

## THE FIRST TIME I SAW A HORSE RUN

*A Forever Moment*  
by Jeff Kirkendall



I have become a sixty-year-old grandfather, and I am happy to report that I still sometimes see my life through the eyes of a boy. How much I have learned. How much I might still discover. As a student and therapist in the field of childhood sexual abuse for thirty years, I know some things, and "firsts" are monumentally important in life. For many of the children I have known, I was the first man they ever met in their lives who treated them with the respect every child is entitled to as a birthright.

Now I have seen a lot of horses run. I grew up with the inventions of television and color movies. Children all over the world love to watch American cowboy and Indian films. In my lifetime I have seen thousands of horses run. But horses in the flesh are what stick with you. My beloved wife of twenty-six years Carol forever remembers a horse she saw from the window of a moving train when she was a young girl. Was the horse racing the train? What us Indians and cowboys know that is that horses can race with spirit winds and they talk with little girls and boys.

January 1st of 2011, Paulden, Arizona. Carol had watched closely from our dining room window the five horses starving to death next door. She took me aside and gave me that look she used to give me when we were saving children for a living. As she pointed, she told me, "That one is not going to make it, it's time to take him." She was pointing to the faltering stud who had broken his penis two weeks before while trying to mount a mare through the pipe-fence. The end of his penis hung un-retractable like a heavy lump of raw hamburger.

We knew we were making the sheriff and livestock officer's lives more difficult, but as the antiquated livestock laws of Arizona are written, officers cannot intervene until the horses are inevitably at death's door. As our daughter Mary has regularly reminded me in the over-quarter-century of my fatherhood to her, to do less than what is necessary in these circumstance would be to fail altogether. That girl has a lot of her mother in her.

We all laughed about it then, and we laugh about it now. I told Carol and Mary, "If they take me away in handcuffs, Sweetheart, my dear wife, I will roll over on you in a heartbeat, get immunity, and testify that you were the ringleader!"

Carol said her and Bob, the neighbor who stole the other three starving horses that night, she said that she and Bob were going to sit in jail playing cards, and when the other convicts asked what they were in for, the two of them would look up and say in unison, "Horse thievin'!"

Our son I call Lame Wolf. Most people know him simply as Wolf. He is of the Choctaw tribe. His wife Tressa, my wife and I call Two Antelope. The four of us are of mixed bloods and varied personal life stories but we share the traditions of Native People and traditional Christianity. We are a family learning how to blend.

We all participated in the saving of Sonny-the- rescue-horse.

It was Two Antelope who used this thing they call the internet to put out a call that a couple of hundred strangers responded to and sent money and feed to the horses' rescue. Until that time, I had little use for the technology. She showed us all that an ordinary person with a passion and a cause could save innocent lives. Now I want to know more about how to do this.

It was Wolf who was inspired to invent the device that soaked Sonny's fully-extended penis over sixty-five times over a five-month period. A flexible bladder inside the cut-off leg of a pair of jeans, neatly sewed together on the end, the top hemmed with a wide strap, suspended around Sonny's waist by a soft three-inch strap, which could be fastened over his rump with a sturdy plastic version of a seat belt clip. We took pictures which are being just developed in which we documented our four-legged's healing progress by holding a sign in front of Sonny's genitals posting the date and number of the treatment. I think we stopped taking photos somewhere in the forties.

It was Dr. Lane Kihlstrom that brought Sonny through this critical time. Great vets are amazing people to behold and make every encounter a teaching experience. It was he who sat on the ground under Sonny and used surgical scissors to cut away the dead tissue of the penis. Dr. Kihlstrom had people who we never knew who contributed funds to Sonny's medical recovery. It was he and his assistant Kim who taught me how to pull a horse by the tail while applying diaper-rash ointment over Sonny's abdomen.

There were the countless people we met who brought out feed, offered encouragement, contributed dollars here and there at just the right time, and Sonny slowly came back from emaciation and infection, and it was time for him to be gelded and have his penile-amputation.

It was Karen Pomroy of Equine Voices Rescue & Sanctuary who rode to the rescue. It was she who connected with Carol Grubb of Arizona Coalition for Equines and Dr. Taylor of Arizona Equine Medical & Surgical Center in Gilbert. It was Karen who connected with Ruthanne Penn in Flagstaff who transported Sonny from Paulden. It was Ruthanne who connected to Melissa and Paul Ambrose of Atlasta Ranch in Chino Valley who transported Sonny to his rehabilitation home with them.

There was Susan Gonzales and all the folks at Warren's Hay-N-More in Chino Valley who offered good guidance on nutrition and was the collection center for donations of hay and blankets. There were all the people who donated old bed-sheets, out of which I could construct a soft, porous horse-jock-strap which held Sonny's penis up against his abdomen in a horizontal position, thereby maximizing blood-flow to his healing over the critical early months.

Sonny has become a living, breathing symbol, or totem for our family, of what miracles can happen when a few people of like-spirit come together with many people of also-like-spirit and one-plus-one-equals three. We become greater than the sum of our parts. We are all transformed by something greater than ourselves.

And so it was yesterday, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012. I walked out into the arena at Atlasta ranch to greet my old four-legged friend, who Melissa had been preparing for this day. In the months I searched for a way for Sonny to have his operation and recovery, I persistently told people, "I just want to someday see him run like a real horse." That was what the four of us of our family had joined together with Melissa and her mother and colleague Doctor Karen to do -- to see Sonny run like a real horse.

It took a year and three months. Sonny carried a heavy pendulum of scar tissue underneath him while we lived with concern that if the poor boy had an erection, unable to retract his penis, the blood would pool, coagulate, and Sonny would die.

All the fears of the year were gone yesterday. Our vision manifested in ways beyond our imaginations.

Sonny began to run for the first time since before his trauma.

I was mesmerized, lost in a dream, watching his flagging tail, his braided blonde mane, his entire body moving and flowing. Captivated in my own experience, I eventually looked back to Carol, arm-in-arm with our son, our daughter-in-law in wide-eyed awe beside them, tears of joy running down the face of my wife. It is now a forever memory.

I shed the tears of a boy seeing a horse run for the first time.

"Wash-tay!" I say to you horse-savers. "Nicely done!" I shout to you. "It is an honor to meet you all!"

From our family to yours,

Many blessings,

Jeffery Dreamer Kirkendall

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