



INAUGURAL CHILDREN'S **WRITING COMPETITION**



SELECTED WILD HORSE ESSAYS

Wild Horse Stories — 2025

Edited by Yvonne Allen

First Edition 2025

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*For Angel and Mischief—
and for every young writer who shared their voice for
the horses in this special 2025 edition.*



Galloping free with Angel and Mischief— Yvonne riding her mare Angel with Mischief running alongside (summer 2012).

Photo © Voice for the Horse Archives

Tribute to Joy Richardson

“Graceful, wise, and unafraid to speak her truth—Joy left everyone a little better for knowing her.”

I first met Joy while riding my horse near her home beside Campbell Valley Park in 2001. She invited me in, offered a glass of sherry and a cup of tea, and showed me her beautiful home filled with horse treasures and memories. That day began a friendship that lasted for years.

Joy loved her horses deeply—Windsong and so many others who shaped her world. She was full of stories, laughter, and wisdom. Her kindness and encouragement never left me. Before she passed, I visited her and read from my book *Run With You*. She smiled and said, “Yvonne, you’ve got to put pen to paper every day.” I’ve carried those words with me ever since.

Joy later became an ambassador for *Voice for the Horse* and was one of our most devoted supporters. She loved that our work empowered youth through literacy and the fine arts—especially music. Her belief in the bond between horses and people continues to inspire everything we do.

Joy was one of those rare souls who carried light wherever she went—gentle, kind, and always ready with a word of encouragement. Her spirit lives on in every heartbeat of this project, in every child’s story, and in every rescued life.

This book is lovingly dedicated to her memory, her friendship, and the beauty she brought to this world through her compassion, courage, and love for the horse.



*Joy Richardson with her beloved gelding, Windsong —
photo circa 2012 — 2013 taken at High Point Equestrian Center, Langley, B.C.*

Foreword: Wild Horses

Yvonne Allen

2025 Legacy Edition Note:

This foreword is adapted from the original 2011 introduction to *Wild Horse Stories* — preserved here to honour the people, horses, and young writers who launched the first international competition through Voice for the Horse.

2011 was a year of great adventure for the Voice for the Horse Society (VFTH). After seven years of researching and networking throughout the world of horses, it became clear that the best way to fulfill our mission — *“forever bridging the gap between the horse and humans in our modern-day world, today and into our futures”* — was to engage our youth in an international writing project.

The inspiration for our children’s writing competition came through Atticus, the wild stallion from Deadman Valley, British Columbia, who was captured in the early winter of 2011. Fortunately for Atticus, his life — along with several of his herd mates — was ultimately spared. This is where our journey truly began.

Although we were aware of the compromised wild-horse populations in Canada, we seized the opportunity to cross the border into the United States to gain additional knowledge and expertise we would need to cover this vast subject, making the children’s writing competition an international success.

What followed became one of the most exciting years a true lover of the horse could imagine. I was overwhelmed by the genuine care, love, and idealism that our writers — ranging in age from eight to eighteen — displayed in their heartfelt stories. Their essays celebrated the spirit of wild horses as well as rescued and beloved barn companions who shared their lives — a testament to their creativity and deep sense of responsibility toward the horse.

Our volunteer panel of judges did an amazing job, and my sincere thanks go out to each of them: Valerie Ormond, Jonathan Boudin, Liz Mitten Ryan, Julie Lines, Angela Dorsey, and Connie Funk.

During that time, many new people also joined forces with VFTH, helping us develop a sound writing curriculum for children to learn from. I extend my gratitude to Margrit Coates, Julie Lines, Mara Legrand, Mary Ann Simonds, Barbara Wheeler, and Liz Mitten Ryan for their contributions of insight, time, and encouragement.

More than half of the stories in this edition were written by children from across the United States, alongside voices from Canada. Their shared compassion for wild horses reminds us that the bond between children and horses knows no borders.

A special thank-you goes to all of our participants for taking part in this unique writing experience. The battleground where many have fought to save our wild horses did not discourage these children from becoming a voice for the horse. Their efforts will help sustain wild-horse populations throughout Canada and the United States for years to come.

— *Yvonne Allen*

Founder, Voice for the Horse Foundation

Atticus — The Wild Stallion Of Deadman Valley

“The horse whose story helped inspire a movement to give wild horses a voice”.



In the winter of 2011, a dark-bay stallion roamed the sage-scented hills of Deadman Valley near Kamloops, B.C. Locals came to call him Atticus, after the steadfast father in *To Kill a Mockingbird* — a name that suited his calm authority.

That winter, Atticus and several members of his band were rounded up under a provincial livestock-control program. In that region of B.C., free-roaming horses are not legally protected as wildlife; many captured animals were sent to public stock-yard auctions, where—if not quickly adopted—most were purchased by kill-buyers for meat export.

Atticus’s life was spared through the combined efforts of Critter Aid / Project Equus, local advocates, and public pressure that reached the provincial government. Rescuers out-bid the kill-buyers and arranged a safe future for him and several of his herd-mates. He was transferred to a gentling program, where the goal was to earn his trust rather than break his spirit, and in time he was adopted into a secure home.

Those who met him remember how the wariness in his eyes softened into curiosity, how his soft bay coat caught the winter light, and how the star on his forehead made him instantly recognizable. Even as he accepted a halter and saddle, he kept the quiet presence of the hills in which he was born.

Atticus’s story was later featured in the *Stronger* instrumental music video created by Voice for the Horse (VFTH), where his image came to symbolize resilience, hope, and the silent strength of the wild horse. The stallion’s journey also inspired the first VFTH International Children’s Writing Competition (2011), reminding us why the voices of both horses and young writers matter.

“Through the eyes of one rescued stallion, children from far and wide found a story worth telling — the quiet bridge between the wild heart of a horse and the hope in a child’s pen.”



Atticus, newly gentled and standing calmly under saddle during his first training months — 2011.

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Legacy Vision — Voice for the Horse

Introduction By Yvonne Allen



In the fall of 1991, a magnificent horse was presented to Yvonne Allen, founder of Voice For The Horse. Despite his 16.2-hand height putting her a little on edge—and the fact he was trained only to race—she said yes to the chance to make him her first horse.

She asked his registered racing name and was surprised to learn it was *Five Sails* —the very same name as the restaurant where Yvonne worked at the Pan Pacific Hotel in downtown Vancouver, B.C. It felt meant to be.

Her experiences with Five Sails (*Jimmy, his barn name*) set her on the path to her true passion. Yvonne studied natural equine therapies and natural hoof care, which helped return Jimmy to good health during a hard spell.

Deemed “unwanted” due to early hoof problems, Jimmy made all the difference in Yvonne’s life. One horse changed everything—and a life “*by design*” began.

From her dream to promise a kinder future for all horses, the seed of Voice For The Horse was planted. That once-unwanted horse with no future became the foundation. Together they made a pact — “*we shall defy them all,*” a line that shortly thereafter became their mantra.”



A symbolic portrait of Yvonne with her beloved horse Jimmy (registered name “Five Sail”), blended with Canada Place and the adjoining Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver, British Columbia — in loving memory 1988 – 2009.

Children's Writing And Literacy

Through the power of writing—so clearly demonstrated by our young competitors—we are given the chance to develop our natural creative abilities, which in turn helps us discover more about who we are. This is true for anyone who takes the time to put thoughts on paper. When we write down our deepest ideas—whether in a personal journal or in essays like those in the Wild Horse Writing Competition—doors open to further creativity and growth.

In today's fast-moving world it's easy to bypass reading and writing in favor of other media and technologies. VFTH believes it's essential that we never lose strong reading and writing skills, because they are what enable people to make a positive impact on the world. Beyond wild horses, there will always be causes that need thoughtful voices. For our wild horses, the most effective advocacy begins with heightened awareness of the threats they face—awareness that grows through timeless means: reading, writing, and storytelling.

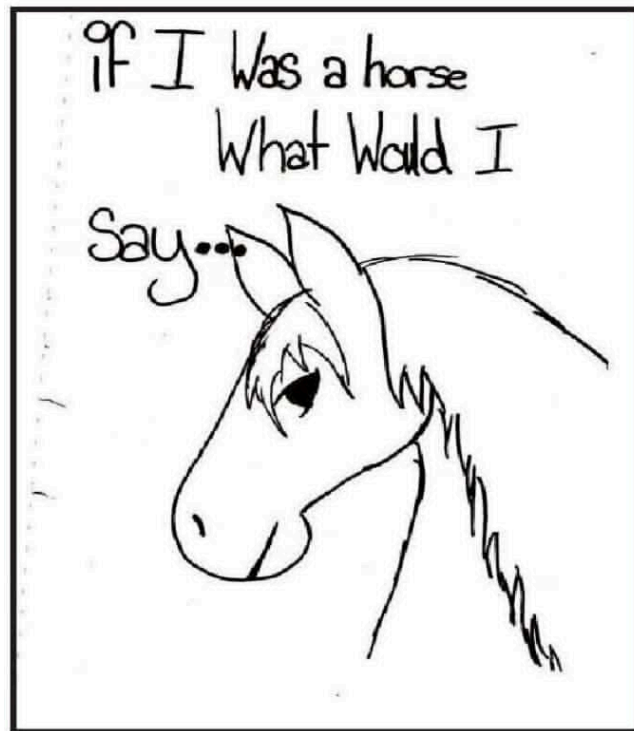


Illustration: "If I Was a Horse What Would I Say" — by Sarah Trafford, age 10 (2011)

A Horse's Tale

Matthew McCormack

Age 18

First Place Winner



"To me, horses and freedom are synonymous." — Veryl Goodnight

Throughout history, there has been no other creature to serve humans better than we have. We've been helping humans since the Spaniards brought us to North America way back in the 16th century. As recently as the 1800s, wild horses and burros numbered in the millions as we roamed from the Mexican border all the way to Canada. Today, only about 33,000 of us remain in the wild.

"What happened?" you might ask. My friend, our freedom has been sacrificed in the name of greed. The nation—especially the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)—needs to change its priorities to save a pivotal part of the American West.

I am a proud mustang, born twelve years ago in the scrublands of western Nevada (the largest herd of wild horses roams 800,000 acres north of Reno, NV). I'm the head stallion in a herd that has dropped from eleven members to five.

I've been lucky not to be captured, but the danger is ever-present. Countless times throughout the year, helicopters head into the mountains or open grasslands to look for us. The helicopters corral my frightened friends into traps. I have witnessed innumerable wild horses and burros—including members of my own herd—rounded up. My reaction is always the same to this nightmare: I neigh and whinny frantically and loudly. The fear and worry in the captured animals' eyes is indescribable. When I see my herd members corralled into the traps, I feel so helpless, knowing I will never see my family and friends again.

Roundups, unfortunately, create inbreeding problems. Capturing members of my species causes the remaining horses and burros in the wild to breed earlier and more actively to maintain their population—a basic survival instinct. This, in turn, results in young horses being bred at an age that is far too young.

Why does the Bureau of Land Management round up 10,000 of my species every year? The BLM claims there is not enough grass and water to maintain the herds. Several of my friends, however, are indeed healthy, and there is plenty of vegetation for both us and other native species. Many of our water sources, though, are fenced off by the BLM.

Capturing members of my herd and other mustangs and burros is not a solution. According to Congressional Representative Dina Titus of Nevada, “That’s why you have the roundups; that’s mostly just about elimination of the horse, not elimination of the problem.” Titus is absolutely correct because we are disappearing in the blink of an eye. Since 1971, more than 200,000 wild horses and burros have been removed from 47 million acres of public lands.

The BLM wants to reserve more land for cattle ranchers. Today, there are over 4.2 million cattle on public lands compared to an estimated 33,000 wild horses and burros. We are certainly more valuable to the public land than cattle. Cattle provide no benefits to the land. We, on the other hand, are much gentler on the land and disperse intact seeds from native plants. Our manure helps keep plants alive in certain areas. This manure is also important to the creation of humus in the building of soil in arid regions. Animals such as bobcats and wild dogs use my species as an important food source when we die. We can paw through ice to expose water during the winter months, which in turn makes water available to other animals that cannot break through the ice. We also prevent wildfires by eating dry plant matter.

The Bureau of Land Management makes excuses to the public and tries to convince the American people that what they are doing is saving horses. John Phillips, former Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, had this to say about that position: “I really believe deep down they think of them [horses] as a range maggot; they’re a pest, they’re a feral animal, they don’t belong.” The BLM clearly does not care about our feelings or emotions. They believe we are like a disease that is affecting the public lands.

So where is my species taken every year once they are captured? Currently, there are over 36,000 wild horses and burros in government holding pens. The conditions of these pens where the horses reside are absolutely appalling. The only amenities provided to the horses are feed and water. There is no shade, no roaming room, no escape from the elements, and no clean standing or rolling room. I cringe every time I think about these “prisons” because my herd members are living in these heinous conditions. The funding to keep the pens running costs millions of dollars, and this money comes from the American taxpayers. The cost of housing wild horses and burros continues to rise annually.

Will these roughly 36,000 mustangs and burros ever be released from the government holding pens? The Bureau of Land Management claims adoption is the solution. However, only thirty percent of my species will be adopted. Plus, adoption procedures are poorly regulated. Some animals may be released to the wild after receiving birth control. Others may be transported to different holding facilities around the country.

As a horse that has seen it all, I am begging you to take action. Do not be afraid to speak up for me, my herd, my friends, and for the countless other wild horses and burros that have been on the frontlines with humans since day one. I want to leave you with a quote that I truly find inspiring. Dayton O. Hyde, founder of Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary, said, “The time to come up with a solution that’s practical and efficient and good for the horses—the time is right now.” As a nation, people must work together to save this special piece of history. America

needs to stand up and take action against the Bureau of Land Management to save wild horses and burros now. Otherwise, our free and roaming spirit will be swept right off the land.

Voice For The Horse

Genna Vickers

Age 14

Second Place Winner



I only have 1000 words to say this, so I'm going to make it quick.

What should we do about this mess we have gotten ourselves into? Ranchers are complaining about the wild horses invading their land, the government is trying to put a lid on this by engaging the horses in roundups that border on animal cruelty, and equestrians are beginning to raise their voice in protest, vouching for the safety and freedom of America's symbol of the wild west.

Certainly, this isn't a small-scale squabble. Both sides—the ranchers and the horse lovers—bring valid points to the argument. Ranchers want fewer Mustangs so they will have more land for their cattle (and more meat, thus providing food for millions of people), and the equestrians vouch for allowing the horses to run free and live in the wild.

The government, however, seems to be acting in the best interests of the ranchers, and this certainly doesn't sit well with the horse lovers. My suggestion is: what if all three sides engaged in a sort of compromise?

The best route we can take is to begin spaying/gelding the wild Mustangs. This way, lives aren't being taken needlessly, and the population is prevented from growing any further. Research would need to be done on the exact numbers and such, as I'm no mathematician. It's also easier to keep track of the wild horses' population if you know how many you spay/geld annually, giving you the ability to plan ahead for how much money is required for this.

This brings me to my next point: money. "How the heck are we going to afford this?" you may ask. Well, here's the thing: the government owns the land that the ranchers are using for their

cattle, correct? Meaning, they have full rights to do whatever they want with the land that they rightfully own. So, what if the government charged more than they currently do to allow ranchers use of the land? Again, the ranchers would have no choice but to comply or risk losing their farm. With the money the government would gain from this, it could be utilized for sterilizing the horses. And since you could predict how many horses you'd have to spay/geld in the next year, this method provides a stable, manageable way to keep the numbers in check without taking the lives of innocent animals.

The only flaw/possible weakness in this plan is the risk of inbreeding (or too much of it, anyway). If you know anything at all about wild Mustangs, you'll know that inbreeding happens all the time. Since stallions chase away any colts that are old enough to take over their mares, the fillies of the herd have no other choice but to breed with the herd's main stallion; this can oftentimes be their direct father.

At this point in time, inbreeding is the least of our concerns. It can easily be avoided by sterilizing an equal number of animals from each herd. This way, you still allow some reproduction to go on naturally (even the occasional inbreed), while keeping the population in check at the same time. The wild horses' numbers cannot be reduced to the point that they have no choice but to inbreed, though. This would only create another problem for us to deal with.

I know that some people just want to slaughter the horses and be done with it. I, for one, am against horse slaughter in the first place. Why kill such intelligent animals for meat? I know every single horse that is put on those trucks is capable of working and serving people in another way than simply food. My ex-PMU mare that I currently ride was ****slaughter-****bound before we saved her. She went from unhandled and pregnant to competing at state competition and winning blue ribbons in the open pleasure circuit. But this is a whole 'nother ball game, and I'm getting off track.

Anyway, some also may argue that the horses were brought to us from Spain thousands of years ago, and that they're considered an invasive species. Preposterous. This is like saying that the domestic house cat is a destructive species and should be exterminated. Cats originated in Egypt and gradually spread throughout the world, changing to fit the climate and forming different breeds. Horses are the same way! Mustangs evolved from the Spanish Barb to fit the land. They are an essential part of the western culture and wild animal food chain. Take them away, and you decimate the entire west.

About the roundups... I know, for a fact, that a helicopter—with its blades whirling like giant knives, flattening the grass around its vicinity—is one of the most frightening things any horse, let alone a wild one, could ever encounter (trust me; I speak from firsthand experience). There has got to be a better way. I mean, think about it. What would be going through your head if something that resembled a giant hawk with talons unlike anything you'd ever seen before decided to drop down out of the sky and come so close to you that you were certain it had malicious intent?

Something has to be done about this. Even cars or four-wheelers would be more humane than helicopters. If ground transportation could be used, this would greatly reduce the horses' chances of injury.

I know that horses are surprisingly human-like, for creatures of their size and mental capacity. They have amazing healing ability (if you're reading this, you've almost certainly had your life touched by a horse), and what's odd is that they're not picky about who they give it out to, like most humans are. Horses see that you're hurting, then come over and make it better. Plain and simple. They don't try to dance around talking about your damaged feelings, or avoid you, or pretend you're not there in a conversation between fellow equines from their herd. Horses are so much less... judgmental than people are. In a way, they're all angels. Their halos may be invisible (perhaps a tad crooked at times), but nonetheless, they're there.

We horse lovers, out of all people, know that. We know the healing power horses possess, and we know that equines are very capable of touching lives. I just don't think the authorities that are in charge of this entire operation can see that. Their eyes aren't open and everybody knows that if you proceed without knowing where you're going, then you'll surely stumble and fall.

This is a topic I feel very deeply about, and I truly do hope that the government thinks long and hard about the path they choose to take, picking the one that would be best for the horses. And really, when you think about it, isn't what's best for the horses what's best for us humans?

Wild Horse Essay

Megan Gunn

Age 12

Third Place Winner



Horses are amazing! Whether domesticated or wild, they're all special. They have a spirit that none can match! When they were domesticated around 6000 years ago, they were used mainly for work. But today their purpose has evolved! Today they are used for English riding, Western riding, and much, much more!

I tried to imagine what a horse would tell me if it talked. Multiple questions popped up in my mind, such as: Do you like hay? Do you like to be ridden? And most of all, do you like being with us? I kept trying to imagine what a horse would say if they could talk. Unfortunately, they don't talk in a voice we understand. But they can display their feelings through body language. It's like, if a horse's ears are back, it normally means it's not very happy. Or, if a horse has its head in the air, that's another sign they're on high alert; it always depends on the urgency of the situation.

Today there are some people who understand horses. One day I hope all humans will be able to communicate with horses like Jonathan Field and Daryl Gibb. I think what we need is to observe horses' behaviour in the wild so we can treat a domesticated horse the way a wild horse acts naturally. I don't mean turning them loose—I mean acting like a herd with them. If we achieve this, everyone will be able to communicate with horses better.

When I started to write this, I thought back to the time when I first saw a horse. I remember he was a buckskin gelding who sauntered up to the fence. As soon as I laid a hand on his muzzle, he cantered away. Even though I only touched his face for a few seconds, I could still feel the immense power radiating from him. To this day I still can't believe that something with all of

that power can still be a gentle creature. His coat was soft and thick, like his mane! My grandparents led me around on him, and I felt so confident! I also felt proud that a creature with all of his might—who could buck me off—didn't!

Wild horses and domesticated horses are different and yet still so similar. Obviously, wild horses live in the wild and domesticated horses don't. Domesticated horses rely on their owner for their needs; a wild horse can't. They are alike because they both enjoy company from horses, humans, or other animals. Just because a horse is in human care doesn't mean it's tame. For example, a horse that has never had human contact, no matter the age, could be deemed wild.

Horses and humans are also alike! Horses may rely on us for their needs, as we rely on humans for our needs. However, we're also different because of the way that we communicate.

I think horses and humans can help each other in different ways. Horses can help us by giving us confidence and teaching us to be kind. They also give us riders a purpose in life.

Learning to be friends with horses is something that I think is important. It's an amazing feeling when you are in sync with your horse! For people who have never experienced this, I feel so sorry!

I believe that wild horses should be kept free. That's the way it should be! I envy wild horses; they are free with no boundaries. They are proud creatures, with a fiery spirit.

If I Was A Horse, What Would I Say

Sara Trafford

Age 12

Spirit Award Winner



VFTH Mascot — Mischief

Photo © Voice for the Horse Archives

Hello, my name is Cloud and this is my story. When I was young, my mother showed me all of the meadows and the forest. Up high in the mountains is where we lived, in a herd of wild horses just like me. My father's name was Thunder, a trusty black stallion with hooves of steel. My mother, on the other hand, was a young and beautiful mare named Sky. I arrived in late spring on a wet day on the slopes of Vernon, British Columbia. Every time I looked into my mother's eyes I saw crystalline gems staring back at me. It was so peaceful there; it was a paradise.

The winters were cold up in the mountains and food was scarce. We had to dig under the snow for grass, and we used the trees for shelter and huddled to keep warm. The water in the stream felt cold on my lips; I still remember that tingly feeling when I dipped down to drink. In our herd a filly named Seara was born after me. We grew up together—we were truly best friends. We would gallop as fast as our legs could go, racing each other over the pastures in the wind, feeling it lift under our manes and tossing our tails high in the air. Looking down from the top of the ridge, with the lake at our heels, we felt like we were at the top of the world.

Protecting each other was important because cougars and bears were looking for food. I still remember the day my father fought off a cougar just before it attacked me. I heard the scream of the cougar before I could see it. Before it could jump on my back, my father leaped in its way

and stood on his hind legs, thrashing with his front hooves. It was a gruesome fight, but the cougar could not hold off my father's strength. My mother was tense and wary, and with my body pressed against her side, I could feel her tighten the muscles in her shoulder. From that instant, I knew she was scared that my father wouldn't make it through the fight alive. My father was brave, and I respected him more than I ever had, knowing he would do anything to protect us and the herd.

The biggest threat was not bears nor cougars, but humans. They wanted our meadows and streams, and they cut down the trees that gave us shelter—and the worst part was we had no say in any of it. Humans are ugly inside and out, with their two legs, small eyes, small noses, and mouths; it's a mystery they can eat at all! The machines they used were big and scary, and we tried to run far away from civilization. We were not able to cross into our grazing fields anymore. It was hopeless.

When I turned three, everything—from grazing fields to trickling streams—was gone. All the grass turned to mud, and safe turned to dangerous in a flash. Then one day humans came with big trucks and trailers, and long ropes, and at that time I had no clue what they were. I also didn't know if I was ever going to see our mountain again. They wrapped a rope around my mother's neck and then mine. My father tried and tried, but this time he had no success. In the end, five horses, including my dad and Seara, were left on the land, and the rest of us were sent to a farm with fences and barbed wire.

The water on the farm was not clean—it sat in buckets—and it didn't taste like the water from our stream. The ground was filthy, the hay wasn't fresh, and some of the horses got colic and diseases. It was scary there; we did not know anything about farms. Then one day someone put a heavy saddle on my back and tried to sit on me! I did what my father would have done: I kicked and leaped as high as I could, but the man would not give up, and finally, after a long time, I stopped fighting and the man said I was "broke."

Then they put me in a box in some building; they said it was called a stall. It was dark and wet, and I couldn't help but think of the rest of my herd. There was one person who made my stay bearable, and her name was Caitlin. She would feed me treats and stroke my soft coat with a curry comb. I looked forward to the extra oats she brought me. She spoke softly and made me feel safe.

I spent two years in that place, and then one day they put us back into the trailers and onto a strange mountain. I was as happy as I could be until I remembered my father and Seara. All the others were jumping for joy, all except me. My mother came up beside me, and I knew she missed him as much as I did. I knew in my heart he would always be there for me.

But then I saw an unreal sight. It was my father and Seara! And all the other horses from the herd, and many more. I galloped as fast as my legs could carry me, just like Seara and I would do when we were young. I felt a bolt of joy shoot through me. "Cloud!" my father screamed, "you're back!" The herd was excited to be together again. The water was clean and the grass was fresh, and I lifted my head and looked at the sun that felt amazing on my face, and I was glad for freedom.

I am now an older and wiser horse, and Seara and I still wander over the hills with our own herd. I hope to someday leave the mountain to our young and hope that humans will protect

our pastures from civilization. Caitlin sometimes comes to see us and takes pictures of our young. I think she knows how happy I am to be home.

Taken From My Home

Megan Evans

Age 13



It all happened so suddenly I barely remember it. I was in the field, calmly grazing with my herd beside my mother, the lead mare. I was hungry after a cold, bitter winter and wanted to fill my stomach to the maximum. Out of the clouds suddenly appeared a loud flying thing. Startled, we started running, trying to get away from it. The helicopter backed off a small amount, allowing us to slow to a trot, but still guiding us forward. We entered a narrow canyon, ready to bolt, when suddenly we all stopped and looked around us. There was nowhere to go; we were trapped, encaged, and anything but free.

My mother's nostrils flared, her ears twitching. A gate opened in the rail enclosure that held us, freeing the stallion, who ran away like a hurricane. Men entered the pen riding horses with mysterious leathers on their backs and heads. They herded all the foals, including me, into a small pen. When no foals remained, the men turned the mares loose, and they plunged away back into the hills to reunite with the stallion.

I kicked the rails and reared, plunging into the soft sand beneath me. My only thought was, *Where was my mother? Out, wild, free!* I galloped around the pen, rearing and kicking the walls until I stood, head low, panting with exhaustion. I bolted into action again as men entered the pen on foot and slowly herded us up a chute into a trailer. We crowded together, frightened, against the back wall. Suddenly the trailer moved! We braced ourselves and stood splay-legged and motionless. I wished my mother was with me. I twisted around quickly, losing my footing, and fell on my little nose. I cried out and scrambled up, not moving again. Eventually the trailer stopped, the door opened, and we scrambled out and found ourselves in a round rail pen.

As the other foals and I tentatively explored our new environment, another person appeared, a woman. She spoke in a gentle voice as she spread some sweet green hay on the ground and stood back to give us our space. After eating my fill, I fell asleep, exhausted. I woke up half an hour later and stood up when I heard her footsteps approaching and the sound of her dreamy humming. She stepped into my pen and pattered around, tidying it up with a pitchfork while I watched her, growing easier with her presence. Cautiously, I came within three feet of her and found how easy it was to be near her warmth and calm motherliness. I jumped as her finger twitched. I skittered to the edge of the fence and heard her laugh like silk. With smooth movements, she walked out of the pen, leaving me staring curiously after her.

Each day I grew more accustomed to her presence and even grew to enjoy her touch. She was always calm and never impatient. Though I still occasionally thought of the wild, I recognized this as my true home.

Horses Are Not Junk!

Gabrielle Cournoyer

Age 8



Horses are not junk! What I notice about how some horses are treated in our world is wrong! Some people treat horses like they are expendable instead of the beautiful creatures they are. That is very, very wrong. Take action and stop this!

In learning about Cloud, the wild stallion of the Arrowheads, and his family, I noticed that the wild horses are not treated with respect. First, the helicopter scares them into a pen. This is a problem because some of the horses are hurt because they are running so hard. This is not necessary. Second, they are branded with a fiery, hot iron. That is unacceptable. Does anyone care about horses after they are branded and taken from their family? Third, people treat them like junk because at the auction they are just thrown away to whoever offers the most money, without any care about what will happen to them for the rest of their life! That is wrong!

Domestic horses can also run into many problems. Our family helped rescue a horse that someone thought was expendable. My sister and I went and played our instruments for strangers to raise donations for a horse rescue. Day Dreams Equine Rescue was going to an auction and needed more money. We got seventy-five dollars, and they brought home a horse that needed to be rescued. He had no name and we called him Justice. Someone else's junk is my best buddy! He filled my heart with love!

Not all horses face these types of problems, but too many do! Both domestic and wild horses can be treated badly. Horses are not junk! Everyone can do something to end this unfairness. Maybe you can tell a friend or brush a dirty horse at a local rescue! It's time to take action and make a difference for the horses of our world!

Justice

A beautiful stallion
Pony friends forever
Justice is a big teddy bear
Hot chocolate brown
Smells like hay
Love him
When I look at him
I know
He will be my big brave horse
I love you, boy!

— Gabrielle Cournoyer, Age 8



VFTH Mascots — Angel and Mischief

Photo © Voice For The Horse Archives

Wild Horses

Katie Bachman

Age 13



*“As farm-animal numbers increase, the number of wild horses roaming free on public lands decline.” ~
Katie Bachmann*

Wild horses can be found all over the world. Most wild horses are feral animals—domesticated animals that have returned to the wild. The most famous wild horses are found on Sable Island, off the coast of Nova Scotia.

Most people believe that the ancestors of the horses on Sable Island are survivors of a shipwreck, but the first horses were actually brought to the island for pasture in the late eighteenth century, and additional horses were later transported to improve the herd's breeding stock. Later they took the horses off the island.

How come they're still there? Well, when they were taking the horses off the island, they missed some. The horses that they missed are the ancestors of the horses that live there now.

The Sable Island horses have been in several documentaries, books, and magazine articles. They were the subject of an exhibition at the Equine Museum of Japan in Yokohama, and a photography exhibition in New York City.

There are other wild horses roaming the world too. Other island horses are on the Barrier Islands of Assateague and Shackle Ford.

Some wild horses live on public land, and because of this they must share the resources of grazing lands and water with farmers' livestock. As farm-animal numbers increase, the number of wild horses roaming free on public lands decline.

When most people think of horses they think of Mustangs. Mustangs are not easy to define. Their ability to survive in the most hostile places is amazing. From rigorous winters to scorching summers, these magnificent animals can survive on the limited amounts of food and water that's available.

Mustangs, like all horse herds, create paths when they travel from pasture to water hole and back. They follow the paths they make and usually travel in single file with the lead mare in front and the stallion at the rear. The paths are marked the way all animals do it— with droppings. These droppings are not to mark territories but to let other herds know that they were there and to be careful.

A good herd has one stallion and however many mares the stallion can look after, and their foals. The colts in the herd will slowly be chased out at the age of two or three. All the bachelors usually stay together until they make their own herd. This means stealing mares from existing herds, which could end up in a fight with the stallion that owns the mares. Violent combats between stallions are rare. Fights are most often eye-contact, bowed necks, and controlled kicks.

Wild horses are not treated fairly. Pregnant mares are chased by helicopters when they should be doing little and enjoying life. They are then captured where they wait to be killed and turned into dog food.

Wild horses should be protected and left alone—only to be handled by humans when something happens to their home.

Horses today are used for all kinds of things, from work to pleasure. Work horses are those that pull things whether it's a tree or farm equipment. Pleasure horses are those that are most popular. They are used for different kinds of riding disciplines such as trail riding, dressage, jumping, eventing, cattle-penning, and other western riding.

Horses have been through a lot—those on Sable Island and anywhere else. Not just due to environmental changes but also due to physiological changes (from a four-toed plant-eating animal to a one-hoofed grazer).

There should always be two types of horses: wild and domestic— not one or the other.

If Wild Horses Had A Voice

(Title supplied by editor)

Emmaleen F. Aviles

Age 10



On the huge plains of the American West, nothing is moving. Then a bird soaring high in the sky cries, and a head lifts from a herd of wild horses. First one head, then another—eyes wide open and ears pricked— and as one herd they gallop off, leaving nothing but dust in the air.

Wild horses were thought to be extinct in the United States for more than 10,000 years before the Spanish arrived. Horse fossils found in the United States show that equine ancestors were once present. Many other horses called “wild” are descended from tame horses that escaped or were released into the wild. Wild horses live in many parts of the world. Wild horses live on their own on prairies. Horses mate in the springtime and foals are born a year later. Usually only one foal is born at a time. A male foal is called a colt and a female foal is called a filly.

Horses belong to the same large family as zebras and donkeys. There are three species of zebras, two species of donkeys, and one species of horse. Hundreds of years ago, the Native peoples of North America tamed the horses of the plains. The Appaloosas and Pintos were favorites because they were small, strong, and brave. They were also useful for hunting. Pintos and Appaloosas look like the same kind of horse, but it is easy to tell them apart. A Pinto's spots look like big splotches of paint and Appaloosas have many small spots.

Wild horses come in groups of 3 to 20 horses. A stallion leads the group, which has mares and young foals. The Przewalski's horse is the only true wild horse whose ancestors were never domesticated. The Przewalski's horse exists today only in captivity.

I know horses say lots of things, but we don't understand it. If they had a voice, that would be a miracle! Why do I say that? Horses are like family and a friend to us.

If I could know what horses say, they would tell me if their legs were too sore for running and if they needed some time by themselves. The reason I said “if they needed some time by themselves” is because we just go in their horse corral without asking them.

Some people say that when a horse’s ears stand tall and face forward it means they’re curious, but they don’t really know. They could be saying something else that we don’t know. If wild horses had a voice they would tell me what it is like to be free. They would probably say that there’s no noise but the wind and there’s the smell of fresh air running through our manes. I would describe wild horses as graceful, beautiful, strong, brave, and FREE. I believe horses have a voice.

What Would Horses Say If They Could Speak

Jessilynn Bean

Age 13



As a child growing up in the country around horses, I have always loved watching how they act and how they interact with each other. They remind me of humans—living in organized groups with leadership. Horses can communicate with each other, just like us, but what would they say if they could speak to us and we could understand? I have asked myself that question many times. Would they say they were hungry, or tired, or happy? Or would they tell us their rich history and how they helped pave the way for what America is today?

Have you ever wondered what life would be like if we had never had horses to help us with day-to-day living? Because of horses, we have been able to explore uncharted territories faster and more efficiently, settle new lands, and increase agricultural production. Even the earliest people of this land—the Native Americans—benefited from the introduction of horses to America in the 16th century by the Spanish conquistadors.

When the Spaniards first came to the “new world,” they brought horses to carry heavy burdens and for faster travel. Some horses escaped and survived because they could adapt to many climates, habitats, and diets. These herds quickly established large populations of wild horses that were later domesticated by nomadic peoples—especially Native Americans.

The horse was very helpful to Native Americans. Before the horse, dogs were used as pack animals, pulling travois to carry loads. With horses, people could carry more, travel with the buffalo and other herds they depended on for food, clothing, shelter, and tools, and move farther and faster. With this majestic animal, many tribes flourished and grew.

Along with traveling with life-sustaining herds, Native Americans became skilled riders who could conquer enemies on horseback. With this new way of life, the partnership between people and horses became a relationship that has lasted for centuries. They honored the horse and looked upon them with pride.

The partnership of person and horse has been around for a very long time. People have used horses for travel, sport, and—most importantly—agriculture. Before horses, many families could harvest only a meager amount of crops. With horses, farmers could harrow fields, later pull plows, and eventually use horse-drawn reapers instead of sickles. Horses played a key role in the growth of agriculture in America and around the world.

Ask yourself this question: if horses have done so much for us and our ancestors, why are we slaughtering these beautiful wild creatures just because they are abundant and taking up land? Some people even propose slaughter for human consumption, even though horses in the United States are not raised as food animals and receive medications that are banned for food animals. Also, of all the horses that go to slaughter every year, 92 percent are in good condition and do not need to be euthanized—so why are we killing them?

Horses have helped us since the 16th century when they were brought by the Spanish. With their help we have explored, settled, and farmed. Native Americans followed the herds they depended on, became skilled horsemen, and saw their communities grow. Horses helped increase agricultural yields and feed families and towns. Yet some people still want to remove them because of who they are and the size of their herds.

What would horses say if they could speak to you?

The Voice Of The Wild Horses

(Title supplied by editor)

Peyton Falk

Age 11



I feel my mane blow in the wind. I feel the warm sun on my back. I hear the eagle calling me. I hear my hooves thundering through the valley. I hear my band nickering to me to come back. I go—our head mare leads the way through lakes and streams, over rocks and through gullies. Suddenly, she stops. Our head stallion trots to the front to see what's wrong. I see his ears perk; his nose rises with a whinny saying, "They're here."

I listen, then hear the screams and shouts of cowboys, the roar of their horses' hooves as they run down the side of the gully, and the head mare nickers to us, "Run!" I do as she says and bolt. I hear a slam of hooves behind me; I flick my head back to see who it is. It's Sheshu, a black-and-white paint mare who has been my closest ally in the band. We continue to run across the gully until we don't hear the roar of hooves or the screams of the cowboys, and we stop. My nostrils flare; my lungs heave as if in a thank you. Sheshu starts to snack on some grassy shrubs and I drink from a small pond, then I eat. Sheshu and I huddle next to each other and sleep.

I wake to the grumble of my hungry stomach and trot to some grass and eat. I pick up my head to chew, and then I hear the screaming and shouts of the cowboys. Sheshu flashes awake; she and I run—our hearts race and our feet beat the ground, our manes and tails blow in the wind—but still we hear them. I neigh to Sheshu, "Run!" Then, in a blur, a rope flies through the air. I feel it slip over my head, and then I feel a jerk. I let out a screeching neigh: "No! Let me be free!" I feel another jerk and I still fight and pull my neck. I see Sheshu do the same, but it's no use.

Sheshu and I are dragged to a big metal trailer attached to a truck. The cowboys dismount their slave horses and pull us into the trailer, take off the ropes, and slide a big metal wall in front of us. The cowboys give us hay and water, load their horses, and jump in their truck. The trailer rattles and shakes, but I doze off.

I awake to neighs of horses and screams of men. The cowboys unload their horses first, then Sheshu and me. They slide the metal piece back and shoo us out. I trot bravely forward; Sheshu follows close behind. We trot into a pen full of other wild horses. One horse reaches out and bites me, and I bite right back, pinching the horse's flank. He backs off. Then I hear a low nicker, and I look up to see Nawah, our head mare, and we go to her. "You were caught today," she nickers. Then we hear a man yell in a loud voice, "Now it's time for the wild horse race."

The crowd roars. I hear a door unlatch and see it swing open. I hear a whip crack, so I lope out of the pen into an arena. The man then yells, "Let it begin!"

A bell sounds and men run from everywhere. Three men run to me and one jumps on and pulls my head down. I fight him but he persists and shoves a cold metal thing in my mouth. Then another man slams a thick blanket on my back and a saddle. I am scared out of my mind. I feel a weight on my back and rear, only to feel the sting of spurs jabbing my sides. I run faster and faster.

I look to the left to see a girl staring at me as I thunder past the finish line. My blue roan body drips with sweat, my sides dribble blood from the spurs, and my lungs heave as my rider dismounts and takes his prize. "Well, that concludes today's rodeo—see you again tomorrow, folks," the man yells.

I am led out of the arena and my saddle and bridle are removed. I am put in a pen next to other horses and given more hay and water, and a pat on the back. My eyes finally close.

I hear my pen door open and open my eyes. It is still dark, but I see the girl from the arena at the rail. She feeds me an apple and loops a rope around my neck. She leads me out past all the tents to a fence gate, which she unlocks and walks me through. She takes off the rope.

"Go be free," she says. "I will bring your mares—the ones you stood with in the pen. Now go! I will be your voice, the voice of the wild horses!"

Horses' Call For Help

True story based on an article in an Annapolis newspaper.

Tatiana Bachara, Nantucket Elementary

Age 12



One Monday morning, I went to get the mail when a front-page article in the newspaper caught my eye. Four horses looked out at me, their eyes pleading for help. I heard their voices calling:

“We are hungry. Our guardian passed away. No one is taking care of us.”

I wanted to help.

I decided to make a donation, but I didn't have enough money. I thought my school could help. My dad and I went to Kmart and bought a poster board and a glass jar. Then we went home, got everything ready that day, and wrote a school announcement that horses needed help. We also displayed the poster with the article and the pictures of the horses.

We collected \$14.27 for the vet bill. I hope I helped a little.

Kaylin

Madelyn McCoy

Age 9



Based on a true story

Howdy, I am Kaylin. Right now I'm living on a great farm called "I Believe." Let me tell you how I got here.

I was getting ready to go to a slaughterhouse when my lead broke. I had no idea what to do, so I ran. I ran until I was caught. After that I went back to the farm. By the way, the farm is called Star Streak. They didn't have enough money to take care of me, so they were sending me to a slaughterhouse.

I was at an auction and about to be called. "Would anybody like a brown and white Paint?" Nobody said they wanted me. As I was getting on the truck to go to the slaughterhouse, a girl yelled that she wanted me. I was so excited that I whinnied! But I found out that if they got me, I had to wait four weeks before I could go to the other farm.

I had to stay at a foster farm with 48 other horses, and there were only 45 stalls. Two other horses and I had to stay outside. Finally, after four whole weeks, the girl came to pick me up. It was a very bumpy ride, but I thought it was kind of fun. After a while I found out what her name was. The girl's name is Madelyn.

Now that I have told you my story about how I got here, let me tell you about my life here. The first day was a little scary. There were so many horses in the field; it took a while for them to include me and warm up to me. The people here are so nice. They come to say good morning and good night to all the horses. The best part is the treats. I like carrots, apples, pears, and they put applesauce in my food so it tastes even better. Oh, and the kids! There are so many kids! I see kids every day and they always give me a kiss. I just can't get enough!!!

Right now I am working with a trainer so that Madelyn can ride me in the spring. Madelyn is very sweet. The other horses who have been here for a while just adore her. One horse, Dugan, says she is his favorite person!

The day I was brought to the "I Believe" farm was the best day of my life! I can only hope that other horses can be rescued and have a home as great as this one. I feel like I am one of the luckiest horses alive!!

If People Could Just Open Their Eyes

(Title supplied by editor)

Ariel Edmonson

Age 14



Throughout the process of researching wild horses, my views on the equine world have really expanded. It is a shame to see what is happening to the herds that helped make North America what it is today, and I believe we should do everything possible to protect them.

In the beginning, the Spanish conquistadors brought horses overseas to North America during the 1400s. They hired Native Americans to tend to their steeds, though the native people were forbidden to ride or own a beast. The Spanish said that, given the chance, a horse would rip through a man and devour him whole. The natives began to revolt, and soon many of the “ferocious” creatures were in their hands. The Aboriginal people learned the art of riding quickly, and the horse became their greatest asset for both hunting and battle. Few horses escaped, but their feral population grew from a handful to thousands. This was how the mustang we know today came to be.

In the 1920s, an estimated two million mustangs roamed American soil. There were so many they were considered a nuisance. Train travelers were even offered the chance to shoot any wild horse they saw from their compartments to avoid boredom. Farmers would capture these creatures and sew rawhide flaps onto their nostrils, then release them back to their herd. This made the herd far slower, due to the difficulty of breathing. The pet-food industry began to take interest, slaughtering 500 of these beasts per day. At its peak, this industry canned about 30 million pounds of horseflesh into pet and chicken food.

Madeleine Pickens has a great plan to help the wild mustangs. It’s wonderful to see her enthusiasm! But would she take all the horses? I can’t help but think that would be a shame—especially when she mentioned in her video how her plan would be non-reproductive. I understand these creatures would be kept in a very large enclosure, but wouldn’t it be stunning to see them in the open, with no boundaries? That would be a magnificent sight in my mind. On the other hand, the United States would save thousands of dollars if Madeleine is

able to maintain her sanctuary. The BLM would have fewer and fewer roundups, and the cattle industry would have less conflict over natural resources.

It is fabulous to imagine a place where horses could run safely without the worry of being chased by the BLM. Families would be able to gather and take pleasure in observing the iconic wild mustang. The only drawback, in my mind, is that the BLM would still be rounding up horses inhumanely. Horses would still be auctioned off to naïve horse lovers or potential meat buyers. Helicopters would still fly dangerously close to the horses, who would still risk injury and anxiety.

Due to the flighty nature of these animals, helicopters are inhumane in many ways. When roundups take place, horses desperately try to escape, often scattering across valleys and plains. This causes them to run farther than needed. They face a higher risk of injury and even death. It would be more sensible, for the good of these animals, to use different methods. Instead of helicopters, the BLM could use vehicles or—better yet—round up horses on horseback. Though this may be more costly and time-consuming, fewer horses would be harmed.

I can just imagine the hot sun beating down as the horses run for their lives. It seems particularly inhumane when helicopters are only about ten feet away from the horses being chased. Foals become separated from their mothers, unable to keep up the pace. And these are not horses the BLM personally chooses; instead, helicopter pilots choose—getting paid by how many head they capture. This includes old horses, pregnant mares, and young foals.

This competition has really expanded my views on the horse industry, and I have truly enjoyed this experience! I'm amazed at how horses in general are treated so unkindly. Of all animals, I think horses have some of the hardest lives, and it would be a wonderful change if people started thinking about these creatures' emotions. Just think about all they've done for us, and in turn we dump them into auction houses—where they could go anywhere: the child's bratty, chubby pony; the thoroughbred hot off the track; the level-four dressage champion. If people could just open their eyes, that alone would change the equestrian world. If horses weren't bred excessively, then more would live long, happy lives and fewer would be sold for meat. Mustangs are the same way. Instead of putting all their energy into rounding up equines so savagely, the BLM could invest in gelding some stallions or using contraceptives for mares. Mustangs shouldn't vanish completely from the wild—just be controlled. The BLM should also be more careful about whom they sell horses to. Adoption prices begin at only \$125. A horse lover with little or no experience could get caught up in the moment and buy one of these wild, untamed creatures. They may become too overwhelmed with the responsibility, with no other choice than to sell it at auction. Meat buyers could take interest in this cheap price of horseflesh and “adopt” a stallion or mare. The BLM should either raise adoption prices or interview possible owners. History doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes—and I would hate to see the 1920s recur.

This writing competition has really got me motivated to help horses and to put my ideas down on paper. I would definitely do this again in the future and tell people about Voice For The Horse and its cause. It has really inspired me to write, and this competition has been a great opportunity to discuss the threats our horses—wild and domestic—are facing.

The Wild Ponies Of Chincoteague

Olivia Pero

Age 8



History:

Once a year the fire department from the island of Chincoteague goes over to Assateague Island, where wild ponies roam the beaches. Boats round up some ponies and swim them across the bay to Chincoteague. Then they have a day called Pony Penning Day, where each pony is put up for auction and whoever bids the most gets the pony. Ponies that don't get sold are taken back to Assateague.

How They Might Have Gotten to the Island:

Some people believe the ponies got to the island because of a Spanish galleon. Long ago a Spanish galleon sailed the seas with ponies on board. The ship sailed into a rough storm. One stallion didn't like the storm and started pawing the deck. It sounded louder than thunder. He hit the deck so hard the ship broke! The ponies broke free and jumped out. Some found Assateague; others never made it. That's how some people think they got there.

Ginger and Spots:

"Wake up!" said Ginger.

"What?" said Spots.

"Today is Pony Penning Day," said Ginger.

"Oh no," whinnied Spots. "I don't want to be sold! I want to stay on my little island home."

"You don't?" said Ginger. "You don't want to come to Chincoteague?"

"Well, it would be nice to go there and have an owner, but I would never see you again," neighed Spots.

"Yeah... well, let's play before those firemen get here," said Ginger.

So the two good friends ran around the island to all their favorite places. They ran into the water, splashing up to their withers. They played for so long, and suddenly they heard the motor of a boat.

"The fire department," whinnied Ginger.

"Should we go?" said Spots.

"Oh... um," said Ginger.

"Yes!" said Spots. "Come on!"

The two of them ran out to the boats and swam with the herd to Chincoteague.

As Ginger and Spots hit the shore, they heard the roar of the crowd—about 40,000 people. The herd of wild ponies was split into corrals. Little foals were separated from their mothers. It was a terrible sight to see, but people didn't mind much. Ginger and Spots were lucky—they were not split up. They squeezed between stallions and mares. Ginger inched closer to Spots as they made their way to a cozy spot in the middle of some white-and-brown ponies. They relaxed, and before they knew it they both fell asleep like foals.

The next day, they awoke in the crowd of horses with people surrounding the pen.

"Hey, Spots!" said Ginger, looking scared and happy at the same time. "You... you have a rope around your neck."

"What?" said Spots.

"Yes," whinnied Ginger.

"You do too, Ginger," said a pony behind them. "I saw both of you get sold together. It looks like you got a pretty nice man for an owner."

"We did!" neighed Spots.

"Yup," said the pony.

"It's going to be great!" said Ginger.

A fireman came over with a man and let Ginger and Spots out.

"Are these the ponies, sir?" asked the fireman.

"Yes," said the man.

The fireman led the two ponies out of the crowded pen. They walked over green grass until they reached the man's trailer. The trailer smelled of fresh hay. They ate the hay in celebration that they would be together. They passed many pony ranches and trailers, passed plains with many colored flowers, and finally pulled into the man's driveway. He had a big pasture for them and for a filly. The man led them into the pasture. Ginger and Spots ate more grass and hay with the filly.

"Aren't you glad we can be together?" asked Spots.

"Sure, I am," said Ginger, munching some grass.

"Good night," said Spots.

"Good night," said the filly.

Ginger and Spots looked at each other in shock.

"Good night," said Ginger and Spots. They had not heard a word from the filly the whole time they were with her.

The Miracle Of Horses

Annika Maulucci

Age 11



I can still clearly remember the first time I saw a horse. I was surprised, happy, and in awe all at the same time. I had only seen them in movies, and I almost expected the real thing to be nothing like Spirit or Rain. I was surprised at their size and gentleness, happy that a creature so majestic could really exist and wasn't just in my storybooks, and in awe of their beauty. It didn't matter that the first horse I saw was not a Lipizzaner or Friesian—just being near a horse was enough to fill me with a kind of happiness I had never felt before. I reached out to feel its thick hair and smell its dusty coat. It was not for a long time, but it will stay with me forever.

It was that moment that made me who I am today: I am a rider. People may think I'm weird for going to the barn just to groom horses and muck stalls. I can't picture anything more enjoyable than spending time with and learning about horses. After many years of staring at horses, you begin to learn how they communicate, and you learn how to communicate with them in their language. For example, when a horse begins to blink a lot it means they are taking in something you or another horse has taught them. A low nicker may mean a happy hello—or a happy hello to the treat you have.

Although I have not yet mastered a nicker and the horse I ride can't speak English, we still communicate with each other. We have created a language that only we can understand—a compromise between two completely different worlds. This is a language based on praise. If he does what I ask, I praise him by giving him a treat or scratching him on the neck. I think he communicates with me by using his body language. For example, if he walks over to me and blows gently through his nostrils, he is saying, "Hi." It is nice to be able to tell someone all my problems and know that he will understand and not tell anyone.

Wild horses live free. They are constantly moving and never live in one place for too long. They are nomadic. Domestic horses stay in one place. They don't move around because they don't run free. I don't know if domestic horses like staying in one place, but I'm sure they like that they are safe there. I like the similarity and feeling of safety in being at home—maybe tame horses do too. I think wild horses like the freedom of going where they please. Unfortunately,

people round them up and auction them off because of land-management issues. Then the wild horses become domestic, but just like Spirit, they will always be wild in their hearts.

Wild and domestic horses are the same and different at the same time. Both came from the same beginnings and both want the same things. They want food, shelter, a herd to be with, water, and—most of all—freedom. Freedom doesn't mean being loose and running wild. To me it means having the freedom to make choices and the freedom to be accepted for what they can and can't do. After all, isn't that what we all want? They are different because domestic horses have been tamed to do what people want, and wild horses are free to do what they want. Free or domestic, they both deserve respect.

A horse and a human may seem like two completely different things, but we are the same behind our different bodies. We wouldn't like to be disrespected or used only for our talents until we get old and then discarded. Neither do horses. We wouldn't like to be deprived of the freedom we live for; neither would horses. We are all connected, so when we do something bad to another creature it will come back to us. We may look different, function differently, think differently, and live differently, but behind our differences we are all the same.

Horses have helped us so much over the centuries—bravely leading armies into war, working in underground coal mines tirelessly, and winning blue ribbons at horse shows. They have truly changed our lives. Long ago people relied on horses for their lives and for their families. Even though today they are not as needed, we owe them respect for what they have done for us. We should let them be free; if it were not for them, we wouldn't be able to live free. They have truly earned their freedom.

I think we can help horses by letting them have freedom. Regarding population issues in wild horses, before humans came and ruined their system everything was fine. We can help by making sure every horse is safe, respected, and loved. We can make more laws regarding their well-being. We can help by reminding people that horses have done so much for us, so now it is our turn to give back to them.

Wild horses—what do you think when you hear those words? I think free, wild, herd-bound, and, of course, untamed. Now think of these four things and imagine what wild horses would be without them. We are taking these things away from them when we round them up and auction them off. We are not appreciating these beautiful creatures as much as we should.

To help people appreciate horses more, maybe we could teach them things that show off their intelligence and agility. Maybe we could teach them to help blind people. I think horses could help many people with self-confidence issues, depression, or autism. They could help so many people—and some already do. Specially trained horses help people with autism or people who are handicapped. Horses have the capability and love to help people, and if we give them the chance they could change many lives.

We can learn so much from horses. We can learn responsibility and patience, and we can learn how to love. I've learned so much from horses. They have taught me the joy of finding love and the heartbreak of losing it. They have taught me to forgive and forget and to live every day with everything you have. I hope everyone, at one point in their lives, can experience the healing power of horses. I know they can change many lives as they changed mine.

Becoming friends with horses is what I live for. That friendship is what I rely on to keep me going and to keep me happy. Bringing humans and horses together is a lot like riding a horse. You can try your hardest to ride well, but you will never look good unless you have a partnership. When horses and humans come together as one, great things can happen—some so great they could be called a miracle: the miracle of horses.

The Wild Horse

Naya Lindaboom

Age 10



I'm a wild horse. I am swift and powerful. My long black mane messily sweeps across my brown eyes. My coat is a smooth, chocolatey brown. I am unique because of the white diamond on my forehead. With long, strong legs, I enjoy galloping with my family and eating grass.

I've been feeling gloomy. My mom keeps asking me what's wrong. It's just that all my farm friends have it so much better than me. Like Cow—she gets to relax, chomp grass, and sleep whenever she wants. She is fenced in and gets fed by her owners or farmers. Then there's Sheep—she's so white, fluffy, and beautiful. Lots of people use her wool to make sweaters and jackets. Last but not least is Pig. He's playful and funny and gets to romp in the mud. He can eat just about anything he wants.

My mom says I'm the lucky one. She says they will never know what it's like to run free. They will never know what it's like to see different parts of British Columbia. They will never know what it's like to play and gallop around in the forests of B.C. They will never know what it's like to drink fresh water from the stream. I cherish doing whatever I want, whenever I want.

I guess my life as a wild horse isn't so bad after all.

A Voice For The Horse

Doree-Ann Satermo

Age 15



Mustangs are truly miraculous creatures. Mustangs have the freedom we often long for. For us, it's a far-off dream, buried somewhere in our hearts. True freedom is not just running free, though—it's about the heart, and the freedom of it. A wild horse may be caught and broke, but its heart will always be free. Freedom is having a place you love, and knowing it will always be there in your heart as long as you have this power—this fight. Because that's part of being a horse: they know true freedom.

Mustangs: a representation of the Wild West—courage, love, beauty, strength and, most important, freedom. In 1971, the United States Congress recognized mustangs as “living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West, which continue to contribute to the diversity of life forms within the Nation and enrich the lives of the American people.” A saying of the Old West is, “With every footprint, a hoofprint lay beside it.”

Wild mustangs truly show the beauty of the world. Together, they form a herd to protect each other. The Native Americans tamed and rode this glorious creature, knowing its power. They used mustangs to hunt animals and to travel long distances.

A few hundred free-roaming horses survive in Alberta and British Columbia. Since the 1900s, the mustang population has reduced drastically. Mustangs have been caught for war use, used as domestic horses, and sold for slaughter.

The statute known as the “Wild Horse Annie Act” prohibited the use of motorized vehicles to hunt mustangs and burros. Protection was increased by the “Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.” Today, free-roaming horses are protected under U.S. law but have disappeared from many states where there were once established populations. The feral mustang population in February 2010 was 33,700 horses and 4,700 burros. More than half the mustangs are in Nevada, with other significant populations in Oregon and Wyoming. Another 34,000 horses are in holding facilities. The only true wild horse today is the Przewalski's horse.

The wild horses are rounded up with helicopters and forced to run down any slopes that come their way. Tragically, many pregnant mares lose their foals. The Bureau of Land Management rounds up as many wild horses in a certain area as they think will keep the population under control.

Five-year-old mustangs are dewormed, vaccinated, freeze-branded, and put up for adoption. Ten-year-olds and up are classified as retired and put into government long-term holding centers, while the five- to nine-year-olds are sent back into the wild. Horses deemed “unadoptable” are usually released back into the wild or put in long-term holding centers, and the stallions are gelded and separated from the mares.

Horses are the Wild West. They live, breathe, and love the freedom of it all. Horses are something of a mystery. Sometimes they are hard to figure out; you can’t always understand their nature, and that scares some people—but not me.

That’s really the thrill of it all: the chance you take to be friends with this amazing creature; to feel the connection they can offer you; the freedom they give you as you mount their back and experience something that can only be described as one of the best feelings in the world. When you mount up, that feeling overcomes you and you feel like you can do anything—as long as that horse is by your side.

Mustangs have courage. They protect each other no matter what. When a mustang is caught and broke, he has to have courage to trust his rider to protect him, like his herd would have. When you adopt a horse into your life, that’s what you get: a herd. If a horse feels strongly toward his rider, he will protect that person at any cost. I have heard many stories of real mustangs doing just that—standing up for their owners against another horse who could have trampled them, putting themselves at risk to save a member of their “herd.”

Mustangs give each other comfort and love. They look after one another, making sure no harm comes. It is incredible how much mustangs will love each other. Like any human family, the stallion will protect his family at all costs. They fight so their families can make it. A light within them burns brightly, willing the mustangs to keep going—to keep the freedom they have.

When I saw my first mustangs, I felt captured by their breathtaking beauty. I saw freedom and strength in their eyes, their black coats shining like the night sky. The stallion hung back and just stared at me. Our gazes met, and in that moment I felt peace. I felt sad I wasn’t running off with them, but happy that I was able to see them. I still remember that stallion; I hope all is well with him. I want other mustangs, like them, to always be free and rejoice in their strength and in the freedom they have.

Mustangs need to be protected; a history lies within them—one that might be destroyed if we don’t do something. Foals deserve to grow up wild, the way their ancestors did. They don’t deserve to be captured roughly and cruelly. Their freedom should be rejoiced. It should be recognized, because that is the true Wild West. They don’t belong in slaughterhouses or captured for rodeo use. That is why mustangs should be heard, should be free—and why we have to take time to listen to the mustang.

They have a voice too. We just need to listen.

The Amazing World Of Mustangs

Audrey Feldman

Age 10



I believe we should protect Mustangs and keep them wild because they represent the values that make America great—such as hard work, team effort, and individual responsibility.

Mustangs may be small, but they are sturdy, tough, and fearless. These traits come from hard work. Domestic horses often wait for things to come to them instead of going forward to get what they want. Mustangs, on the other hand, rummage and trudge through treacherous mountains and canyons, only to find a limited amount of their necessities. If Mustangs want or need something, they will work hard for it until they get it. Mustangs never, ever give up.

Now that we know Mustangs are hard-working creatures, we can talk about team effort. A Mustang's so-called "team" is his or her herd. Each herd has a pecking order. Each resembles a "country." The "president" is the lead, dominant stallion who watches over and protects the herd. The "secretary" is an elderly mare who knows where the grass patches and water holes are; she leads the herd to these places and helps keep everything in order. And last—but definitely not least—we have the "citizens." These are the mares and foals in the herd. They help by being there and giving advice. As you can see, everyone has a job to do. There is no such thing as being bored. Mustangs always have something to do to survive. They use hard work to complete these tasks. Even as foals, they are always learning new techniques to survive. Mustangs are always working together.

Even though Mustangs help each other in a herd, they can't just rely on each other. For example, the young stallions in bachelor bands don't rely on other stallions for their needs. Nobody gives Mustangs what they want—or even what they need. They work for what they want, and they earn it. They are responsible for everything they do. For example, if a Mustang goes near a cougar, they will face the consequences of doing that.

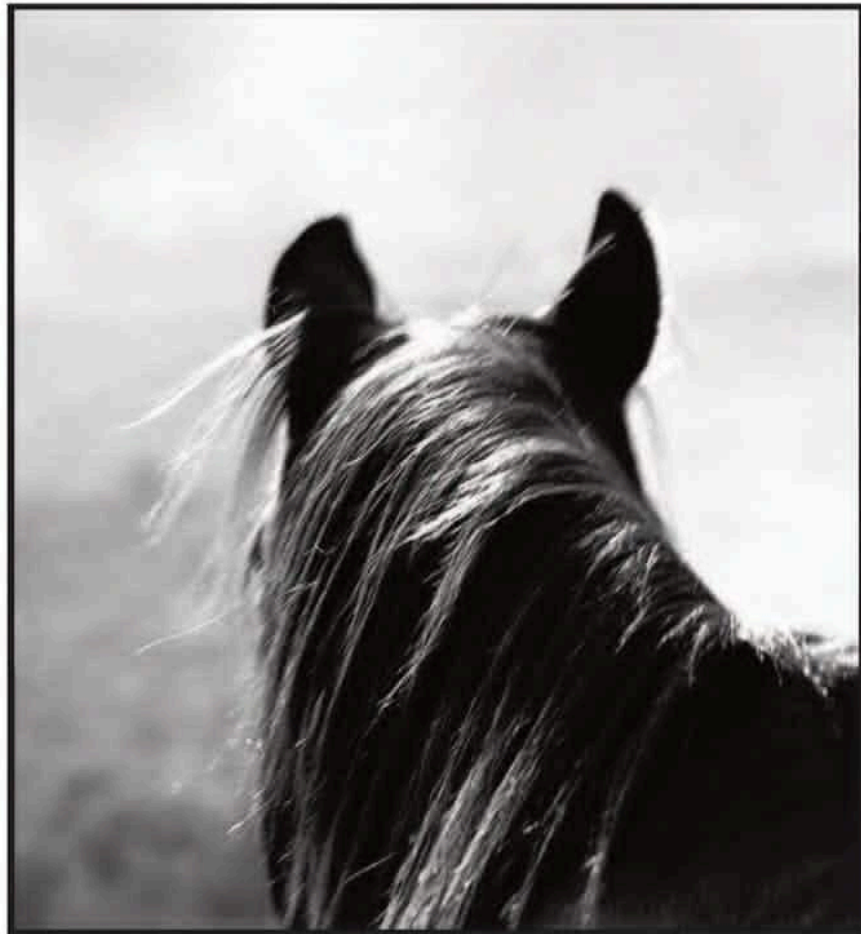
They also have the responsibility of making their own choices. So if they decide to travel alone in winter, they will face the consequences of not having the herd's protection, having a hard time finding food and water, and losing the warmth of the herd—because that was their choice.

I hope I have made my point that Mustangs are great examples of hard work, team effort, and individual responsibility—the values that make America great. I believe we should protect Mustangs and keep them roaming free because they remind us of what is truly important. They inspire us.

A Wild One

Melanie Asselin

Age 13



For as long as I can remember, the borders of my math notebooks have been covered in endless doodles and replays of my too-good-to-be-true daydreams of an equestrian life: a stick-figure rider holding a massive World Equestrian Games trophy while leading a sleek, elegant sport horse by the bridle, for one. In school I constantly exceed expectations, but still—it is no place for me. Long summer days and gone-too-soon weekends are spent in the stables—feeding, cleaning, grooming—and then, finally, well-earned time in the saddle. That feeling as the earth rushes away from me, as my hair whips in the wind, as his hoofbeats ring in my ears, as his heartbeat pulses gently against my palm—singing to me softly, as mine to him—until we become one energy, one force to be reckoned with. This is the moment I experience first-hand the power of the horse—the beasts that helped make us, as citizens of North America, who we are today.

Equus caballus. Wild horses. Feral beasts. Mustangs—call us what you wish; they are merely names, labels even. When it comes to something as pure and invariable as we are, there is much more than meets the eye. We are found in North America along the foothills, grasslands, and semi-desert regions of the western United States, as well as specific sections of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in British Columbia and Alberta of western Canada. This is our home—where we thrive—grazing, raising our young, running free as a herd family. This is where we truly belong.

We are the mustangs, after all, known as “America’s horse,” since this country was built on the backs of our ancestors. They’ve passed on, but they remain a vital part of American history. Our ancestors were

brought to North America many moons ago in the early 1500s by Spanish explorers. Some escaped in hopes of running free on the range—breeding diverse herds and traveling nomadically together as a family for generations to come. They dreamed of a legacy so great it would gallop through the thoughts of North America each day for as long as our flags may wave. It's a legacy we should always have—not a legacy “left behind” in remembrance like Michael Jackson's or Thomas Edison's, but a living legacy: a celebration of a phenomenal, ongoing reality.

Past and present North American mustangs have exceeded expectations, helping make our nation what it is today, earning their reputation as citizens. But we fear for the future. Plain and simple, we fear future generations won't be around to see it.

The wild mustangs have struggled and are very responsible for what our beautiful continent is today. One struggle our ancestors endured was the battle for rights. The proper definition of a *right* is “a moral, ethical, or legal principle considered as an underlying cause of truth, justice, or morality.” Our ancestors fought tremendously hard for the rights of minors—Blacks, Asians, women, and children—to be equal with Whites. That meant everyone, no matter what race or nationality, would be treated with respect. Laws have been passed and rules enforced, but those days are not entirely behind us.

Although not human, the wild mustangs of North America deserve rights and respect.

Although unrecognized and ignored by many, the mustangs are in great need. The American Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has managed public lands for a long time, but more recently its methods are being questioned, particularly concerning mustangs. When mustangs repopulated and recovered from excessive sport hunting years ago, they began to wander close to cattle and sheep on public grazing lands. The land was not enough to sustain the ever-growing horse population, and something had to be done. Providing more land was not an option, as most was already designated for other purposes, and it was figured that if land were set aside for mustangs it would soon be crowded again. The “reasonable” option chosen was to control the population and keep it at a steady, manageable number—and so the roundups began. Targeted herds were chased from the mountains to flatter ground to be captured and roped by people in pickups, then transported to one of two places: the already crowded adoption center, or the slaughterhouse.

The methods “worked”—herd numbers were brought down—but the problems didn't end. People across the nation were blind to the situation, eyes closed to the harsh brutality behind slaughterhouse doors and to dangerously declining populations and habitat. The BLM took it too far. Over-management should not be overlooked. Attempts to gain respect for our beautiful mustangs have been made, but not pressed, not enforced.

These horses should not have to endure pain and struggle while they wait for us humans, as the authority figures, to overcome our laziness and do something. Many are unaware; many who learn the truth are infuriated—disgusted—at the lack of justice toward life forms different from our own. When our selfish needs for “more” and “mine” blind us to the raw beauty of nature and the dire need to preserve it, we develop a cruel problem. We begin to kill. And we fear that the future may be very different in the West. On the path they're on now, the mustangs won't live to continue their legacy—a path toward extinction.

As a rider, I know the main purpose of reins is to steer. In the bigger picture, we humans can use our “reins” to guide these horses to a better path—one that leads to a brighter future. To achieve this, we must always keep the well-being of these horses as the first priority. The two most important things in a horse's mind are family and freedom. So: do not let anyone destroy their families, under any circumstances. And let them run.

They have the potential to be independent, but as we keep changing and limiting their environment, they lose some of that potential. They just need a little help to get it back. I thought of ROAP: Research, Observation, Awareness, and Protection. With this, you get real results. Get to know these horses—not personally, but scientifically. Study their patterns and behaviour. Get in touch with universities and observation labs. Get answers, and maybe we can change the future for these horses. In riding, a little touch is all it takes—and here, all you need is a little hope and a little bit of ROAP.

Whispers On The Wind

Hailey Goodkey

Age 11



PROLOGUE

We are travellers. From dawn to dusk we are moving, like a peaceful river—always flowing and ever-changing. Take my word for it: being a wild creature, a wild mustang, has been a challenge since the first wild horse set foot on this earth. I don't think people were ready for what we had to bring to them.

I am Eurachi, the lead female of the Wind Whisp herd—a banded herd of mustangs forced together by development in neighbouring areas by the human habitat. We also get the horses they abandon, while they work on ways to destroy my mate Beuroki's herd. The Wind Whisp herd is slowly vanishing from what was once a paradise in the Wyoming backcountry. Now that our herd is diminishing, we have nothing left to live for but the hope that one human may have the decency to give us back the land we once thrived upon... and our freedom.

CHAPTER 1 — CONSTRUCTION

"No, Bobynn, the other way!" shouted my father as we set down the table in the construction tent. I'm Bobynn, as you already know, and I am 12 years old. My father is the construction boss for this big (sorry—that was an understatement) huge landscaping job on the eastern end of the valley. It's weird, though—this section of land (1,000 acres) is completely isolated from any other people (except for the construction crew), and we keep waking up with horse prints all around the equipment, tents, vehicles—you know, just everywhere. Anyways—uh, oh! Here comes Dad! I'd better get going. My dad does not like it when I write about his work.

CHAPTER 2 — THE HOLLOW

“Enough!”

Beuroki’s rumbling whinny echoed throughout the large forest hollow as thunder does off the rocks. He stood on the knoll in the centre of the hollow with our daughter, Cassityra, standing tall and proud beside him. This was her leader ceremony, where she would take on the full responsibility of all the leader’s duties. Her mate, Shikqui, stood proudly, his gaze lifted to shine on Cassityra’s face. “Now,” Beuroki boomed, “that we have silenced our tongues, let us start what we gathered here for.” Cassityra took four steps forward to stand at her father’s shoulder. She was the tallest mare in the herd at 16 hands, but still two hands shorter than her father.

At that exact moment there was a loud, crunching sound. All the horses’ heads turned simultaneously toward the darkness where the sound came from. Then—as if sent by the devil himself—a beast moved over and through the trees and into the forest hollow. All the horses made a one-pivot about-turn, like a barrel racer, and streamed out of the hollow onto the moorland.

The beast stopped, made a harsh, penetrating noise, and a shape appeared, moving along the top of it. It seemed to return to the beast and then left—its raging sounds slowly diminishing in the distance. One by one, the mustangs slowly found the courage to walk back to the hollow.

The beast had shredded and torn up the land. Cassityra stood at the bottom of the knoll, her head to the ground as though she were grazing. Beuroki stood on top of the knoll. Rage and anger blazed in his eyes. “My herd, we will go to their home and destroy everything in it. Let’s see how they appreciate that!”

The herd’s whinnies and snorts were enough to knock a flower’s petals off.

CHAPTER 3 — BAD NEWS

“Bobyynn, wake up!”

My father shouted, pulling the warm blankets off my bed in an attempt to wake me. I looked up through tired eyes to see my father speaking through gritted teeth. As I climbed out of bed, he stormed out of my tent, letting a gust of cold, frosty air into the heated canvas. I slipped on my thick wool sweater, long johns, sweatpants, and boots. My hat was in the truck, so I had to run across the site wearing my “outfit,” hoping not to get seen by the crew. Once I got my hat, I dashed back to my tent only to find my father sitting on my bed, twiddling his thumbs. I feared the worst had happened and we could no longer go through with the construction job.

“Bobyynn, there’s... there’s something I need to tell you,” he said, keeping his gaze on my carpet. I sat down cautiously on my pile of dirty clothes at the end of my bed. As soon as I did, he looked at me with troubled brown eyes, deep with emotion—like a whirlpool sucking up ships on troubled water. “There’s a herd of wild horses running loose around here, which could hurt our chance at completing the project,” he said with great worry, dropping his gaze again.

“Well, then let’s track them down and get them out of here!” I said dryly.

He still didn't reply or lift his stare to my own. Frustrated, I stepped outside my tent only to see Darek scrambling through the mud toward me. "Bobyynn, go back inside the tent—quickly!" Suddenly, a noise and tremor as great as an earthquake shook the ground, as if all of our machinery was working in the same spot at once. By the time my eyes caught up with my whirling mind, all I could do was scream a bleak, faint "Help!" I turned and fled for my life. An ocean of black, brown, bay, grey, and roan rolled over the hill, hurling down the slope like a tsunami wave crashing to the shore. "God, that was close."

CHAPTER 4 — WHAT ARE WE DOING?

"We're nearly there!" Beuroki's nicker sounded above the pounding of hooves. I pushed down hard as I came to his shoulder. "Beuroki," I said, trying to keep the fear from edging into my voice, "why are we attacking them? Someone will be captured, hurt, or even killed by the humans. What about their beasts? We should try to make peace!"

My voice was drowned out by our hooves pounding the ground. Unexpectedly, Cassityra and Shikqui bolted past us and kept going for another twenty feet before they stopped dead in their tracks. The rest of the herd nearly dominoed over each other as they skidded to a halt behind the pair.

"We're here, Father!" Cassityra said with a hint of wrath as she blew a quick snort.

The hollow was filled with mud, humans, and the strange, sour-smelling beasts that had attacked their forest and land. There was a silence in the air and I felt Beuroki's shoulder muscles tense and flex with every heated, hyperventilated breath.

A shadow started moving behind one of the sour-smelling beasts. I moved forward cautiously, one hesitant step at a time. Aware of the herd moving in behind me, I quickly moved to intercept whatever was lurking. It was a human! I whirled, sending a spray of mud from my hinged-like turn, and sprang back toward the herd. With my ears back, nostrils flaring, they got the message and turned to advance to the hills.

CHAPTER 5 — HELP!!!!

"Noooooooooooooooo!"

My voice echoed through the night. I sat up faster than the "no" that came out of my mouth, and it gave me a head rush. Grabbing my blanket and peeling it off my sweating body, I scrambled to get my clothes that were set in order at the foot of my bed—but were now tousled up in my saturated blankets. I ran outside.

The workers were busy as bees, as always, and as required by my father. The mud tugged at my boots; each step was a suctioned fight. I hauled myself out to where my terrifying dream had occurred. It was like *déjà vu*—the familiar crisp air, the sour smell of the machinery, the dim, misty dawn light. There were only boot prints in the muck, not horse prints. I looked up the hill in the direction they had retreated and wondered: had my dream been real?

CHAPTER 6 — WAS IT REAL?

My eyes squinted against the sunrise. I gave my body a shimmer-shake from front to back to lighten the load of dew on my coat. The yelp of terror still rang in my mind as I lifted my head to gaze upon the hill that we had galloped over the night before. Or had we? I wondered—**had my dream been real?**

CHAPTER 7 — PREPARING

My plan was going into action that night. I was going to sabotage the equipment that was destroying the horses' home. First, I did a little online research and discovered that sugar will wreck the engines. So, I would pour ten pounds into each engine—one per night. Then I would put water in the oil. That would kill them for sure! Maybe even let air out of the tires or clip the communications. Yes. So that is it—my recipe for disaster. Now to get the ingredients. Thank goodness for my grade 6 teacher's math lessons—I will be able to calculate exactly what I need...

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My plan was going into action that night. I was going to sabotage the sour-smelling beasts from destroying our home. First, I would sneak in and kick at their bright eyes, then at the holey faces, and finally I would bite and pull at the black veins that keep their fiery hearts working. Yes—my recipe for devastation. Now to navigate my path and figure out how to get past my mate and the others in the herd. Thank God we've been taught how to out-think the mountain lions—I can creep and hide my way. Now to plan the time...

CHAPTER 8 — BIG TROUBLE

Ok, here goes nothing. I am going to save that herd any way necessary. My water bottles are almost empty, so that takes care of the oil for one night. And the sugar is being prepared for the engines. I'm also thinking about taking a few bolts out of the machines. Uh-oh! Dad's coming—and he has an empty water bottle! Oh, trouble—big time!

Ok, here goes nothing. I am going to save the herd any way necessary. Once the ceremony is over, I will execute my plan...

CHAPTER 9 — FINALLY

"Cassityra," Beuroki called, his gaze resting on our daughter's rosy palomino coat. Shikqui escorted her from the back of the herd. All the horses backed up with Andalusian grandeur, their heads partially bowed and necks arched with approval, and parted to let her through.

She looked radiant—gallant, even. The moon blossoms glowed blue in her forelock, mane, and tail. Against her coat they looked like morning dew drops glowing shades of iridescent scarlet-blue. At the bottom of the knoll, Shikqui stopped and watched as Cassityra proceeded up the small hill and stopped in front of her father. She bowed her head, and Beuroki lifted his right front foot and rested it between her ears.

“Cassityra,” he began, “do you promise, before the stars of our ancestors above, to listen and remember the rules with which to lead your herd with wisdom?”

“I will,” she exclaimed proudly, without hesitation.

“Then by my choice and your mother’s, I give you the full leadership of the herd, with Shikqui by your side.”

“Cassityra, Cassityra,” the herd cheered.

She bowed her head and Shikqui marched up the knoll and bowed to her. The herd behind him each did the same. She was now the leader. She was finally the leader!

CHAPTER 10 — DONE DEAL

My plan is finally done! My dad was talking to his boss, and he said they can’t go through with the job until new equipment and machines come in next year. I have saved the mustangs. And I am going to tell the conservation officer so they can relocate the herd or protect the land. They are finally at peace. And so am I.

I still secretly sneak out every night and bring them feed. I love them. Four of them I have named. Beuroki, which I believe is the grandsire. Eurachi (granddam and his mate). Shikqui, and my favourite Cassityra. I think she is now looking like the leader, and I guess I will have to wait and see. I will never forget what I did for that mustang herd—and what they did for me. And to this day, I believe that on those crisp, misty nights I can still hear their whinnies on the wind...

...The wind is still and quiet once again, free to carry our voices. I still believe that one of those shapes was a helpful human. I feel it in me—spiritually—like we had a connection, an unspoken language of our own. We are now at peace once again.

As first-place winner in this competition, Matthew McCormack was awarded a visit to the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros (ISPMB).

Visit To The ISPMB

By Matthew McCormack



My trip to the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros (ISPMB) in Lantry, SD, was absolutely incredible. I shared this unique and extraordinary horse adventure with my sister, Molly, from July 6-10, 2012. We cherished every moment at the nation's oldest wild-horse-and-burro organization, founded in 1960.

The president of the ISPMB, Karen Sussman, picked Molly and me up at the airport in Rapid City, SD. As we rode in the pickup truck for two and a half hours to the ranch, we saw the rolling hills and plains of South Dakota. We also talked and shared laughs along the way.

As the three of us drove on the dirt road leading into the ranch, we saw magnificent herds of wild horses. Shortly after settling into Karen's ranch home with our suitcases, it was time for Molly and me to get outside and embrace the wild horses. Not only was Karen welcoming but so were her staff and volunteers. The organization has three employees and two volunteers. The people at the ISPMB are very passionate about improving the lives of wild horses and burros.

Gina and Kirsten, the two volunteers at the sanctuary, shared many stories with Molly and me about their backgrounds and how they became interested in wild horses. Gina is from Austria, and Kirsten is from Germany.

There is never a dull moment at the ISPMB. Most of the day involves taking care of the more than 400 horses that roam on 680 acres. I saw, for instance, a young stud trying to breed with another horse after getting out of his pen. Another horse accidentally got his leg caught in a gate. Each time, however, Karen and the volunteers handled the situation calmly and efficiently.

On the trip, I fell in love with a foal that is part of the Virginia Range herd. Around the end of June, a colt was born with sepsis. Neither Karen nor the veterinarian with whom she consults was sure why the foal was born with this disease. As a result of sepsis, which affects the joints, the little one could not stand. He had a knot about the size of a tennis ball on each of his two back legs near the hooves. Every hour this baby needed to be fed milk because he could not stand to nurse from his mom. So every hour, either Gina or Kirsten would walk down to the barn to provide the foal with milk. I, along with Molly, Karen, and the two volunteers, exercised and massaged his muscles. This little one may or may not survive; Karen was not sure what kind of a chance the boy had for survival.

You might be thinking, “*What is the colt’s name?*” Usually the nonprofit does not name a newborn if there is a chance the animal may not survive. The organization does not want to become too attached to a sick newborn. However, Molly and I had the honor of naming the colt. Throughout our stay at the ranch, Molly and I thought of names and searched the web for one that would fit the brown-colored horse.

The two of us selected the name Hoof Prince Chance.

We picked “*Hoof*” because all of us wanted his back legs and hooves to improve so he could stand and walk.

We chose “*Prince*” because the little one deserves to be treated royally, as he was being treated.

We chose “*Chance*” because we hoped the colt would have a strong chance for survival.

We called the little boy “Chance” for short.

Gina and Kirsten later added another name, and his full name became Hoof Prince Chance Thunderheart. We all became very close to this precious newborn.

One night after dinner, I read my winning equine essay to Karen, Gina, Kirsten, and Molly. Prior to reading my essay, I shared my background and how I became interested in horses. Afterwards, the five of us discussed wild horses and burros, their future, and how the organization will continue to improve the lives of these iconic animals. For example, the ISPMB will continue trying to end the use of helicopter roundups by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

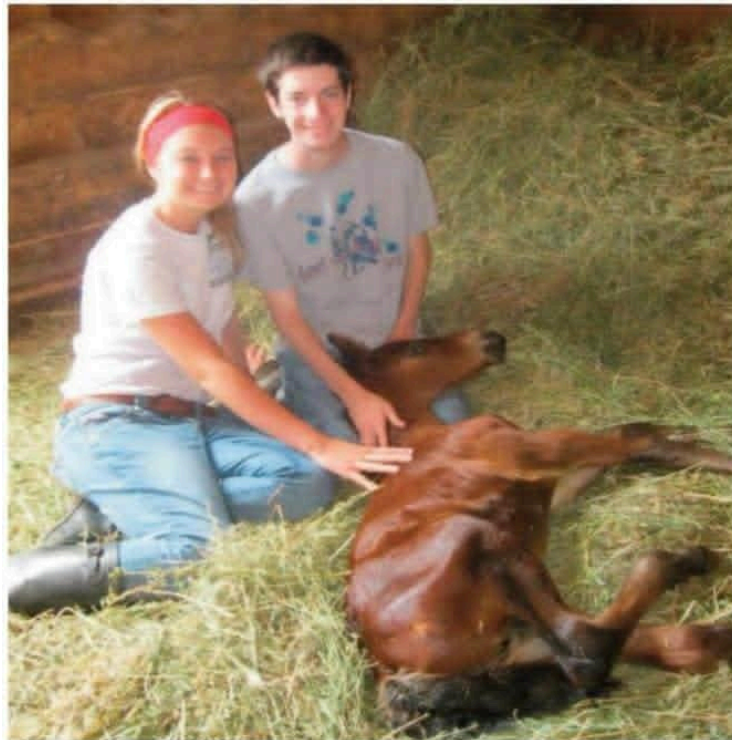
Learning about wild horses and burros—and actually seeing these majestic symbols of American heritage—was very moving. There are a total of four herds at the ISPMB. Of the herds that Molly and I viewed with Karen, I especially treasured the rare Spanish Gila herd. This group of wild horses exists nowhere else in the United States. Learning about the backgrounds of the various herds and how they came to the ISPMB was engrossing. The Spanish Gila horses were rescued from slaughter. I asked Karen how herds such as the Gila herd are transported to the ranch. She said the horses are moved in tractor-trailers, and the ISPMB tries to keep the bands (families) together during transport. A massive wild-horse herd can contain hundreds of horses, typically 60 percent mares and 40 percent stallions. Within one herd there are many bands—usually three to five horses in each band.

During our time in the field with the Spanish horses, Molly and I got to be inches away from this herd. Karen drove us in the pickup truck to this remarkable group, and the horses came right up to the window. We also got out of the vehicle and walked among the animals. Lots of cute foals were prancing around and enjoying life. Wild horses are constantly on the move; they don’t stay in one spot for long. Horses are also very aware of their surroundings. Since they are prey animals, they must stay alert for predators. When Karen, Molly, and I were in the field observing the Spanish horses, we saw the horses’ ears turn forward, pointing at something in the distance. It turned out a four-wheeler was traveling on a dirt road a mile away. Horses spot things much sooner than humans—just as the Spanish Gila horses spotted the four-wheeler much sooner than Karen, Molly, and I.

When Karen, my sister, and I returned to the Gila herd a second time, Gina and Kirsten joined us. The sun was beginning to set. The horses were by the pond, drinking. Karen said many photographs are taken by the pond with the animals—she was right. As soon as I got out of the

pickup truck, I grabbed my camera and started snapping pictures. The five of us absorbed the moment as the horses drank; we saw glowing reflections on the water's surface from the herd. Later that night, Karen, Gina, Kirsten, Molly, and I returned to the pasture of the Gila herd to stargaze. We spotted the Big Dipper and other constellations. Every now and then, the Gila horses would whinny in the distance under the night sky.

In closing, Molly and I had an unforgettable time at the International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros. We were so impressed by the staff and volunteers who work so hard to care for the animals. Karen and everyone involved with the ISPMB truly want to improve the lives of all wild horses and burros. They aim to stop the Bureau of Land Management from destroying these priceless symbols of the American West. The ISPMB is a model for positive change that the world can look to. Together, people can take a strong stand to change how the BLM treats wild horses and burros. These animals simply want to live naturally, uninterrupted. When more people recognize this simple longing, we will be that much closer to keeping wild horses and burros forever running free.



First-place winner Matthew McCormack and his sister Molly share a quiet moment with the newborn foal "Hoof Prince Chance" at the ISPMB sanctuary, July 2012.

Voice For The Horse Mascots: Angel & Mischief

“Some horses carry our stories, a few carry our hearts — and the rare ones carry the wild freedom of their ancestors.”

From the beginning, Voice for the Horse has been guided by something deeper than a slogan — the quiet, enduring voice of the horse itself.

That voice came alive in two unforgettable equine ambassadors: Angel and Mischief.

They were not simply mascots.

Angel carried the calm strength of her ancestors, as if the old stories of wild horses still moved in her breath.

Mischief — the spirited bay gelding later known as Chief — brought a playful spark that lit up parades and often caught the attention of the children as I rode him along the road in front of the school and the little church across from the farm where he and Angel lived.

Many times the children would come to the fence to pet him, and he would toss his head with that bright-eyed look that seemed to say, *“You matter.”*

Together they gave our work a living heartbeat — the bonded, inspired voice of the horse that still guides this society. In the pages that follow, you’ll meet them in their own stories:

In the pages ahead, you’ll meet them in their own words — one carrying the memory of the wild herds, the other carrying a quiet message of belonging that still echoes today.

Angel — *Standing in the Tracks of My Ancestors*

Mischief — *The Horse Who Said “You Matter”*

We honour these two horses for the way they carried our message — that when a horse and a human meet with respect, something timeless speaks through them both.



“Side by side they carried a courage that was soft at the edges — their strength matched only by their kindness.”

Angel — *Standing In The Tracks of My Ancestors*

“I stand in the tracks of my ancestors.” — Angel



I was born in the month of June 2007 in the province of Manitoba, Canada. It was fascinating to see this world around me after coming from the security and safety of my mother's womb.

As I peered around, even before getting up, I noticed others like me — wobbly on our legs but spirited in our hearts. It wasn't long before we were standing by our mothers' sides, nursing for the very first time.

We played, kicked, and ran circles around our moms, who would from time to time say *enough is enough* and, with their firm language, keep us close to their sides in quietness. That was always a good opportunity for

more nourishment and, without choice, what often befell — a nice siesta — and then, once our energy was rejuvenated, we would do it all over again.

In my first days I came to know what is called a human. Sometimes they came into our space to check us over, and if one of us was in the way, we'd get a heavy shove on the rump. Why wouldn't they play with us? Sometimes their voices were gruff, not at all friendly as I had hoped, but these occasions were few and far between.

Most days were filled with playtime and the joy of the wide green fields.

Then one day many people came into our field. My friends and I tried to run as far as we could from them but could not escape their tactics as they pushed us into a small confined area. With fear, many of us babies cried for our moms. Where were they when we needed them most?

I was only four months old and didn't want to be without her. I soon felt the pressure of my friends pushing against me and, having no choice but to move forward, I found myself in a place that was very small and tight. There was no room to move around and all of us babies were left to stand side by side when we suddenly felt the energy of movement beneath us.

We called for our mothers as they called for us, but soon we heard them only from a distance — and for the very last time... except in our dreams.

This new space we were pushed into was not nice. We had fences around us now and no longer the lush green grasses of the fields we were raised on. I craved my mom's warm milk, but none was ever to be offered again. Our days turned into just this: time that simply passed. We were given plenty of food but had no place to burn it off. Most of us grew chubby, as happens when horses are put on feedlots.

After what felt like a lifetime, we were loaded again into this tight foreign box and taken away. There was so much noise in this new place. One by one we were separated from our own little herd. I sensed something terribly wrong and soon came to understand we were going to be taken away forever — from each other and, for many of us, more was about to be taken away... our lives.

During this time some people would come through and look at us. Why were we so captivating to them?

Once again I was separated from my last few herd-mates, but lucky for me, one was able to come along. The person who took us away did not show the harshness we had experienced before and even spoke with a soft voice. I found this comforting, as did my friend. We stayed close together and were not separated again — at least not for a while.

Then on a cold day in January 2008 I was put in this travelling box and once again felt the familiar movement beneath me. I called endlessly for my friend as he called for me, but inevitably our voices were lost in the wind.

I felt very alone this time but comforted by the fact that I had others of my kind close beside me. After about four days the doors were opened and I was invited to step out. The voices of these new people were soft and kind. With little resistance I followed one of my new herd-mates and we were soon introduced to some other young horses like us. They were friendly — I wasn't used to such happy mates but adjusted easily.

The people started calling me "*Fatty Patty*," which made them laugh.

On a warm spring day in March, only two months after joining this new young herd, my caretaker came at her usual time to feed us lunch. Two of us had been naughty little horses and had broken into the barn (most often you'll hear of horses breaking out of barns, but not us — we lived outdoors 24/7 and only came in for snacks!). We weren't really in trouble; in fact they laughed at us.

We happily ran into our designated stalls knowing our tasty kibbles-and-bits were on the way.

Not only did the feed arrive, but so did a girl with a soft voice. She quietly put horsey treats into my bucket and invited me to eat them. This was new to me. I wasn't sure about having her so close, but she offered such tasty snacks that she couldn't be all bad. Then she began to touch me. My hind end came up in fear — was she going to hurt me? Her touch was gentle, but I wasn't used to being handled except when being pushed around.

She didn't give up. When she moved slowly to the left side of my body I became confused. I wanted to run away but there was nowhere to go, just small circles in this little stall. I could smell a soft scent on her which comforted me. Her voice stayed firm yet soft, and in minutes she was touching me lightly on my left shoulder — and somehow that seemed okay.

I heard her whisper a new name to me: Angel. I felt safe and at ease and even drifted into a light sleep.

The next day the girl returned. I remembered her and was almost happy to see her. Soon another person came in. This new energy was different but still soft. I felt apprehensive but soon sensed his gentleness. I began to invite his touch. Together they worked with me, using soft voices and natural herbal scents that calmed me.

They tried to slip something over my head — a leather halter — and though I resisted at first, I finally let go of my fears. I realized not all people were the same. These two were special. They understood me and helped me feel safe in this world since I had been taken away from my mother so long ago.

This routine continued for weeks. I began to look forward to their visits, enjoying the lessons they taught me. One day a kind woman came to trim my feet — thanks to the girl's patient practice with me, it was no big deal.

The gentle man often bathed me with warm water to wash off the mud I loved to roll in. We became close — I leaned into him, trusting him to keep me safe, though I learned not to lean too heavily.

I might have been pint-sized then, but as a Percheron-cross foal I wouldn't stay that way for long.

My life became beautiful. I knew they would one day place a saddle on my back, and I was happy for them to do so. My trust in them had grown so deep that I gave them all of my heart. I knew what they had done for me, and I knew the sad road the others from my birth herd had travelled — the unlucky ones without the colouring and conformation I was born with.

I was a PMU foal born to a PMU mare. I hope that one day my mother will be set free from the life she has endured — not just in raising me but all the other foals she has carried to

produce Premarin for the pharmaceutical industry. I know I was only a by-product of that industry, but by chance I was found by an angel... and then passed on to another Angel, who called me her Angel.

Through my young eyes, heart, and mind I have learned that I do have a purpose in this world. I once lost the will to live after all I had endured, but I now see it is possible to overcome great challenges. I have an even greater appreciation for life than before. Knowing that I am loved again shows me that we all have the capacity to love more — whether for man or beast.



Angel with Yvonne riding the Rotary Trails along the Vedder River, Chilliwack BC — a quiet summer evening, 2022.

Photo © Voice for the Horse Archives

Mischief — *The Horse Who Said “You Matter”*

“A rough beginning cannot quiet the heart of a horse who still believes in gentle hands.” — Mischief



January 2009 — My name is Mischief (formerly known as *Little Chief* in my younger days), and I was born, like Angel, in the month of June — just one year later. At the time of this writing I am nine months old.

I’m not here to compete with Angel — she would win that contest, hooves down — but I do have things to tell you, if you’d like to listen.

Like Angel, I am a PMU foal, bred as a by-product of the pharmaceutical industry to produce a drug called Premarin — estrogen derived from my pregnant mother’s urine for hormone-replacement therapy in women.

When I was separated from my mom I was taken to an auction, just as Angel was. What I found heartbreaking about that place was that many of my friends and playmates were not chosen as I was to be taken to a new home. They were left behind for reasons I still don’t understand. People seemed to be struggling to care for their horses, and there was no longer a demand for yearlings like the bunch I came in with.

I consider myself lucky, but I’m saddened for the others who were probably auctioned off and will never know the kind of life they could have had: serving, bonding, and sharing their days with someone who cared for them.

I also know there is much debate over what to do with so many of my kind who cannot be sustained. This is a difficult question, but for me I can only live in the moment and hope that one day the situation of unwanted horses at risk will be gone, and that every horse will live a dignified life from the beginning to the end.

I ask those who want to save us from the grisly road to slaughter: *please come and rescue us as soon as possible. Time waits for no one here.* Yet I also see the reality that saving us all comes down to what you humans call money, which these days does not seem plentiful. We want to go with you — but only if we will not bring hardship to you, because we are not meant to live in your lives as a burden.

Do not let me burden you, because without you I am not whole as a domesticated horse — I need you. What saddens me most is that more and more horses, those like me, are shipped to feedlots via auctions, placed in the hands of strangers who will end our lives quickly and never know — or acknowledge — the service we provided to some of you in our years together.

I may have been the one who carried your child on her first pony ride... or the one who won you hundreds of thousands of dollars in the sport you trained me for... or I could have been a dear and faithful friend for many years, now no longer able to carry on.

All I ask is that you humans be clear in how you choose to care for our last moments here on earth: please let us go with dignity, and make it as humane as possible. Your blessing helps bring our passing more gently.

Your friend,
Mischief



Photo by Pam Dykstra Photography, 2023

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Photo & lyric © Voice For The Horse — from the anthem Stronger

Photo © Voice for the Horse Archives



*Original **Voice For The Horse** banner — 2012*

LEGACY VISION — VOICE FOR THE HORSE

“Voice For The Horse began as a grassroots dream: to give children a chance to discover their own voice while learning to respect and care for the horse”.

It started as a children’s writing contest—an early offering that soon became more than a contest. What began with kids sending in essays about wild horses grew into a bridge between generations: young writers, their families, and the horses they loved, reminding us that empathy and responsibility are learned in the barnyard as much as in the classroom.

The first contest was paired with the anthem *Stronger*, and the music video produced—still available on YouTube—showcased the children’s words and gave them a collective voice. In the years that followed, we went on to record additional original pieces, including a trilogy of songs and a special tribute titled “*Leading Your Way*,” a full music-video production dedicated to the famous race horse—*Seabiscuit*. Together, these recordings — all released on video — formed the foundation of what is now a nearly complete *Voice For The Horse* album of music. Those early efforts proved that when young people are given a platform to speak for the animals they love, their creativity can spark compassion far beyond the barn.

The next chapter carries forward that same heartbeat. Our upcoming new theme song, “*Voice of Truth*,” was inspired by the original 2012 piece “*Message from the Horse*,” a short work of storytelling that gave a voice to the horse itself. That early writing has now grown into a full song—a new storytelling anthem in the making—blending music with narrative to honour the horse’s quiet wisdom.

The vision is to pair this new theme song with a revived children’s writing competition—just as *Stronger* once amplified the *Wild Horse Essays*—so that a new generation of young writers and riders can be heard. When complete, this song will serve as the next theme piece for Voice

For The Horse, carrying forward the legacy of linking children's voices, music, and the spirit of the horse.

Our aims are simple and practical. We want to give more children the chance to meet a horse up close—to brush its mane, to learn to move safely around its body, and to feel the horse's steady heartbeat and rhythmic motion beneath them on their first gentle ride. We will continue opening writing competitions, art projects, and song-sharing programs that build confidence and creativity. We aim to support literacy and compassion in classrooms by linking reading programs to the natural curiosity kids feel for horses. And we hope to partner with communities, barns, and educators so that young people who might never set foot in a stable can still discover what a horse can teach about patience, courage, and respect.

Through Voice for the Horse, we hope to keep opening those gates: offering more children honest time beside a horse, a place to be heard, and a reason to care for the land and creatures entrusted to us.

“Whoever is kind to the creatures of God is kind to himself.” — Prophet Muhammad

This legacy is both a dedication—to the horses who have carried us—and an invitation: to teachers, parents, barns, sponsors, and every young dreamer who still stops to rest a hand on a horse's shoulder. Together we can keep that simple circle alive: **child ⇌ horse ⇌ hope.**

With gratitude for every child and every horse who helped us begin this journey—and for the children and horses who will join us as we carry it forward,

With love and gratitude,

Yvonne Allen

Founder, Voice for the Horse

Amanda Todd Tribute

In October 2012, just days before *Voice for the Horse* attended the Main Event Equestrian Trade Show in Chilliwack, BC, to promote our children's wild-horse writing competition, we learned of the passing of 14-year-old Amanda Todd, a local teen from Port Coquitlam. Her story inspired the creation of “*Message from the Horse*,” written in her memory and shared throughout that weekend's event.

From that moment forward, Amanda's message of hope and compassion has continued to guide our mission—empowering youth to speak, create, and heal through the spirit of the horse.

This legacy is dedicated in loving memory of Amanda Todd (1996 – 2012)

Message from the Horse

*(Voice for the Horse Tribute — in memory of Amanda Todd)
Written October 11, 2012 — the day after Amanda's passing
by Yvonne Allen*

We know who you are.
We see right through you.
We have been with you since the beginning of time.
We seek to be with you — understanding far beyond what you may believe,
for we do not have your ego to contend with.
We live in the moment.

We have fought your wars and carried you into battle.
When you feared for your life, we did not.
We carried on, fulfilling the task we had been given — to win your war.

Your wars of today are far more complex,
no longer against each other to win land or governments,
but to gain power and control over another —
to include and to shape destinies.

In the natural world, I exist.
I will fight for my herd to preserve unity.
I may win, or I may lose.
This is the instinct gifted to us —
to survive in this world as Horse.

We know those of you who elect to have power over another
are often only seeking what you yourselves have lost,
and there is no fault here.
It is about choices —
and what it is you have learned.

You can change your choices any moment you choose to,
and in the case of those who have elected themselves to be the bully,
you have the full opportunity to make this amend.
If you ever believe you have the choice to change,
and become the person you were meant to be,
we honour this —
and invite you to graze with us in our playground.

We Know Who We Are

Voice for the Horse

VOICE FOR THE HORSE



*Historic **Voice For The Horse** – **Walk or Trot Around the World** event banner — carried in parades and featured in early online campaigns during the first years of Voice For The Horse*