SSHS JULY 2023 NEWSLETTER

SEA STAR HORSE SANCTUARY

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CELEBRATING LIFE

As summer settles in on the central coast, the sunshine has been brightening our days and our hearts. We have grown in so many ways. The latest phase of our Holistic Pastures Project has taken root and we now have just over two acres of the most nutrient-dense, sustainable pasture grass ready for year-round grazing.

The herd received so much extra love from our visitors and volunteers during this past stormy spring, especially in the wake of the passing of the sanctuary's namesake horse, Seastar. We honored our beloved Seastar with a memorial ceremony, during which we planted his memorial tree in the garden. Our heavy hearts were lifted with the arrival of Tara, our first mustang rescue at the sanctuary. We opened our gates a little wider to the community through a six-week summer camp collaboration with kids from Seaside's Community Partnership for Youth, in addition to weekend mindfulness gatherings that are continuing through the summer.

Our current newsletter honors Seastar's legacy, introduces you to Tara's mustang magic and shares the heartfelt joy and connection felt by our summer camp attendees during their time at the sanctuary. We are excited to share our collaboration with local artisans, Kate Rider Jewelry and Carmel Candle Lab, who have so graciously offered to support the sanctuary through their work. We hope you enjoy reading this chapter of our story and feel inspired to become part of the next chapter!

Our Tribute to Seastar

Seastar's friends, both horse and human, gathered at the sanctuary on Tuesday, May 9th to honor him with a celebration of life ceremony. The gathering opened with the strike of a gong and the sounds of a crystal bowl. Incense was lit ceremonially. Its white smoke invited the presence of spirit, the universal part of the soul that is connected to all that is. A candle burned with wisps of monterey cypress, oak moss, palo santo and sea breeze, the natural scents of the sanctuary. Its flame represented the individual aspect of soul, as it rests in the heart center of every being. It symbolized Seastar's light, which can never be extinguished.

In keeping with sanctuary tradition, each person shared a favorite memory of Seastar or offered a reflection and then released a handful of his ashes into the root soil of his memorial tree. Sharon lovingly chose a red horse chestnut to honor him and placed it between Jane's purple smoke tree and Papoose's bay laurel. The geometrical arrangement celebrates the triangle of great love these three beautiful beings shared, all of whom lived well into their thirties.

Tears and laughter flowed from the stories we shared. The many lessons he taught us, his emotional depth, his openness to connection and appreciation of healing, his special way with children, and the middle path he traveled between the physical and the spiritual with his meditative nature. He was a lover, not a fighter. His was a way of being that inspired awe.

One friend played soulful guitar music, another brought fresh German chamomile. A Hawaiian saying was offered with an outstretched hand gesturing to the east and then to the west. Mai ka lā hiki a ka lā kau, a hui hou. (From the sun's arrival to the sun's rest, until we meet again). It was meant to express a feeling of hope that we will see our loved one again.

Takoda and Bentley joined the ceremony and joy spread throughout the group. Sharon opened a small bag of ashes for them to experience and process in their own way. Takoda, Bentley and Seastar, affectionately known as "the boys", formed a special bond. They shared a pasture together. Their stalls were adjacent and so they munched their meals and slept together too. Bentley outwardly mourned the loss of Seastar quite profoundly. He stood alone in Seastar's empty stall for hours. The characteristic playful, mischievous side of this little pony was completely extinguished for weeks following Seastar's death. It was heartwarming to witness the return of his clownish ways at Seastar's memorial.

Seastar's rescue and life thereafter so fully embodied Sharon's vision and mission for her sanctuary that she chose him as its namesake. While he is no longer with us in the physical realm, we know Seastar is with us in spirit as we continue the work he inspired. We will remember you forever, sweet boy. Until we meet again...

SEASTAR

Welcome home, Tara!

We are so excited to introduce you to the newest addition to the family! Tara arrived to her forever home with us on Monday, May 22 with the support of a generous donor and friend of the sanctuary. Tara is a 19 year old mustang mare, whose name (pronounced tar-ah) means “star” in Hindi and Sanskrit. We’re happy to say she has been living up to her name and immediately captured our hearts with her gentle, curious, and sweet nature!

Most rescue horses have backstories that break your heart. When we take in a horse in need, we strive to create a fresh start by giving them a new name and allowing them to write a new chapter in their story. It’s not that we ignore their history; it’s that we don’t allow it to define them or limit their potential. One can’t help but be curious about a mustang’s backstory; afterall, a mustang is the American symbol of wild, unbridled freedom.

When we adopted Tara, we were told that she originally came from the wildlands of New Mexico. Our friends at Skydog Sanctuary helped us with researching Tara’s registration number with the Bureau of Land Management, the federal agency that typically manages the lands wild mustangs roam. According to their records, Tara was born in a holding facility in Oklahoma. This likely means her mother was captured while she was pregnant with Tara, but we’re not sure to which herd her mother belonged.

Tara was adopted out around the age of two and somehow made it to the central coast of California. Before her arrival at the SPCA, she lived with a small herd of cattle in south county. Tara spent around a year in the SPCA’s care before our donor and friend met her and thought she’d be a great fit for the sanctuary. She offered to sponsor her adoption if we’d give her a forever home - an offer we couldn’t refuse. The stars aligned and she came home with us!

While it doesn’t appear she ever experienced the true wild, she carries the potent magic of the wild mustang spirit. Sharon intended for her to settle into Jane’s old stall, but Tara surprised us and chose to be with Takoda and Bentley instead of the main herd. Every chance she got, she would run down to the shared fence line and look for Takoda and Bentley. Sharon honored her choice and moved her to Seastar’s stall, where she finally settled down and enjoyed a peaceful meal. One can’t help but imagine that Seastar - who was known for his princely charm with the ladies - gave his blessing for such a stunning mare to take over his stall!

Tara settled into her new life with relative ease. She would gaze out over the land toward the ocean, making one wonder what it was like for her to experience the coastal breeze likely for the first time. She was particularly curious about the wild turkeys and their spring mating dances in the pastures. She would watch them, look at her human friends nearby, then further study the turkeys before letting out a little whinny and running to the other side of the pasture.

As Sharon worked with Tara each day, she introduced her to the herd along the fence. Kiva would come up to meet her nose-to-nose, speaking words that couldn’t be heard by human ears. When Tara got excited, Sharon met her with loving kindness and understanding. Over time, Kiva started calling out for Tara just as he does for his other mares when they’re away from the herd.

After about a week, Sharon intuitively put Tara on the grass with the main herd under watchful eye. Tara was content and the rest of the herd welcomed her in without incident. When they all migrated to the pastures for the day, Tara had everyone running laps around Big Heaven. The sweetest part was the rare sight of an energetic Peppy moving with speed alongside Tara, even giving a playful little kick in the air with her hindlegs. In the end, Tara surprised us yet again and decided to be with the main herd afterall.

Since meeting her, Tara has completely captivated our hearts and kept us on our toes with her wild mustang magic. While she has grown accustomed to sharing the pasture with wild turkeys and settled into the herd’s daily routine, she remains just as curious as when she arrived and ever-gentle toward all the new experiences and people who’ve come her way.

Connecting Community Youth to Horses

This summer, we launched and successfully completed our pilot program for equine-guided learning opportunities for local youth. We connected with Community Partnership for Youth (CPY), a nonprofit prevention program for Seaside youth that provides positive alternatives to gangs, drugs and violence while reinforcing individual strengths. We were one of the many options for activities and programs offered to CPY's students during their six week summer camp.

A group of four kids between 8-11 years old were selected by CPY staff to experience the sanctuary, with the hopes of finding comfort and healing - the magic we experience so often with our herd. Majority of CPY's students have faced significant hardship or trauma alongside experiencing systemic inequality in their community. It was incredible to see them open their hearts to us and the horses each week!

Sanctuary staff and volunteers created "disguised" educational lessons for the kids that focused on connecting them to nature and to our herd. When we were introducing them to the sanctuary and each of the horses, the kids were especially drawn to Takoda, who became a staple of each week's session. They were particularly curious about a horse's senses, how they communicate with their ears, and similarities between horse and human anatomy. Their sense of wonder expanded to the stunning view of Carmel Bay, the beautiful flowers on the sanctuary grounds, the wild turkeys who roam the sanctuary and weekly check ins on all the barn swallows who have been raising babies in the barn.

One of our favorite sessions was introducing them to zoopharmacognosy, the practice of animals self-medicating by choosing and ingesting herbs and essential oils. We opened their minds to ways plants can be used as medicine to help with physical, mental and emotional health for horses and humans. The kids had fun guessing the scents of essential oils - garlic took the prize of the least liked and vanilla was the most liked. We offered Bentley a kid-led zoopharmacognosy session in the pasture, with each of us offering him essential oils. It turns out Bentley really liked vanilla that day too! Each kid chose a dried herb to offer to Bentley and laughed when Bentley flipped the empty buckets, playfully signaling he'd love some more herbs!

Throughout our program, we enjoyed sharing all that makes the sanctuary so special: our holistic care approaches, our commitment to honoring the spirit of the horse and our dedication to letting the horses peacefully and freely live out the rest of their lives. However, the highlight for us was witnessing the looks of pure joy and wonder on the children's faces each week and providing them a safe space to explore and learn.

We'd like to extend our deepest gratitude to Shari Hastey, Benjamin Bruce and Jorge Torres, along with their staff at Community Partnership for Youth for trusting us to create these heart-warming experiences for their kids this summer! We are excited to continue building our relationship with Community Partnership for Youth beyond summer camp and expand our program offerings to create similar opportunities for other organizations and individuals in our local area!

SUPPORT US WHILE YOU SHOP!

We are excited to share we have partnered with a few local artisans and now have a shopping page on our website! Carmel Candle Lab's founder Molly offered to create a unique candle to benefit Sea Star. She helped us capture the natural scents, peacefulness and beauty one senses while in the presence of the horses on this sacred land near the sea. The Sea Star Horse Sanctuary candle is a perfect gift for special occasions and every day enjoyment!

Local equestrian and artist Kate Rider creates artisan and intentional jewelry from natural stones and individually forged metal work. In support of Sea Star's mission, Kate will donate 50% of your purchase when you use the code SEASTAR at check out.

Scan the QR code to visit our updated website to learn more and support Sea Star with your purchases!

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.

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