

Waiting for Midnight

By Cindy Wall

He arrived in late November 2013

He was one of 65 neglected horses abandoned on a ranch in Spokane, Wash., left to fend for themselves, with no food or water and many of them needing medical attention. Trusting Spirit was one of several animal welfare groups called on to help with a seizure and rescue effort and remove the horses to a safer location. This thin, underweight seemingly all black gelding with a long wavy mane and a white cross on his forehead did not look like a grand horse. He was dirty and covered in filth. His hooves were deplorably neglected and his thick mane and tail were matted. He was malnourished and clearly afraid of humans.

“We already agreed to take in four of the horses from this seizure.” said Claudia Trapp, Trusting Spirit’s founder and chairman. “But when I spotted Midnight, I saw something special. His eyes were soft and gentle. And despite his condition and fear of people, he did not display an aggressive demeanor.”



Early picture of Midnight, taken a few weeks after he arrived.

Trapp told the others to load him in the trailer and they made the several hour journey back to the ranch that would soon be his new home. They named him *Midnight's Dance*.

“You could just see his confidence level increasing daily.”

While he was significantly underweight and malnourished, his oversized head and hooves suggested he had the makings of a large horse. So as a precaution, he was placed in a solitary pen with sturdier railing. Trusting Spirit began the long process of allowing him to heal and understand he was in a safe place where he would have food, water, shelter and nobody would hurt him. It took months of patience and consistent kindness to develop a connection and help him trust again. By February, he started to welcome his human visitors, even if in a guarded sort of way.

By late winter, he'd put on weight and was looking much healthier. Story Burke, a trainer from Wenatchee, Wash., was brought in to work with Midnight, his now abbreviated name. She spent several days a week with him and like the other handlers, she began first by earning his trust. Before long, that trust was established. He was eager to work with her each time she arrived. “There was such a dramatic improvement in his overall demeanor in a matter of weeks.” said Burke. “He really liked having purpose. It was moving to watch him grow.



Burke introduces Midnight to a saddle during spring training

Stephanie Stibal, Trusting Spirit board member and rehabilitation and adoption coordinator observed his remarkable and steady progress. “You could just see his confidence level increasing daily. He seemed happy.”

A volunteer from Chelan, Wash., had taken an interest in Midnight and signed on to be his equine sponsor.

Jim Whipps began working with Midnight on his off-training days with Burke. He also kept up on his pen maintenance. Midnight continued to make incredible progress as did his confidence and desire to please.

In May, Whipps arranged with Stokes Ranch in Manson, Wash., to put Midnight through more extensive training. Mike Stokes, a professional trainer and reining rider took on the role of teacher and coach. His goal: *Get Midnight ready to safely carry a rider.*



Training Camp

Throughout the summer months, Stokes took him through his paces teaching him everything he needed to know about being a horse; one that learns to trust, listen, respect and bond with his human rider. Midnight flourished. He began displaying more of a regal carriage and while large and powerful, his gate was naturally graceful.

As they watched Midnight grow into his larger than life personality, one thing was clear: He was looking and acting a lot like a Friesian, perhaps crossed with a Thoroughbred or a Morgan. This was no surprise to Trapp. She suspected he was Friesian when she spotted him in Spokane.



It didn't take long to realize Midnight was a quick learner and loved working, as seen here during a lungeing exercise.

"Something about the way he moved caught my attention back then." said Trapp. "He was unique and I knew it."

By late summer, his transformation was astounding. Estimated to be around 6-years old and now taller and 200 pounds heavier than when he arrived, he'd become a proud, confident, strong, spectacle of a horse.

"He's become this extraordinary horse that loves to work."

Stokes pointed out that Friesians are typically powerful and strong. "But they are able to move gracefully and land softly." he said. "Midnight is no exception."

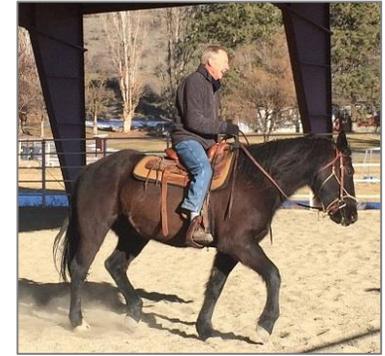


Whipps leading Midnight to the training arena at Stokes Ranch

When asked what attracted Whipps to Midnight, he said it was difficult to explain. "My intent was to volunteer at the rescue, not become a horse owner." he added. "But Midnight was special. We just connected. I guess it was timing. We must have been waiting for one another."

In late September, Midnight left Stokes Ranch and went to his permanent home in Chelan.

Whipps continues to work with Midnight in preparation for a number of trail riding adventures he has planned with his wife Cindy and her



quarter horse Darla Sue. "I feel fortunate." said Whipps. "He's become this extraordinary horse that loves to work and is beautiful to ride. He's learned to trust and has made many friends with his big and playful personality."

Midnight is one more success story for Trusting Spirit. The Whipps family completed Midnight's adoption process in November, one year after his rescue from a very uncertain future.



"Midnight's life could have ended so differently." said Trapp. "We are so grateful for our supporters who give rescues like Midnight a chance at a good life and a hopeful future."

Photos: Stephanie Stibal and Cindy Wall