

SSHS MARCH 2023 NEWSLETTER



SEA STAR HORSE SANCTUARY

53A RILEY RANCH RD. CARMEL, CA



PEPPY'S TRANSFORMATION

A good sanctuary by definition is a place of transformation. It is a place where rescue animals are given everything they need to leave their hard pasts behind. Here in our stalls and pastures, good nutrition replaces memories of a hunger once so strong that some of them ate sand. Out in the round pen, mutual understanding supplants incomprehensible actions and demands. Farrier and veterinary care prevents and manages pain or illness. Holistic healing nurtures their spirits and smooths the flow of energy. In herds, they find the essential element of family and companionship as they graze, play, and rest together. With time, Seastar found his voice at the sanctuary, Starberry rose like a phoenix from loss and tragedy. Bentley does Bentley with an outlet for his playful mischief. We have witnessed transformation in all the horses, but perhaps the most intense was Peppy's.

We may never know the full backstory of our beautiful Peppy, but we do know she was born with at least one deformity in her hind legs. The story that came down to us was orthopedic braces may not have been used with proper care when she was a baby. In addition to two clubbed hind feet, Peppy has "tarsus varus" of her left hind leg, making it bowlegged. This uncommon abnormality usually occurs in soft-boned foals when pain in one limb causes weight to be redistributed to another. Little Peppy must have compensated by standing with her left hind leg under the center of her body. This caused the left hock to develop abnormally, leading to arthritis at an early age. Years of pain followed by neglect and abandonment gave Peppy no reason to trust humans.

When Peppy first arrived at the sanctuary, she was described as "wild", "almost feral", "angry". What Sharon saw was fear. She turned to her friend, Ray Berta, for support in handling her. This renowned horseman and communicator practices natural training: a patient, gentle, consistent approach that requires total presence to help a horse feel safe and gain confidence. Ray remembers "Peppy was disconnected, difficult to catch, and prone to kicking. I worked with her on basic ground work to help her be haltered and handled safely. As with both Peanut and Stuey [siblings rescued at the same time], it was very difficult to trim her hooves. I trimmed her until she became reliable enough for a farrier to work with. From there, Sharon's consistent, daily interactions with Peppy are mostly responsible for helping her be the sweet mare that she is."

Sharon built upon the foundation laid by Ray and spent as much time with Peppy as she could. Short, daily sessions of groundwork opened the door to communication. Grooming was the way to connection and reinforcing trust. "I would continually rub her hind end and start to move down her legs. As soon as I could feel that she was going to kick, I would stop and rub her somewhere else. Then I'd return to her hind end and legs until I could go all the way down without her feeling the need to kick." Once it was safe, she invited her friend, Karen Aasen, to join her for grooming.

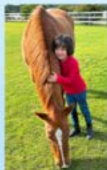


Karen is now the sanctuary's longest-serving volunteer. She understood that Peppy's defensive manner came from a deep need for security and kindness. It was several months before Peppy allowed her close enough to offer scratches on the neck or a kiss on the nose. Knowing in her heart that Peppy was the "biggest love", Karen created a safe space for her to reveal her gentle nature when she was ready. The two formed a lasting bond that is evident in their relationship today.

The sense of touch was key in Peppy's softening. Sharon applied lots of rubbing and hugging, gently holding the mare's face to hers. Today, when Sharon opens the gate after she's finished eating, Peppy won't walk away until her face has been thoroughly caressed and kissed. When groomed today by volunteers, she obligingly lifts her hooves and holds them in place until released. She's even been known to doze during farrier appointments. This represents tremendous strides in her healing that might have seemed impossible to those who saw her on the first day.

For her 100th birthday, Margaret Schlyter asked her friend, Tiffany Durham, to take her to meet the horses. As part of the sanctuary's veterinary team, Tiffany felt that Peppy's fear of strangers was potentially dangerous. Margaret was very fragile and needed a wheelchair. Peppy was the first to approach them. She buried her nose in Margaret's hair and smelled her. She continued to gently smell and nuzzle her the entire visit. Horses often mirror our emotions and intentions. Peppy was reflecting the vulnerability, trust, and kindness she sensed in Margaret.

The first time veterinarian Matt Durham examined Peppy, restraining her in any way was next to impossible. Matt worked with Peppy to give her spring and fall injections and paste deworming, eventually getting her to be unemotional about routine processes. During medical procedures, Peppy is sometimes startled by equipment, but instead of trying to kick the humans around her, she visibly tries to avoid hurting anybody. She no longer requires sedation for simple things - especially if cookies are on hand. Peppy came to understand that people who come to the sanctuary are there to help her.



A survivor, who always expects the unexpected, Peppy can shift into panic mode in situations that she doesn't understand. This can be said of all prey animals, but Peppy is the most jittery of the herd. At the same time, her capacity to trust is constantly expanding. We saw this when applied zoopharmacognosy was introduced to the horses. To everyone's surprise, Peppy walked right up to an unknown person to fully participate in a new experience. The guiding principal of this modality is self-selection. Peppy was free to choose medicinal plants that she instinctively knew she needed. Some she inhaled, some she ingested, a few she wanted massaged on her body. The plant that continues to be her favorite, *Viola odorata*, is frequently attractive to animals that spook easily in anticipation of a frightening event. When she was finished, Peppy lingered to nuzzle and share the air with this stranger, who empowered her to guide her own healing.

Healing Touch for Animals (HTA) students came to the sanctuary to practice equine energetic techniques. When Peppy was led out to the group, she looked pleasantly surprised that she had been chosen from the herd. She was an eager participant and gave herself right over to deep relaxation. Over the last year, we've noticed that her standing among the horses has been rising from the bottom of the pecking order to the middle.

One of our newest volunteers, Gabriel Gandzjuk, shared his experience of offering bio-energetic bodywork to Peppy: "After spending more time simply in her presence, creating trust, she became incredibly engaged when I started working on her. Turning her head back after every technique to acknowledge what I was doing was appreciated - at one point, lifting her back legs for me to work on. This is huge because this is where she lacks the most confidence. This was one of my most rewarding sessions."

All beings are on a continual journey of change and Peppy is no different. The sanctuary creates a safe environment for the ongoing process of growth and healing. When new people approach Peppy in the pasture, she never knows what to expect. Reiki? Perhaps Masterson Method or Spirit Points? Wilson Meagher Equine Sports Massage or Chinese Energy Medicine? What she does know is it will be offered with respect, compassion, and only with her permission. And so, enfolded in love and security, a trusting mare emerges from the rubble of a shattered filly.

Peppy's Day

by Charlie DeWeese

Mmm... some light coming in. Who's here? Ah, my sisters, my brother, all my friends. I like it here.

Someone's coming. It's the nice lady who helped me! When I came here I was scared, even though my family greeted me. She stayed until I was comfortable with my new friends. She's named Sharon, just like I'm named Peppy. My stablemates and I have other ways to greet each other. It's our little secret. Time to eat!

I like it here.

Now we go out! I enjoy the grass and taste-testing weeds and bushes and... anything green! Maybe I'll roll in the sand.

I like it here.

Time to eat again! We all know when that is. We stand at the gates and fences and stare at Sharon and her friends to remind them, just in case they've forgotten. Soon we are all in our stalls again, munching away.

I like it here.

We explore our meadows some more, exchanging bits of gossip. We use body language a lot. Sometimes Sharon and her friends get it, sometimes not. It's another one of our little secrets. Perhaps we'll be groomed! That's always good. Sometimes there are people who help me with my legs. I don't like that, but I trust Sharon and her friends. I always feel better when they're done.

I like it here.

The light is dimming. Soon we can go back to our own private places. Someone kind has cleaned them all out. It will feel good to rest in this quiet safe place. That is, after an evening nibble!

I like it here.

WHO WE ARE



Founded by Sharon Regan in 2017, Sea Star Horse Sanctuary is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing exceptional care and lifetime sanctuary to abused, abandoned, and neglected horses. We believe in nurturing the body, mind, and soul of each horse in our loving care. We strive to cultivate "horse wholeness" by providing comprehensive veterinary care, specialized nutrition, natural training, connection-based grooming techniques and holistic care. We respect and honor the essence of the equine spirit.