

Remembering Dee
October 29, 2010

I remember the first day I set eyes on the 8 week old, dunn filly. She was at her dam's side. I was called to see the mare for a hoof injury that no one knew how to trim. The little one was so cute, as are all young foals at the start of life. I never suspected, dreamed or even desired for her to be mine. The option or need was not yet presented. Over the months I saw her periodically when I came to trim Mom. She was nose-y and disrespectful, and often annoying when I tried to work. I told the owners many times that they need to start working on her feet now, while she was small. Handling her feet was a one way street at best.

Then one day in late summer, I received a call from the filly's owners, asking if I would be interested in her, as she wanted to give her to me. She saw that I had great patience with her, and admitted that she did not. After some thought and discussion with my husband, we agreed to take her. At 16 months of age she had little experience in handling, and trailering was a bad experience in the past. Working with her Mom and another pasture mate, I was able to (sanely) load her onto my trailer within an hour. I didn't live far, so Mom road over with her.

When she entered the paddock we closed it off to separate her from my herd for a while, she immediately tested the (electric) fence, and already made an attempt to kick me. We had a long road ahead to build a relationship of trust, respect and consistency.

The first three days of her time with my herd were incredible learning experiences for not only her, but me too. My boss mare, Maizie kicked her, bit her and knocked her down almost immediately when they were free to all be together. Sage was the friendly peacemaker and welcomed her right away. Khubie just stood by and watched. Now, most people would think it cruel that I let Maizie treat her that way, but this little filly needed to understand "horse" things on "horse" terms first, and their ways are not ours. By the next morning the two were standing together at the shelter's entrance. A lesson well learned- and for me too. Maizie taught me to be very clear when I communicate with her. By week's end after some round pen school time, we had a meeting of hearts that grew on a daily basis. I took it slow and easy with her no agenda, no time clock. What a sweet horse she was, and all who ever met her commented how social and friendly, yet respectful she became. My herd of 4 were very content with life in their paddock paradise environment. Dee was the youngest with so much promise.

I have neat 3 board fencing and 3 strand coated wire in the back fields where it sometimes floods, and a strand of electric to keep them away from it. As safe as I could think to make it. Most of the time the electric is not necessary. On two occasions, though, she managed to lay down close to the fence and get her legs stuck under the bottom rail, both times scraping herself up pretty good. All was clear sailing with the fence after that for a long time until yesterday- or so it appeared. We will never really know what happened. The entire scene is so mysterious. I went back to feed the horses their evening hay before we had dinner, and Dee was not with the others. I went out the back of the shelter, and saw her laying on the ground with her feet out stiff. She was under the coated wire fence on the track. I thought

she was dead, and raced down there. The bottom 2 strands were attached to the post, but the top was under her. She was stranded there for who knows how long, as all was fine when they were checked by my husband at noon. I could see this was bad. I called for help and took all the fencing down and out of the way. She tried to get up, but was shivering and groaning. I grabbed some blankets and threw them over her, ran into the house and called the emergency number for the vet. He was there within 30 minutes, which seemed an eternity.

Her temp, heart rate and capillary refill were all normal, but there were no gut sounds- not good. The horse's hind gut is attached to their frame in only 2 places, and can twist easily. We gave her some banamine to knock down the pain so we could get her up on her feet to make a better assessment. She tried several times only putting herself into more difficult spots for us to help her up. Her mouth was dry, so I put some water in a cupped hand and she began to take it from me, then was interested in some oats I used for motivation. We got her head up and folded her front legs under her for a more natural position. She took more water, oats and a little hay. Things seemed hopeful, and we let her tell us when she was ready to try to get up, and she did try. She just could not do it. Each attempt made her shiver in pain. I knew where this was going- try as I may in my heart to think otherwise. I have been down this road too many times, and my gut was giving me that all too familiar twinge. After that last attempt she told me she could not do this. There was something terribly wrong inside, and she began to give up. It was night. We had the generator running with lights on and it was raining. It seemed to be the perfect storm.

I asked the vet if I could excuse myself for 5-10 minutes, walk to the house and clear my head, and choose the best path to take. We had few options. As a tenacious 2 year old, she would have been on her feet if she could have done it already. Each attempt and failure was heart wrenching. I made the decision with the vet, and he told me that he would have done the same if it were his horse.

With all her human care givers around her, we soothed her, and spoke gently to her. I lay my forehead on her cheek and spoke to her in Cherokee, and gave the nod, then she slipped away from us into the spirit world through the dark misty rain.

Early the next morning, Sage, Maizie and Khubie wanted see her. They would not eat, just stared down the path where she was covered. I fixed up the area where the fence was down with some tape fence, uncovered her, and we all walked down together for our time of mourning. Sage took this very hard. This was his playmate. The main reason I adopted her, was for him since his playfulness was thwarted by the two older ones. He took his time examining her, nudged her, as if to help her get up. They all stayed with her for a while each one paying their respects, then they moved away slowly, and went to eat some hay. Sage came back a few times, but they all have settled in their hearts what happened to her. They are clearly still mourning as we are.

What happened? I don't suppose we will ever really know. Nothing at the scene makes any real sense in relation to her inability to coordinate herself. We can make guesses, but it appears that in her effort to free herself, she either twisted her gut or damaged something neurologically. The very few abrasions she had were

quite superficial. No broken limbs. Despite all the guesses we cannot escape the final result. Our time together was brief, just over a year. But, just like all the others I have watched tearfully slip into the spirit world, she will hold a place in the archives of my heart with all the others who have gone before her. I will miss you, Dee.

