



Rowdy:

Story of A Survivor

by Ann Kline (with Virginia Mach)

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Rowdy is a purebred Morgan colt with a powerful will to survive. Mea Ola is a special mare whose Hawaiian name means "survivor." Ann Kline is her rescuer and the founder of Mea Ola's Place, a horse rescue and therapeutic horsemanship organization, named for the black and white mare. It is located in the Mojave Desert, southwest of Victorville, California. On its logo is the phrase, "a place for survivors." Perhaps it was inevitable that Ann and Rowdy would meet.

When Rowdy was born at four o'clock on a chilly May morning, it became apparent that his chances of survival were not good. These worsened with each passing moment. He had been born with contracted foreleg tendons, so he was unable to stand and nurse. His owners couldn't provide him with much assistance because of physical limitations, and finally his mother lost patience and rejected him. During these critical early hours of the young foal's life, unseen things were also happening that would further increase the odds against him. It would take a real miracle for Rowdy to survive. Here is his amazing story as told by Ann Kline, the prime worker of that miracle.

Rejected

Rowdy's story began on Friday, May 23, 2014.

For me, the day started the same as any other morning. I got dressed for work at the mixed (large and small) animal clinic where I was a vet tech. I had my coffee, then Chris and I headed out to feed. It was a rare morning in one sense, however, because I had my cell phone on me, which I almost NEVER do!

The time was about 7:15 AM when the phone rang. I saw the call was from one of my bosses, so I answered and heard, "Ann, remember XXX's horse that was in foal? Well, she's rejecting the foal, and it's in bad shape. He's four hours old and has not been able to stand. Would you be interested in trying to save it? Do you have help? Do you know anyone with a wet mare? Do you have one?"

Immediately, I replied. "Yes, I'll save it! Mea Ola will help. I bet she'll make milk [*it's quite possible*] and adopt it. That's the kind of horse she is. Will it fit in my truck?"

"Yes! Hurry, its temp is only ninety-five degrees, and can you stop and get coffee for XXX? They've been up all night."

"Will do," I said. "We'll be there ASAP! Can you sedate the mare and milk out some colostrum?"

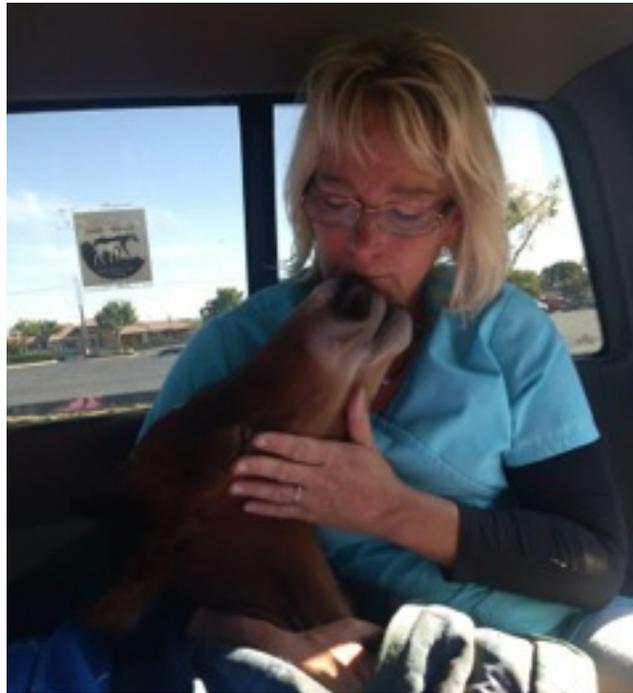
We arrived about twenty minutes later. The scene, still fresh in my mind, looked pretty grim. The foal had on a little blue plaid coat, and he was lying in a corral all by himself. He looked dead.

Rescued

I handed the coffee to the owner, chatted with the vets for a minute about where we were as far as the foal was concerned, then Chris and I scooped him up. We put him with me in the backseat of the pickup and off we went, for bottles, powdered colostrum, and formula on our way home.

The little newborn immediately wanted to nurse the warm body next to him. He was hungry and cold, and exhausted from his futile efforts to stand. It had not helped that his MOM was not cooperating, and had even stepped on him, breaking the skin on his left rear fetlock.

Waiting for the local vet supply to open to buy him something to drink was probably the longest fifteen minutes of my life! But as we waited in the truck, the little foal's temp kept climbing. Before we got home it was ninety-nine degrees! *[101 to 102 is normal for a foal.]*



Ann Kline with the four-hour old rejected foal

Strong Fighter

At his first feeding, the weak foal managed to suck down about two ounces. Then he showed us his strong spirit. HE STOOD, BY HIMSELF. This was about fifteen minutes after getting home with a slightly higher body temperature, and after receiving only a little nutrition. We steadied him side to side when he got up, and then, with determined little grunts, he took his first steps! This was when I knew he was a fighter. I knew he wanted to live! At that moment, I committed to doing everything in my power to make that happen.



With this in mind, I decided the foal needed a strong name, so I chose Kikeona — "strong fighter" in Hawaiian, our "theme" language. But Chris liked Rowdy, so we compromised and agreed to use Rowdy as his barn name.

Just before Rowdy stood up for the first time, I had removed his foal coat and noticed that his umbilical cord was about six inches long and had not been tied off. I had nothing but some ribbon, so before cutting the cord shorter, I dipped the ribbon in betadine and double tied his cord, after dipping it in the betadine several times as well. But this was too late for Rowdy, as we would soon find out. He had already lain with it in the dirt for four hours before we got him.

Progress and Plans

Once he was stable on his feet, we introduced Rowdy to Mea Ola, who had been rescued two years earlier while heavily in foal. She had lovingly mothered her own foal, and as we had expected, she took right to Rowdy. But he was too weak to be left with her just yet, so we made him a stall in a shed close to her, where we could set up a heater for the night and sleep there with him. He was doing well, all things considered, and each hour he was getting better at nursing from the bottle.



Rowdy meeting Mea Ola for the first time, Day One



Sleeping to conserve strength and grow

The next morning Rowdy was stronger, but I called the vets to come because I noticed that his lymph nodes were swelling, and I was concerned about the scrape and swelling in his left rear

fetlock. The vets came, but were so impressed to see the little bay foal standing, nursing and walking, that they were not concerned about anything else. I mentioned an IgG test, but it was dismissed as not needed. This proved to be an unfortunate mistake, although they did give me penicillin to start him on right away, as a precaution for the fetlock swelling.

I also found out that I was actually saving Rowdy for the owners. They had called the vets the morning before to come euthanize the rejected and crippled foal, but had agreed to give him two days with me, and pay for my time and care, to see if he would improve. I must admit that I was disappointed. This was the first I had heard of that deal, but I agreed. My job and calling are to save lives, so that was my mission, regardless.

We slept with Rowdy again that night. As a matter of fact, we had not left his side at all since we got him. Chris and I took shifts. Rowdy would sleep for forty-five minutes to an hour and then nurse his bottle. He was still weak and sometimes I allowed him to nurse lying down. But every few hours I forced him to get up. He needed to get those legs working and straightened out.

The next day, Sunday, Rowdy's owners came to visit. I was very proud of his progress, but they were not optimistic, and told me they were still deciding whether or not to put him to sleep. They asked me if I would give them two more days to make a decision, and I said, "Not if you're going to put him to sleep. I will not be a part of that. He wants to live, and he's a fighter. Plus I'm already attached to him. He's not suffering. He just needs time and TLC." I told them he could stay forever at M.O.P., and that we could use him as a therapy horse. They left to think it over.

On his twice daily walks, we kept taking Rowdy to see Mea Ola and hoping to put them together in a few more days. The weather was still cool at night but really warming up during the day, so we brought in a portable air conditioner. Yet that night, we needed the heater, and he tried to climb into the cot with me.

First Crisis

On Monday, Memorial Day, we did our morning exercise cruise around the area at about 6:00 AM, but Rowdy was very lethargic and weak. I took his temperature and it was a whopping 103.6 degrees! (His temp and vitals were being monitored several times a day, so I knew this was BAD!) I immediately called my vets, pulled some blood, and asked if someone could meet me at the hospital so I could run his blood work. It was now about 8:00 AM.

Just then, Rowdy's owner drove up. He told me they had made the decision to give him to me (to Mea Ola's Place), freeing him from the threat of imminent euthanasia. Thank God for that because Rowdy had already marched his sweet self right into our hearts, and this was the beginning of a nightmare roller coaster ride.

It was already getting hot and the air was on in his stall as I left to run the blood work while Chris stayed with Rowdy.

The results were horrible! He had almost no white blood cells, nothing to fight infection! *[A foal is born with no natural immunity. This must be acquired from the mother in the first few nursing sessions when the mare's milk is mostly colostrum, needed for building the immune system.]*

An IgG test shows the amount of immunoglobulins present in the foal's blood. One way to provide some immunity to foals who fail to get it from the mother is to supply plasma to the foal.]

I got on the phone to one of my vets and I was frantic! "He needs PLASMA and he needs it NOW!" Great, this was Memorial Day. Well, I was not taking "we need to wait until tomorrow" as an answer. Rowdy would never make it! I grabbed the supplies for an IV catheter and fluids, and kept calling, and "being persistent" about finding plasma TODAY!

When I got home at about 9:30 AM, it was already 100 degrees outside. The portable air-conditioner in the semi-open stall could not keep up. Rowdy was fading, so I made a very extraordinary decision, but one that would prove to be another important factor in saving his life.

I looked at Chris and said, "Can you build a stall in the house? We need to move him to the house, NOW!"

Chris replied, "You mean the garage?"

"No, THE HOUSE!"

"Okay." (♥)

People came to help and by 11:30 AM, they had the new stall constructed, and Chris scooped Rowdy up and headed to the house. Rowdy was almost limp from heat exhaustion. He weighed about 110 pounds, and Chris had to struggle to carry him, all dangling legs, the 200 feet to the house.

Once Rowdy was indoors, I put in an IV catheter and started him on fluids. The next call was our confirmation for plasma. Chris made a three-hour round trip and paid the \$400 cash to get it. At about 6:00 PM, we sedated Rowdy and gave him the plasma transfusion.



By the morning of his fifth day, Rowdy was much better. His lymph nodes were starting to shrink and his appetite was great. The heat outdoors was still too much for him to handle, so he re-

mained in his indoor stall. Every time he awoke for bottles, we would take him outside, except in the worst heat of the day, so mostly he exercised at night. Chris and I took shifts through the night, sleeping on the couch next to Rowdy's stall, and sometimes even in it, with him.

A constant problem throughout the entire time we bottle-fed was our own inability to get adequate amounts of sleep. Rowdy had a very predictable routine from day one: he was up an hour, down an hour, twenty-four--seven, so for us, anything more than an hour of sleep was a blessing. Friends, family, and M.O.P. volunteers often came to help, so that we were able to catch naps of three to four hours on these occasions. But sleep deprivation was a major concern for us and we couldn't have done it without our helpers.

Mainly, our motivation to carry on was provided by Rowdy himself. He was our inspiration, and he was just so cute and lovable and sweet and innocent and eager for life that we wanted him to live, and we were willing to do whatever we had to, so that he would.

By the end of Rowdy's fifth day, things seemed to be going well. He was past the critical stage. We were settling into a routine, and adjusting to the idea of having a horse in the house.



Rowdy in his indoor stall, June, 2014



Rowdy sleeping with "Dad"



Bottle-feeding help from a "baby" human



Rowdy sleeping with "Mom"

Second Crisis

On day six, Rowdy started having problems with his left front leg. From the knee down, his leg would bend into a "C," and he would face plant into the ground! At first we thought he had overdone it playing, and had hurt himself. The problem was actually being caused by the contracted tendons in his front legs. He could not have the treatment to relax them, however, because his rear tendons were too loose and the treatment would have made them worse.

The vets advised me to wrap the leg from the knee down. It took several days to get this right, as I experimented with different kinds of wraps. During this time, he injured his knee in one of his face-plants. I researched wraps and finally made one that worked well.

Wraps can be dangerous if not placed on a leg properly, as they can cut off circulation and cause a host of other problems, so I asked the vets to come and have a look to make sure his knee was okay and that my wrap was suitable. We made an appointment for June 2nd.

Not out of the Woods Yet

During this second week of Rowdy's life, there were about five days when we were able to bring Mea Ola to visit him in his outside paddock and stall. We celebrated his two-week birthday on June 6, anticipating a bright future, only to find that things were going to get terribly worse.



Rowdy at two weeks with Mea Ola, Ann, & Chris



Sharing the love that gave us **all** the will to fight



Rowdy's typical Morgan head and neck



Exercising in the morning's relative coolness

[Because of circumstances, Mea Ola was not destined to play a role in Rowdy's story. Lame in both front feet, she has quite a survival story of her own, however. See her story on her page.]

Help!

We'd had an appointment on day ten, June 2, for the vets to come and check Rowdy's left front leg, my wrap, and his back legs, too, which I was worried about. I had been giving cold laser treatments to all four legs, and to his back that had a small curve in it, called a "roached back." I wanted him checked out again. But the vets never came, nor were my phone calls returned.

That weekend his stools started to darken and turned black. I knew this had to be blood. Fortunately, I did manage to reach my vets for confirmation of that via phone, and they started him right away on ulcer meds.

By now I was also concerned about Rowdy's left front leg because it was not growing like the right one, possibly because the wrap was making it less mobile, and I desperately wanted a vet to come and see him and make sure my wraps were right. I may be a great vet tech, but I'm not a vet, and Rowdy really needed to be seen by one.

Again, I requested an appointment for my vets to come see Rowdy, explaining that I had also noticed that his left rear leg was getting painful. But they just couldn't come. (They were super busy and short-handed because one of their vet techs was unable to leave her precariously fragile rescued foal.) Perhaps they were also starting to think I was paranoid and imagining all these many things "supposedly" wrong with Rowdy.

Our supporters were willing to pay whatever we needed to get someone out to see Rowdy. However, I soon found that getting any vet to come out would prove to be nearly impossible and some of the comments from vets I called left me in tears. These can best be summed up by the attitude of one veterinary office which believed Rowdy was going to die and was not worth the time to come and see. "Take him to a hospital," they advised.

I knew Rowdy would not make it in a hospital. I work in a hospital. I know the diseases found there, the scary noises and smells, the busy atmosphere. He had no immune system to ward off germs, no mother to send with him for comfort and reassurance. Alone, feeling abandoned by us, he would fail rapidly.

The last vet I contacted would consider no other option. I explained that Rowdy was too fragile, physically and emotionally, to be left at a hospital.

"Well, he's probably going to die then," is what he told me. I was DEVASTATED!

While I would not have let Rowdy "go" without being examined for his issues, a hospital HAD to be the last resort. For Pete's sake, he was already in a hospital, in my house where there were no diseases or germs going in and out of his stall all day! What's more, he had a twenty-four-hour vet tech to care for him, who he happened to think was his MOM!

By this time, Rowdy was holding up his back left leg in pain, and it was getting worse by the day. I was literally crying out to God to help me find someone to help us.

Enter Dr. Sam

Why I didn't call him first is beyond my comprehension, but the next day, June 12th, I called Dr. Sam Wittlin in Orange County. He was my last hope before going to a hospital.

I had not talked to Dr. Sam since the previous fall, when he came and tried shock wave therapy on Mea Ola. It did not help her, but I did not blame him for that.

I took a deep breath and called. He surprised me by answering with, "Hi, Ann."

I was so desperate that I just blurted out, "I really need your help with a case."

"Which one? The colt on Facebook?"

I said it was, and told him the short version of Rowdy's situation and how he was our last hope before resorting to a hospital.

He asked for pictures and video. After seeing these, he asked, "Did this colt have umbilical issues? Was there ever a wound or scrape on his left rear leg?"

I was blown away. "As a matter of fact, yes to both questions!"

He then had me wet the left rear fetlock and feel for heat. I did this twice, but there was no heat. Sam's questions were for a purpose, and right then he suspected an infection in the growth plate and not the fetlock joint itself. The soonest he could come would be Saturday, June 14.

Dr. Sam arrived on Saturday in the mid-morning. I had told him that Rowdy was in the house, but I guess he thought I was kidding until I brought him into the living room. The look on Sam's face was priceless when he saw Rowdy there in his indoor stall, and his first question was, "Have you ever raised a foal?" and then, "How are you restraining him?"

In the beginning I had worried about this myself, and I literally had nightmares about raising a "man killer." The movie, *Buck*, played in my mind, with images of that one stallion that had been raised in the house and ended up having to be euthanized at three years old because he was never taught manners, or that he was a horse.

It only took Sam a few minutes to realize we had moved Rowdy indoors out of necessity. Then he was impressed that we had taught Rowdy to be respectful already at three weeks.

Serious Medical Issues

We took the first X-rays while Rowdy was asleep and saw the infection in the growth plate, just as Sam had suspected. *[The condition with the infection in the growth plate in his fetlock is called septic physitis. Foals with this condition usually have a poor to guarded prognosis.]*



Sam explained that this bone infection was much harder to treat than a joint infection and he needed to research some options. With Rowdy under sedation, Sam put in an IV catheter and we started him on IV Gentacin, an antibiotic to be given in addition to the penicillin. Our plan was for Sam to come back later the next week for a more invasive treatment and possibly a bone culture. But the next day, Rowdy's right hock was swollen. Sam had explained that the infection was in

Rowdy's bloodstream which was how it had gotten into the bone of the growth plate. He had also warned me that it could be brewing in other places (joints or bones), and that Rowdy could actually die from sepsis. The infection was pumping through every organ in his body. I was to monitor him closely for additional signs of trouble, so I noticed the hock swelling immediately.

I called Sam and sent pictures right away. He made plans to come back the following day, June 16th, to flush the right hock joint and try to get a culture of the left fetlock infection, as well as inject antibiotics directly into it.

That night, the hock got bigger and bigger. Rowdy did not quit eating, but he slowed down on his milk consumption. I called one of our volunteers, another tech that I worked with, to come the next day and help, and asked Chris to stay home for the procedures.

Third Crisis

The next morning, we got Rowdy's stall stripped and cleaned, ready for the treatments. We planned to have warm clean towels going in the dryer for when he would wake up from anesthesia.

Normally getting to Mea Ola's Place took Sam two hours, but this time he had to make two stops on the way, looking for a blood collection bottle for a blood culture. It is a special bottle that would take us days to get, so he was going to try and find one from another vet on the way up.

For both Rowdy and me, it was an agonizing morning of waiting! Rowdy's right hock was now extremely painful, and when I went to give him his penicillin injection, he fought it. The struggle somehow caused him such severe pain that he went down. He started sweating and trembling. I feared he might be going into septic shock and that we were going to lose him.

I called Sam, asking him where he was. Terrified, I told him what was going on. "He's going into septic shock, isn't he?" I cried. Sam was still over an hour away.

I sat with Rowdy, crying, and begging God not to take him. About thirty minutes later, he got up, as though nothing had happened. The only thing I can figure is that while struggling, he must have wrenched the joint or bumped it, causing excruciating pain. His reaction (trembling and sweating) was actually shock from the pain.

Sam arrived and we set up all the equipment and supplies needed for the procedures. We did the hock first, and collected the fluid for a culture to identify what we were fighting there. We drained the infection and flushed the hock joint with saline solution and an antibiotic (Amikacin).

Next, Sam used his fluoroscope to try and get into the fetlock, but the bone was too hard. So we did the first perfusion to the fetlock. Sam had been unable to locate a blood culture bottle, so we only had the joint fluid to send out. For now, this was all we could do.



With Chris and me in close attendance, Rowdy woke from the anesthesia well. Our plan was to watch the hock and make sure it would not require a second flush.



Sam had researched the growth plate infection and said we had two options: the perfusions, or a bone screw that would allow direct injection to the bone. The latter came with many risks that he was not comfortable with. He was going to call a vet in Florida who had a lot of experience with these infections and get her advice. In the meantime, we switched to all IV antibiotics, which meant Rowdy had to have an IV catheter sutured in place.



First time out after waking from anesthesia, feeling perky and happily out of pain on 16 June 2014

Another Crisis and a Prequel, with Bird

That night, I was on the phone with Sam again. I was very worried about Rowdy, for he had spiked a fever of 103.2. Sam gave me some great advice that I will never forget. He did not want me to give Rowdy banamine to lower his temperature. He called it a "fighting" temp. He believed it was best to let Rowdy's body fight. If his temp got any higher, I was to give him something, but he really wanted to let Rowdy fight on his own.

Sam reminded me that he would be here, no matter what time of day or night, if Rowdy should take a turn, and the worst needed to happen, I am crying as I relive this while writing it down. Euthanasia. I could not even say that word or fathom the possibility of losing Rowdy because it would have killed me, I am sure of it!

This is when I told Sam my motto as a vet tech, "Nothing dies on my shift!"

Brave words, but I was so, so worried. It was a very long night for me.

While watching and waiting, I thought of all the incidents in Rowdy's story and of the prequel to it that I'd only recently learned of from one of my bosses. I hadn't been aware of it because it had taken place before I got involved, and yet it was mainly the reason why I WAS involved.

The vets I worked for, who had been called out to euthanize Rowdy just a few hours after his birth, had been impressed by the spunky little foal's desperate efforts to stand. It was evident to them that he had a will to live. One of them had not forgotten my answer to a question about a bird I was raising. It had made such a strong impression on her that it kept going through her mind, and she thought the foal deserved the same chance. Hence, the phone call to me that morning.

Part of the prequel had happened about a week before Rowdy was born. That I remembered. Our hospital crew had been celebrating a birthday at a local restaurant. Well, a baby bird must be fed a few times every hour as long as the sun is up, so I had the rescued bird in my car in a carrier. At one point during dinner, I excused myself to go and feed it.

When I returned, one of the vets questioned me about it."Ann, WHY are you saving a bird?"

The answer that made such an impression on her seemed obvious to me, "Because it wants to live."

This was also true of Rowdy, He STILL wanted to live. But now I had to let go. I had done all I could do. It was now up to Rowdy and his little body to fix this.

About four hours later, his fever broke.



Einstein, the rescued bird who kind of started it all.

More Treatments

Rowdy was already feeling much better by the next morning. For the next three weeks, he had IV antibiotics which meant I no longer had to give him injections of penicillin, a relief to both of us because they HURT! I had to be diligent about keeping the catheter clean to avoid introducing any new infection, and we had to replace it several times because he managed to rub them out.

Rowdy's routine remained essentially the same. After an hour of sleep, he was up for an hour, and each time he was awake, he had to drink from his bottles, had to go outside for exercise, and had to have his stall cleaned. Just like in a hospital, we had charts for his daily routines. We charted when he woke up, how much he was consuming, the timing and amount of his bowel movements, and what meds he needed to have at each feeding. We had to keep track of his medications, make sure he got his probiotics and different supplements for ulcers along with his yogurt and oatmeal in his bottles, and closely watch his vitals. He was now draining up to about twelve 10-ounce bottles an hour, and consuming about ten gallons of milk replacer a day!

Dr Sam had consulted with the vet in Florida, and after our second perfusion treatment and X-rays, she felt confident that we could beat Rowdy's infection. Progress would be slow, and she thought it would take at least five perfusion treatments, each about one to two weeks apart.

She was right! By the third treatment on June 29th, we could see that the infection was now encapsulated. I started to feel hopeful, and after the July 6th X-rays and treatment, I knew we were going to win.

On July 6th, Rowdy was switched to oral antibiotics which made him susceptible to heat stroke, so he could not go outside much at all during the day for the next month.

When the oral antibiotics were stopped after four weeks., the monitoring of antibiotics in his bottles was no longer necessary, so we introduced a bucket. It took only about two days to get him from bottle to bucket. Finally we were able to get some real sleep!

Rowdy's hock had not required additional flushes, but he did need three shockwave treatments of the hock, as it was not growing like the left hock. He had the last of these on August 16th.



Dr. Sam Wittlin and 3-month old Rowdy



Sharing a hug, at a fund-raising BBQ 16 Aug 2014

Going Forward

Rowdy had to remain on meds for the ulcers, which would take many months to heal completely. He had received these and his probiotics in yogurt mixed with his formula in his bottles. Once he switched to the bucket, he quickly learned to eat yogurt from a spoon, and feeding Rowdy his yogurt grew to be one of my favorite activities as well as that of visitors, and of Rowdy himself.



23Dec2014 Virginia Mach feeds 7-month-old Rowdy



9Jan2015 More yogurt from Frank Steinberger

Around the beginning of September, Rowdy began sleeping in his outside stall at night. We enlarged and fixed it so it could be kept cool enough during the day while he was acclimating to the heat and elements for the first time in his life. He was moved out of the house for good as soon as

the summer ended. The enlarged stall, which has access to his paddock, is conveniently right outside the back door on our covered patio, and is now serving as his winter stall.

Lately Rowdy has been insisting on more and more independence from humans. He's well-mannered and kind, and he loves people, but there's no question that he knows he's a horse and that's the way he wants it.

Already he has worked some of his magic as a therapy horse. Recently he consoled a lonely octogenarian who was grieving the passing of his cat the previous day.

In looking through photos, choosing the ones to include with this article, I was struck by something amazing. In these first pictures and videos I can see Rowdy now as he really was. At the time, I did not see him as so fragile! I believe **I was given different eyes**. I knew he had a fight ahead, but I saw him as STRONG. I saw a fighter. I saw so much hope in him! These pictures have made me realize just how much of a miracle we pulled off!

Chris, Dr. Sam, and I may have done the hard work, but it would never have been possible without each and every person who prayed, shared his story, came to help, and donated funds for us to keep fighting for him. Thanks to them, Rowdy is now healthy and happy, and still growing.

Our beloved Rowdy defied all of the odds that were stacked against him. He never lost his appetite for food or life. He faced euthanasia and escaped it. He fought battle after painful battle. He brought so many people together to believe in him and help him survive, that surely he is destined for great things. So, while this may be the end of the story of his miraculous beginning, it is surely the beginning of something even more miraculous to come.

Postscript: Visible Improvement

These photos show a very clear difference between the little "ugly duckling" with the contracted foreleg tendons, loose rear leg tendons, too tight shoulders, and roached back at one week, and his normal conformation at eight months.



Rowdy on 1 June 2014, his ninth day,



and on 27 January 2015, two days after his gelding.



Beautiful Rowdy on his one-year-old birthday, 23 May 2015



Rowdy at 5 months, 23 October 2014

Notes from the Vet Tech by Ann Kline

Lessons Learned from Rowdy's Story

- Foals do not have antibodies to fight infection at birth. This is why a clean environment for the birth and proper care of the umbilical cord are necessary. In Rowdy's case, the entire placenta was expelled without the cord being severed. The breeder cut the cord, without tying it off, and left it about six inches long. That left the cord long enough to lie in the dirt, and because it was not tied off above where it was cut, a virtual highway for bacteria to enter his blood stream was created. **Had it been properly cared for, it's likely that none of this would have happened.**
- Whether a foal is normal and nurses at birth or not, **an IgG test should be performed when the foal is twelve hours old** to determine if it has gotten enough antibodies. The test is pennies (around \$100) in comparison to what costs could be incurred to treat a septic foal. (In the first three months of Rowdy's life, his medical treatments cost over \$16,000. In a hospital, this would have been about \$30,000.) Based on the results of the IgG test, the foal may need a plasma transfusion because after twelve hours, the foal does not absorb any more antibodies from the colostrum. Plasma costs about \$400 a liter. Some foals may require more than just one liter, depending on the results of the test. Most foals will not need any at all. But, is it worth the risk to not know?
- Although the first vets prescribed penicillin for Rowdy, **an additional antibiotic** like Gentacin **should have been given early on** as well. This way, both gram negative and gram positive bacteria would have been addressed in Rowdy's body. (This is something to discuss with your vet if you are ever faced with a situation like this.)
- When raising a foal on formula, **make sure the formula does not contain animal fats or corn syrup solids.** These are two things a foal has a hard time digesting. (We learned the hard way.) Also, never use anything but a saline or water enema to help expel the meconium. This was a mistake the breeder made, and it caused Rowdy problems for weeks

- We were told by the first vets to **give Rowdy mineral oil in his bottles to help with constipation. Once or twice** would have been fine. But because they recommended the regular use of it, the oil created a barrier in the intestines that inhibited the absorption of vital nutrients. Rowdy started to look pot-bellied and his coat changed after about five days ingesting the oil. Once we realized what was happening, we used oatmeal in his bottles to help remove the oil and started him on pedialyte to replace the missing electrolytes. Within three days, he started to look normal again.
- Last, but not least, it must be noted that we could never have properly cared for Rowdy at home if I were not a vet tech and we hadn't had the directions of our veterinarian Sam Wiltlin. None of this is meant to teach someone how to care for a septic foal at home. **My hope is that Rowdy's ordeal will be avoided completely for other foals in the future, so that other lives will be saved.**

Lalainia Ann Kline, Veterinary Technician
President/Founder of Mea Ola's Place



Rowdy, in the middle of his yearling year, 23 October 2015