she acquired Navajo back in 1994.

Through the grapevine, Kathy learned that originally Navajo had belonged to a family with kids who, in Kathy's words, "rode the heck out of him." They rode until Navajo would be huffing and puffing, trying to catch his breath.

"I don't know what condition the horse was in when they first got him," explained Kathy. "But I would imagine he was passed around like a second-hand car."

Navajo was kept in a small sand-filled lot with absolutely

no shade of any kind. He wasn't fed well and with all of the rough riding and getting turned out into the sun-drenched lot, he began to go downhill quickly. By the time the family got ready to "dump the horse" as Kathy put it, he was in bad shape. "So bad, that no one wanted him and he was being sent to the slaughterhouse. I think it was around 1993."

Kathy went on to describe the situation. "So here he was, just a rack of bones. His ears were totally eaten away from flies and insects. They were actually blood-raw. His nose was like hamburger - raw hamburger. I am sure it was because of it getting sunburned, then the scabs would fall off, he would get burned again, scabbed again, always in the sun, and the cycle continued over and over.

"His eyes were the same thing. All around his eyes there was crusted matter. It almost looked like someone had stuck play dough all over and around his eyes. The thick crust covered the raw flesh underneath. When he rubbed against anything, the scabs would be ripped off and the flesh exposed. Yellow pus would run down into the corners of his eyes. The eyes were tearing up all the time. The acid and infection from the raw sores ran down his head, scalding the skin, taking all the hair off his face. He was a mess, a total mess."

Once the decision was made by the owners to dispose of Navajo, a call was put in to a hauler to come and pick him up. The day the driver arrived to pick up the horse, the hauler also was transporting an expensive Quarter Horse stallion to new owner Rick Demme. When he arrived at the Demme ranch, the stallion was unloaded and taken into the barn.

As the driver prepared to leave, Rick heard noises coming out of the front of the trailer. Thinking it might be another expensive horse, he peered in to look and saw instead this flea-bitten horse, head hung low, shuffling in his small space.

"What's the story on this horse? What are you going to do with him?" he questioned.

"He's a throw-away. The owners are sending him to the killers and I am taking him for them," the hauler said casually. "Can't ride him anymore, can't do nothin' with him, so he's going to slaughter."

Rick Demme was incensed. As he looked closer, he saw that Navajo's head was totally raw where the halter was. The

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halter was sitting on bones and had no cushioning, so it was cutting into the horse's skin. The sides of the gelding's mouth were covered in huge ulcerated sores. The bridle they sent with him had a chinstrap that had imbedded into Navajo's skin. It was caked with dried blood. Rick couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"How much are you going to get for him?" Rick inquired.

"About two hundred bucks. They pay by the pound. Why, you interested?" he asked.

"Unload him. I'll pay you the two hundred dollars," Rick told him.

Navajo was taken from the trailer, the man was paid and he drove away. Rick immediately began to nurse the gelding back to health. He recognized that this horse still had a lot of life in him, and was determined to give him a chance. He had been involved in the rescue attempts in Miami during and after Hurricane Andrew and was adept at nourishing and healing abused horses.

He kept Navajo for about a year and then contacted Kathy at Black Oaks ranch in early 1994. Rick knew that Kathy ran summer horse camps and said he had several horses for her if she wanted them. Navajo was among those horses. Rick, who had recently suffered a major heart attack, was downsizing his dude-ranch in Bushnell, Florida. He wanted to make sure the horses had a good home. Many of his horses were abandoned horses he had adopted during Hurricane Andrew. After that hurricane, more than five thousand horses were rounded up and out of that number, fifteen hundred were already dead or had to be destroyed. A lot of the horses that survived were sent to new homes. Rick took many of them for his ranch program. He had about forty horses on his property, about ten of them big-money horses.

The dude ranch had been a popular vacation spot for many singing stars from Hollywood. Rick's brother Jonathan Demme was a Hollywood movie director who had directed such movies as *Silence of the Lambs*, *Philadelphia*, *Married to the Mob*, and *The Truth About Charlie*. It was not unusual for stars like Glen Campbell and Tanya Tucker to show up at the Demme ranch on weekends to relax and entertain.

After Rick's heart attack, he needed a triple bypass. He was forced to close the ranch to the public. Kathy agreed to take some of the horses, but didn't really want to take Navajo. Since he had a

completely dead mouth from the severe scabbing injuries he had suffered, he could not be controlled by a bit as most horses are managed while being ridden. Since he couldn't feel the bit in his mouth, it was useless to the rider. He would need to be totally retrained to learn to be controlled by body language. Otherwise he would be unstoppable when cantering. That could prove to be dangerous for a novice rider. He wouldn't make a good camp horse, which is what Kathy needed.

In the end, Kathy did agree to take the horse because she felt obligated to Rick. And, soon, Navajo captured the heart of everyone at Black Oaks. This gelding was a gentle horse who just wanted to please. In Kathy's words, "I never saw Navajo mad. He never pinned his ears back. He was just a happy horse with a lot of personality and always glad to see me. All he cared about was being wanted."

He was also mischievous in nature. In one incident, Kathy recalls that she came down to the barn one morning to find Navajo out of his stall, wandering around the barn. She was surprised, but thought that maybe she had not latched his stall the night before.

The next day when she went down to the barn, Kathy found not only Navajo out of his stall, but several of the other horses. Now she was really puzzled.

"Someone is playing tricks on me, is what I thought at the time." Kathy told me. She figured that one of the kids at the barn was doing this as a joke. As she walked into the barn the next morning, there was Navajo, out of his stall, flicking his nose at the latches of the other horses' doors.

"It's you!" she called out laughing. Navajo was the prankster. She ended up having to lower the latch on Navajo's gate so he could not reach it. Kathy still laughs today when she tells that story. But that episode was in character for Navajo. He was happy-go-lucky and enjoyed his time at Black Oaks.

With lots of medical care, the open sores on his face slowly began to heal, although the scarring was permanent. He gained weight and, with training, learned how to halt when given body signals from his riders. A lot of time was put into this training, but it paid off big. Camp would no longer be a problem for him. Navajo was a trustworthy horse with even the youngest of riders, and the most loved horse at the ranch. He continued to amuse and delight the campers for the next several years. He had finally

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found a home where he was treasured rather than abused.

One of Navajo's young riders was seven-year-old Nathan Clark. Nathan had his first riding lessons on Navajo in 1996, and later that year entered a show at a Pasco County horse show. He and Navajo took five ribbons that day. Nathan was thrilled and went on to show again in 1997.

Other children, including my grandson Brandon, showed Navajo and the horse always did well. Every child came away with high-placing ribbons. In the show arenas, Navajo competed with the best horses and never disappointed his riders. And all of this was because he had been given a second chance.

Navajo was even featured in a newspaper article. In a 1998 *St. Petersburg Times* article, reporter Michelle Miller wrote, "There's little doubt that Navajo, a white gelding with a gentle nature, has earned his reputation as one of the most popular horses at the Black Oak Ranch in New Port Richey."

The article went on to describe some of the abuse that Navajo suffered. The newspaper piece also detailed the Horse Sense Clinics that were being offered to local children. Kathy Chmielewski from Black Oak Ranch would hold the clinics at her ranch in the summer months with Navajo and fellow horse Frosty, educating the children on taking care of horses.

According to Miller's article, "As the children showed off their artistic talents using water color paints and the horse's hide as their palette, Navajo was calm and content, munching lazily on a bag of hay. It wasn't long before Navajo and a mare called Frosty were both covered in an array of stars, hearts, polka dots, and a few catchy phrases like the one written by a fifth grader who wanted to make it clear that 'Horses Rule'."

The article ended with a quote from Kathy Chmielewski. "Educating children is most important," says Chmielewski, as she encourages her young charges to wash away the paint with a bucket of bubbles. "They have fun with it and I think it stays with them. Then they grow up to become such responsible pet owners." And responsibility is the key word.

2

CHEYENNE

Sometimes we are lucky enough to experience love at first sight. Those feelings of instant compatibility and understanding convince us that it is, indeed, love we are feeling. I truly believe that this intuition is not just for humans. Animals can bring out those emotions in us also.

My affection for Cheyenne was an immediate response of not just tenderness, but attachment. I knew right away that she had to be mine. The first time we made eye contact and I looked into her wistful eyes, I not only saw discouragement, but deep inside I could sense a glimmer of her spirit. The years of abuse had not destroyed her completely. I felt that she had a chance, and I wanted to be the one to give it to her.

By the time I first saw her at Black Oaks Ranch, Kathy Chmielewski had only rescued Cheyenne a few months before. She had already sold the horse to a friend, Suzanne Penna. The Penna family had been looking for a horse for their young daughter Danielle. Kathy believed that Cheyenne, once rehabilitated, would make a wonderful horse for Danielle. It would take time, though.

When I found out that Cheyenne was not for sale, I was disappointed. I approached Suzanne and made it clear that if she ever decided to sell Cheyenne, I would buy her at any price.

"I'll see what happens," she answered. "Since Cheyenne will be Danielle's horse, the decision will have to be hers."

"I understand. Just keep my offer in mind," I said, hoping that something would happen to make Cheyenne mine.

As it turned out, I didn't have to wait long. A few weeks later I was working in the barn when Danielle and her mother came to me. They had been talking to Kathy and expressed con-

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cern that Cheyenne might never be anything but a pasture horse. Danielle, an exuberant seven-year-old, was anxious to have a horse right now that she could ride trails and canter with. They decided that Cheyenne might not be the horse for her. This horse was in such poor health that she would need time to recover.

“Miss Lynne?” Danielle began. “Do you still want to buy Cheyenne?”

“Yes, I would love to have her!” I exclaimed. “But are you sure that is what you want, Danielle?”

“Well, if you would still let me ride her sometimes, then I think you can buy her,” The young girl said.

“Of course you can ride her. Anytime. Cheyenne will be here at the ranch and you are welcome to see her and ride whenever you want. How’s that?” I responded with a smile.

Danielle gave me a hug and happily skipped out of the barn. The deal was done. Suzanne and I worked out the details and, later that day, Cheyenne was mine. I spent the afternoon grooming and talking to her. We were forming a bond. I had my first horse!

And now I needed to know this horse’s history. I had heard bits and pieces from different people at Black Oaks, but I knew that Kathy and her farrier, Phil Sanders, had known of Cheyenne for many years before she came to the ranch.

On the day we met at Kathy’s ranch, Phil began to tell me what he knew of Cheyenne’s life. He talked to me as he worked on the horses in the barn. He had been the farrier at Black Oaks for several years. Phil was known around Pasco County as one of the top-notch blacksmiths. He was not only a reliable farrier, but was also very knowledgeable about horses. His opinion was valued by his many clients. He had worked with sheriffs in both Pasco and Hernando Counties in rescue attempts.

Phil began by going back to when he first heard of Cheyenne. At the time, she was owned by a neighbor of his whom we will call Mary (not her real name). At that time, Phil recalled that Cheyenne was receiving decent care. By that he meant she was being fed, watered, and had regular vet and farrier services. Mary had a couple of sons who would occasionally ride Cheyenne too hard, but once Phil mentioned this to the mother, the situation was corrected and Cheyenne was thriving.

Eventually, Mary sold or gave the horse to a neighborhood

grandmother who wanted a horse for her granddaughter. This situation was not the best for Cheyenne as it turns out. The child, later found to be abused herself, began to race up and down the street with the horse. Neighbors cringed as this little girl ran the horse in the Florida heat. The pavement was hot and slippery and could have resulted in a broken leg for Cheyenne if she had lost her footing.

After a while, Phil began to notice Cheyenne dropping weight. He could tell, even observing her from a distance, that her feet were not being done on a regular basis and that the horse's ribs were showing. But before Phil could intervene, the people moved and he lost track of Cheyenne.

For several years no one knew where Cheyenne had gone. We now speculate that the horse was moved from home to home before finally ending up under the ownership of Allison Baker. Allison was a student at Black Oaks Ranch and had been riding there for a number of years. She had acquired Cheyenne and approached Kathy as to what to do with her. Cheyenne was not in bad shape at that point, but definitely had signs of having been raced too much and was underweight.

Kathy advised Allison to begin a maintenance program for Cheyenne. She needed worming, building up, and good nutrition. Appaloosas are a hearty breed, and after a short time, Cheyenne snapped right back. Soon, Allison was able to begin retraining the horse.

Because Cheyenne had been so used to just running, with no direction from the rider, she didn't know what to do under saddle other than to run as fast as she could. Up to that point, she mainly had been used by kids who wanted a thrill ride. Cheyenne needed fine-tuning and to learn the basics in walking, trotting and correct horse behavior.

Allison had been taking English riding lessons at Black Oaks, so she and Kathy decided to take Cheyenne in the ring and work with her to see what she could do. They lunged her, worked on her ground skills, and began to shape not only the horse's body but her mind and attitude.

Kathy's daughter, Kim Aursland, an English trainer, began instructing Allison and her new horse in dressage techniques. The more they worked with Cheyenne, the more she blossomed. Her

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chest muscled up, and she became sleek and in shape. In a short time, Allison was sailing over the jumps with this fine horse. Cheyenne had become worthy enough to begin making the show circuit.

Soon, Allison and Cheyenne were entering shows and doing three-day events, stadium jumping, dressage, and cross-country. Cheyenne was making a name for herself and excelled in every event. Paired up with Allison, both rider and horse were flawless in their moves. Cheyenne finally had an owner she could trust, and Allison dearly loved this horse.

There came a day, though, when Allison grew too tall to ride her beloved Cheyenne. Nearing six feet tall, Allison could no longer compete using Cheyenne without losing points from the judges because of the poor size ratio between horse and rider. Allison needed a taller horse.

Allison made the heartbreaking decision to sell Cheyenne. No one else in the family could ride Cheyenne, and the girl didn't want to see Cheyenne become a pasture horse. This mare had too much potential and needed an owner who could give her an active life. So, Cheyenne was sold to a person whom I will call Linda (not her real name). Linda paid around two thousand dollars for the horse. Allison had requested that Kathy visit the ranch where Linda lived to make sure the new owner had a proper facility. Kathy did go and inspect the place, and thought it was very nice. The barn was in great shape and things looked okay to her. Linda assured her that she knew a lot about horses and used Dr. Gordon, a well-known vet who Kathy also used, to care for her horses. Kathy was satisfied and reported to Allison that things had checked out. To this day, Kathy regrets that she didn't go a step further and call Dr. Gordon to verify that he was the vet of record. She found out much later that the property she checked on for Allison was not the ranch owned by Linda. It was a place owned by another person, possibly a friend or relative of Linda's. The horse would not be kept here. She further learned that Dr. Gordon had never heard of Linda or Cheyenne.

Along with Cheyenne, Linda also took another horse that Allison had because the two horses were bonded, and Allison didn't want them separated. So Cheyenne and the other horse, named Teddy, were transported to their new home. In a few

months, Teddy was dead. At the time, Kathy speculated that Teddy was an old horse and had died of natural causes. No one ever realized that he had been starved to death.

Linda asked Kathy to begin giving riding lessons to her daughter. She told Kathy that she had moved and was no longer living at the ranch that Kathy had first seen Cheyenne at. Of course, she never lived there at all. The first time Kathy came over to instruct the child, she noticed Cheyenne in poor condition. Thinking it was just ignorance on the part of the owner, Kathy began to inform the lady on proper care of the horses. At the time, Linda seemed very receptive to the suggestions that Kathy was making and seemed willing to work on getting Cheyenne back in good health.

Not sure of how things were going, Kathy made frequent visits to see the horse. After several months, Cheyenne's condition did not improve. Over the next year, Linda moved from place to place until Kathy lost track of her. The thought of that mare haunted Kathy. For the next two years she searched for Cheyenne. She frequently asked other horse-owner friends if anyone knew where Cheyenne was. It was as if she had disappeared off the face of the earth.

Then, by sheer luck, a friend called Kathy one day to report that while driving looking for property to buy, she had come across a farm where the animals looked terrible. The friend, aghast at what she had seen, begged Kathy to go and take a look at these horses.

The following day, Kathy made to trip to the property. She observed two horses and then, from around a corner of the barn, out came Cheyenne! Kathy could not believe she had found her. The horse was in terrible shape, as were the other two horses. Wanting to talk with the owners, she parked her car and approached the front door.

On the way up to the door, she was horrified to see a goat hanging by his horns off the fence! Evidently the horns had been caught and the goat had turned himself around trying to escape. He was now dangling from the fence. A little girl came out of the house, disheveled and dirty, school age, but not in school, and Kathy later discovered a small baby in a filthy crib inside the house. Garbage and debris were everywhere, inside and outside of