

Black Velvet; no regrets

In December 2006 someone decided that an aged, malnourished Arabian mare needed to be discarded. She was sold to a killer who loaded her, along with approximately 15 other horses, and began the long journey from Missouri to the Beltex slaughter plant in Texas.

It was freezing cold and snowing when this vividly black horse slipped and fell beneath the other prisoners on the trailer. There was no room to allow her to rise to her feet and the constant jostling tossed the other horses back and forth, causing her to be stepped on over and over. She suffered numerous abrasions, a huge gaping wound to the boney hip which was pressed against the floor and her eye was blinded in the foray. The agony must have been intense.

Drivers arriving to a slaughter plant with an injured or dead horse can face a stiff penalty. As a result, the driver located a sale barn in the Topeka, KS area and stopped long enough to unload the horses, including the injured mare. With the other horses loaded, he stated that "If" the mare lived he would come back for her and take her on his next haul. Her future was bleak.



Fortunately, a kind and compassionate woman, Careen Cain, was working tirelessly to find homes for horses which found themselves at this sale barn. When she saw this scared, fearful, abused old mare her heart ached and she decided she had to "do something."

She knew of a new equine rescue that had recently been established, Rainbow Meadows Equine Rescue and Retirement, Inc., near Sedan, Kansas and she also knew that the co-founder, Karen Everhart, had a soft spot in her heart for Arabian

horses. A call was placed to see if this sweet soul could find a place of refuge at Rainbow Meadows.

While Karen and the rescue wanted to help the mare, resources were limited for this new organization. The “killer” demanded payment at the “kill rate” and funds were not available to pay the ransom. Careen approached an internet group then known as the Fans of Barbaro (now known as the Alex Brown Racing forum). She solicited donations to pay the ransom while Karen worked on transport from Topeka to southern Kansas. The Fans of Barbaro stepped up immediately and the necessary funds were raised within just a few hours. This mare, named by Careen as Black Velvet, was going to be safe.

Black Velvet arrived at Rainbow Meadows on December 22, 2006. She was hundreds of pounds underweight. The wound on her hip was the size of volleyball. She had severe rain rot all along her back and scratches on all of her beautiful white stocking feet. She could not see out of her right eye. She was complaint but frightened. How could she possibly know that she was finally safe?

Rainbow Meadows began her rehabilitation. It was a long and arduous process as the winter was hard. A Fan of Barbaro sent her a blanket to keep her warm but she was so thin that the blanket wouldn't stay in place. Weeks and months went by before the striking beauty began to emerge from the haggard shell of a horse that arrived that winter's day.

By May 2006, a stunning animal was gracing the pastures at Rainbow Meadows. This horse had royalty coursing through her veins. There was little doubt that Velvet had been a show horse in the past. Her carriage was impeccable. Her aura was that of a queen. She was confident. She was poised. She was finally whole again.



Since the mission of Rainbow Meadows is to find forever homes for their rescued horses, it became evident that it was time to identify a new family for Velvet. Soon the announcement was made on the Fans of Barbaro forum that Velvet was available for adoption.

A question was submitted on the forum; “what would it take for Velvet to remain at Rainbow Meadows, forever.” The answer was simple: she could enter the retirement program at the rescue if her care was financially sponsored.

Within a few days, a number of kind and dedicated women from southern California to northern Maine joined together to form Team Velvet. Though they came from a variety of backgrounds and though their resources were varied, they made a “lifetime commitment” to Velvet. They each made a pledge towards Velvet’s care. Some sent their money in monthly. Others sent 3 – 6 months at a time. There were occasions when a Team Velvet member stopped sending their donations. There were also occasions when a Team Velvet member had to discontinue their support due to personal issues. Regardless of the hurdles, Team Velvet rallied and Velvet’s security was never threatened.

Velvet loved her life at Rainbow Meadows. She roamed the 240 acres of rolling hillsides as a part of a larger herd of rescued horses. She never felt the sting of pain or the harshness of anger. She was loved and respected from the moment she

arrived. As each day passed, she became entwined in our hearts, more deeply than we ever could have imagined.



Some of her pasture mates have gone on before her: the namesake for the rescue, Rainbow; Sweet Pea; Sterling. All have been preparing the heavenly pastures for her arrival. And tonight, they are all running together in glorious meadows, free of pain.

Today, after a week-long illness, Velvet succumbed to what appears to have been a stroke. This morning she was significantly improved after receiving medical treatment yesterday. She was bright and alert. She was interested in eating and was drinking. Her breathing was normal. She wanted to leave the barn and rejoin her buddy Moose but we knew she needed a few more days of recovery.

She was doing well all day; nibbling on her Thrive and soaked alfalfa cubes. She was drinking and peeing and pooping. Velvet was back and we were thrilled.

When we arrived at the barn this evening for chores something drastic had changed. Velvet was in distress. She was ataxic (she did not seem to know where her feet were); she was unresponsive to us as though she could not hear us. She was nearly frantic. We moved her from the barn to a paddock and brought Moose in with her, hoping that it would settle her but she did not even recognize his presence. Something was terribly wrong.

As we waited for the Vet's arrival, Velvet continued to move erratically. She was confused and she was scared. Eventually, she lay down. Though she tried, she was

unable to get up. We calmed her and told her how much we loved her and that it was okay and that she was free to go. She did not want to leave. She was not ready. She tried to outrun death. But she weakened with each attempt to get up and soon laid still. She was finally ready to go. When the Vet arrived, we gave her the gift of peace.

My heart is broken. The tears are streaming down my face. But, I have no regrets. Thanks to Careen and the members of Team Velvet and the volunteers and donors here at Rainbow Meadows, David and I have had the privilege to love this phenomenal animal. Black Velvet blessed our lives in so many ways. That we were able to care for her and keep her safe pales in comparison to the gift of love and trust she gave us.



Run with the wind Velvet. Please watch for me when my time comes and be there to welcome me along with all the other gentle souls who have passed before you. I want to be with you and the others, forever.



Karen