

A Rescued Angel

Foal destined for the slaughterhouse finds freedom

by Michelle Hancock



Angel, a PMU foal, learns to trust her new handlers after being rescued from a slaughterhouse destiny.

When they dropped her off at a ranch in Langley, BC, her handlers called the adorable 10-month-old filly “Fatty Patty” because she’d been overfed to fatten her up for a slaughterhouse in Manitoba.

Angel—as the inquisitive and frisky filly is now called—was considered a “by-product” and would have been killed, her edible body parts shipped to countries where horsemeat is eaten, such as Japan, France, Belgium and Italy.

Angel’s mother, meanwhile, is kept literally barefoot and pregnant on what’s known as a PMU farm, where estrogen from pregnant mare’s urine is harvested for hormone replacement therapy drugs (Premarin).

Once Angel’s mother is past her usefulness, she too is destined for a slaughterhouse, either in Canada or abroad. Unlike Angel, she probably won’t be rescued.

In 2006 and 2007, the last three equine slaughterhouses in the United States closed—good news for Canadian slaughterhouse owners, judging by the increasing number of horses now shipped here and to Mexico. According to the US Department

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of Agriculture, the number of horses exported from the US to Canada rose 46 percent: 18,901 in 2006 to 27,688 in 2007.

Last year, almost 80,000 horses in total were killed in Canada. In 2006, the head count was just over 50,000.

Bo Derek, celebrity spokesperson for the Canadian Horse Defense Coalition (DHDC), came to Vancouver last January to publicize the fact that Canada has fallen behind the US in terms of protective legislation.

The US has enacted the Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, but we, in contrast, are

opening new slaughter plants. As of April 2008, there were seven approved by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Quebec.

Ironically, the majority of Canadians (64 percent) don't support horse slaughter for human consumption, according to a 2004 Ipsos Reid/TRACS poll.

Mares no longer used to produce estrogen for Premarin (an industry that is itself criticized by animal rights groups) and/or other horses intended for human consumption can be retired in other ways besides slaughter.

Alternatives include donating them to a rescue, a shelter, or a therapeutic or handicapped riding organization or retiring them to a farm.

While groups such as the CHDC aim to raise public awareness and facilitate legislative change, people like Vernon Groetchen and Yvonne Allen are also making a difference by providing homes for "rescued" horses like Angel.

When the filly first arrived in Langley via a horse-lovers network that bought her for "meat market price," she wouldn't let people walk on her right side.

But watching her now, after only one month of freedom from a guaranteed death sentence, one is reminded of a child learning how to walk. The nice, floating gait that she's growing into delights the audience that has been lured outside to watch her first playful forays in a new paddock.

Her receptive nature has helped Groetchen and Allen overcome the horse's initial mistrust and today, it's evident that if she thought she could sit on Groetchen's lap, she'd try. She does succeed in walking as close to her new "Dad" as horsely possible.

For updates on Angel, visit www.voiceforthehorse.com. For updates on horse slaughter and animal rights issues, see www.defendhorsescanada.org. 🌿

Vancouver writer Michelle Hancock has a very spoiled Rottweiler-German Shepherd cross who enjoys an organic diet and lots of massages.



Jimmy quivers with exertion and excitement as he performs his version of yoga's "downward horse."

The Equine Yogi

Watching a horse do yoga stretches—and clearly love it, to boot—is just about the coolest thing you've ever seen. But hey, if it's beneficial for humans, then why not for animals like Jimmy, a 20-year-old thoroughbred?

This has been Yvonne Allen's rationale for using not just stretching techniques but also other holistic therapies to restore Jimmy to whinnying health since she bought him at a Vancouver racetrack 17 years ago.

For the first few years, she tried conventional health care with her 1,300-pound companion, but the horse eventually developed hives and allergies due to an unnatural diet with too many synthetic feeds and sugars, and started acting angry and miserable. Allen decided enough was enough, and vowed to "naturally keep" her horse—as naturally as is possible in a domesticated setting, anyway.

The first thing she did was remove his shoes, then began maintaining his feet with trimming and filing techniques that would mimic the healthy hoof of a wild horse.

In the years that followed, Allen has added aromatherapy, massage, acupressure, Bach flower remedies, electric microstimulation, light therapy, reiki and shiatsu to her arsenal of therapeutic modalities, and Jim-

my has thrived. When other horses in the stable where Jimmy is kept have been run down with viruses or parasites, natural remedies have helped keep his immunity high and innards clear.

A growing problem in conventionally kept horses is insulin resistance, just like in humans, which is the result of overfeeding of starches and sugars. Inflammatory and painful hoof problems are often the result, but Jimmy's unsweetened diet of hay along with nutritional supplements keeps his hooves in good shape.

Allen teaches one-day equine horse shiatsu massage courses, and is also developing her own product line for horse and rider called At Ease Natural Scents (see www.ateasehorsecare.com).

Use of natural therapies for our animal companions is a growing trend. After numerous pet food recalls (and reported on in previous issues of *Health Action* magazine), organic and/or raw pet foods have also jumped in popularity.

What's good enough for us is good enough for our pets, is the rationale. Allen, for one, would agree. And judging by Jimmy's contented whuffling as he receives one of his regular aromatherapy and Equine Touch treatments, he'd agree, too.