

Gone But Not Forgotten

by Suzy Hopkins

When I picked him up in the horse trailer from the Humane Society shelter he looked like he was suffering. Every step seemed to cause him pain. His owner had run out of money so she stopped feeding him or having his feet trimmed. Luckily for him a neighbor called the authorities.

We called him Wilbur. He responded beautifully to hay in his stall 24 hours a day and all the TLC the students, young and old, gave him plus new shoes. He liked being groomed so I taught the students how to care for him. His black coat shone. Eventually I used him to give confidence to the timid riders in their first lesson because he was so calm and surefooted. I also let the kids ride him bareback two or three at a time all over the property. If they fell off he stood absolutely still until the kids got back on not wanting to trample them by mistake.

For years he got Christmas presents and Valentines from the riders. They even decorated his stall.

He always gave a spirited whinny when, first thing in the morning, he heard my voice. He would follow me around while I did my chores, after lessons, checking out whatever I was doing with his big nose.

One morning the stall cleaner called to me to come look at Wilbur. He was lying on the floor trying his darnedest to get on his feet. He was soaked in sweat, exhausted from trying to stand. A horse's survival instinct is to run from danger. They are terrified if they can't stand. When the veterinarian finally arrived he said he had a neurological condition commonly called "wobbles". A large crowd of the students and boarders had gathered. One little girl gave him water from a cup that he greedily sipped. After watching him struggle for hours, in a vain attempt to right himself, I asked the vet to put him down. When the vet gave him the first of two shots in enormous syringes he let out a huge sigh. Everybody left the area except me. I sat next to him where he lay in the stall for half an hour until I was sure his spirit had gone to the big pasture in the sky.

Sweet Wilbur had been a gentle and cheerful addition to all our lives and could not be replaced or forgotten.