

CHOMPIN' at the BIT . . . to go on a TRAIL RIDE

At Save-a-Horse Stables, formerly unwanted horses provide life lessons for all who want to learn

Story & Photos by Cindy Bailey, GreeneSpeak Editor/Publisher



ROGERSVILLE—
It all started with one whinny.

Darlene Moore, longtime owner of Save-A-Horse Stables in Rogersville, says horses are a family tradition, but she wasn't sure she wanted to carry it on—

until she heard that one particular whinny.

Growing up in the equine world—"I started riding bareback when I was about six years old"—she was acquainted early with the challenges of being around all that horse flesh. Her grandad Melvin Stockdale and dad Harold Stockdale were well-known horse dealers, but the number of buyers was dwindling. By 1982, her dad decided to give it up, hauling his horses to the Waynesburg auction.

Darlene went along and learned something about herself that day. When she entered the auction barn, one voice cried out to her above the others. It was "Cheko," a palomino she knew well.

"When he whinnied to me, I just lost it," she says. "I couldn't let him go."

She had to borrow money and a horse trailer from an indulgent friend to bring Cheko home.

"That horse became a 4-H horse; he lived a long time," she said.

But now she realized her father's torch had been passed on to her. "It was like gambling," she said.

"I would save up my money, and every time I

collected four or five hundred dollars, I'd go to the auction and save another horse from the meat man."

It became a personal crusade, with various rewards. She met her husband Kevin when he hauled a horse to her place. They shared the same "addiction."

"We'd go to auctions all over the place and bid against the meat man," she said. They eventually married, blending their four kids together at her family's farm where Save-A-Horse is now located.

Her stepson Doug Moore, home last month on a break from his job, says it was a great place to grow up and learn a good work ethic.

As the years went by, everyone came to know that Darlene and Kevin would take unwanted horses and let them live out their days well cared for. These days, 56 horses, most of which are rescued, reside on their 225-acre farm where her dad also still lives.

"It's a 24-hour a day job," Doug says.

Darlene says she couldn't do it without her husband and family, including Doug, daughter Angie Moore and nephew Sam Nefzi, along with neighbor Jackie Lahew.

Sam, 13, moved to the farm this summer. He has quickly taken to horses like the rest of the family, Darlene says.

Nobody sits around on this farm. There's hay to put up, feed to haul in, hooves to be picked and clipped, stalls to be mucked, worms to be eradicated, and so on.

It's not cheap. The blacksmith bill alone is about \$3,000 a year; vet and equine dentist bills are "in

the thousands." It takes about 800 round bales and 1,000 square bales of hay every year. "We lease another farm so we can put up enough hay," she says.

To pay her bills, she occasionally sells a colt, gives lessons, hauls ponies to birthday parties, and holds "Summer Horse Days" for kids (next one is Aug. 22), like the one pictured here. And she hosts an annual Labor Day Trail Ride for which people bring their own horses. Weekdays, she cleans other people's houses, "so I can feed my horses."

In tough times, people have acknowledged Darlene's compassionate efforts and came to her rescue, donating money or hay or feed.

The hard part is having to put down the old, sick ones, a life lesson that never gets easier. "I put them down when they aren't happy anymore. It's better to put them down peacefully than to find them on the ground suffering."

However, her biggest challenge is volunteer work with the Humane Society of Greene County, dealing with horse abuse cases. People can be cruel, but she says they often just don't know enough about horses to take care of them properly, especially older ones.

But there are so many good memories, including the story of "Namnastay," a horse which just wouldn't stay put, escaping its owner and wandering the nearby hillsides until Save-A-Horse rescued and tamed her. "I started using her for lessons," Darlene says. "Lots of kids around here took riding lessons on Namnastay."

One of the first things she impresses upon her young students is proper horse care and handling. Compassion and gentleness is something she hopes they pick

up on their own.

Fifty-six horses is more than enough for anyone, but she admits she has a hard time turning them away. Recently, an elderly man died and left several of his beloved horses behind. Two of them now graze on her meadow.

Her recent hip replacement and foot problems, largely from her equines, cause her to sometimes wonder why she does it, but she just shrugs and says, "It's bred in me. I love horses."

For more information about Save-A-Horse Stables, or to register for Summer Horse Day to be held from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aug. 22 or the Labor Day Trail Ride, call 724-499-5709.

PHOTOS: Above, the highlight of Summer Horse Day held last month for 6- to 8-year-olds was the two-hour trail ride. FACING PAGE,

TOP ROW: from left: Darlene Moore watches Emily Gipe, 6, saddle up "Blaze"; Darlene and her nephew Sam Nefzi tighten the girth; Ashley Cumberledge, 8 (left) and Angie Moore put a bridle on "Storm"; and Doug Moore adjusts the stirrups for Bethany Morgan, 8, who's riding "Sugar." MIDDLE ROW: Bringing up the rear, Sam glances back as the group sets off, and mother and daughter, Jen and Ashley Cumberledge, lead the pack. BOTTOM ROW: several spectators watch the riders with great interest; Jackie Lahew leads Jade Policz, 8, on "Spot"; after two girls said they were getting tired, Angie led their horses back down the hill. Games and hot dogs completed the day.

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