



Habitat for Horses Rescues Horse Missing For 11 Years

Janine Neumann spent 11 years looking for the horse that she loved and lost. Just two weeks ago, on a cold Missouri morning, "Dee" stepped from a trailer and back into the loving arms and heart of a woman who never gave up searching for her.

For Immediate Release

HITCHCOCK, Texas/EWORLDWIRE/March 20, 2007 --- Dee was her nickname for "Risky Decision," the two year-old granddaughter of "Seattle Slew," who was separated from Neumann on a fateful day in 1996. It was an accidental separation and after the long years of being away she is finally home. It is a story that is nothing short of a miracle, sprinkled with the fairy-tale magic of "long ago and far away." It is the "happily ever after" part that is just now being written.

Janine Neumann was the first person to ever lay hands on the Illinois-bred weanling. She brought her home to Missouri, halter-trained her and eventually trained her to ride.

"I trained her as a pleasure horse, not as a race horse," says Neumann. "But she was magnificent."

Given Dee's bloodlines, Neumann decided to pay her fees for her to start her racing career. Dee was going to race. A few entries into her start at racing, something happened that would ultimately take her away from Neumann: she flipped in the gate and injured her back leg. Although she received treatment and time to heal, things just were not the same.

When Neumann's trainer suggested that they should put Dee in a claiming race so she could win, it seemed like a good idea. The plan backfired. They didn't see what would happen next coming. Someone stepped up and claimed the filly and horse was taken away from Neumann.

"We didn't think she would be claimed. Presumably it happened because of her bloodlines," says Neumann.

Neumann immediately tried to get her filly back, but the purchaser wouldn't budge. Despite her best efforts to trail the horse, she lost track of her. Neumann emailed the Jockey Club every month, but privacy issues prevented disclosure of the whereabouts of the horse. Neumann searched every Thoroughbred rescue organization she could find looking for the filly to no avail. Nearly 11 years later, she was still looking. Last fall, when she checked for the horse with the Jockey Club, Risky Decision was no longer in their records. Neumann was heartbroken. Perhaps her horse was dead.

What Neumann had no way of knowing was this: In February of 2006, Habitat for Horses, based in Texas and the largest equine rescue of its kind, received a call from the Sheriff's office in Anderson County, Texas. The local animal control office had received complaints about a starved, neglected horse. The horse was seized, Habitat for Horses was awarded custody and "Velvet" began her long road to recovery. No one could have imagined that hundreds of miles away, someone was looking for this sad, skinny horse - someone who loved her dearly - someone who had never stopped looking for her.

Jerry Finch, president of Habitat for Horses talks plainly about what the group does.

"Velvet was severely neglected, probably near death. She didn't deserve that. None of the horses that come to us do. We are a group of individuals who choose to stand beside them - to offer our help and strength in a world in which they have no say."

With anywhere from 325 to 350 horses in their care, it is clear that the group, who operates entirely on donated funds and volunteers, is dedicated to that mission.

Finally time and chance fell together for Neumann and her now-grown filly, but the catalyst was a sad one: in 2006, a horrible accident on I-44 in Missouri. A truckload of horses bound for the slaughterhouse in DeKalb, Illinois overturned. The misery of their plight and the tragedy received national attention. It prompted Neumann to search for horse rescues to support. That's when she found "Habitat for Horses."

"In January of 2007, I was on the organization's Web site, and I ran across a picture of a horse they called 'Velvet.' It looked like Dee - I just knew. I e-mailed Habitat for Horses and told the group I thought 'Velvet' was my horse."

Neumann asked Habitat to check the mare for a scar on her back leg. She did. They photographed it and sent the picture to Neumann.

"I knew from the moment I saw the pictures on her leg - but really, I knew even before that. The scar really did it. It's an L-shape on the back of her back pastern. It's very distinctive," says Neumann. The news was amazing: "Velvet" was "Dee."

Neumann began the adoption process. In the interim she learned that Dee had been seized by law enforcement, just skin and bones. Two foster homes later, Dee was back to a healthy weight. She was out of harm's way. She was, once again, magnificent.

On February 27, 2007, "Velvet" aka "Risky Decision" came home.

The shipping van arrived at the barn at a quarter until five in the morning. In the dark, when the ramp dropped down on the trailer for unloading, the now 16.2 hh, 1250 pound bay mare seemed frightened. Then her eyes fell on Janine Neumann.

"Her eyes met me. She never let them leave me while they unloaded her. I put her in the stall and before she drank water, ate hay or did anything, she came to me and just rested her head and cheek against my chest. Just the look in her eyes," Neumann says in a faraway voice.

After all Velvet/Dee has been through, she has adapted amazingly well. Neumann says she is a little standoffish with people she doesn't know.

When Neumann is asked just why she never gave up, she answers quickly.

"Because she is my girl and I never could forget her. I did everything with her. We were bonded. All horses have big beautiful brown eyes, but she looks into your soul."

Finally, the big bay mare is getting the best of everything she needs. Neumann says that for the rest of Dee's life, they will be together.

"Habitat for Horses allowed me to be reunited with my girl. They literally saved her life. I thank the group for what it does every single day. It's a miracle that I found her."

Today "Risky Decision" is doing just fine. And as hard as the last 11 years have been, the rest of the story is easy. It goes like this: "the big gorgeous bay mare, once again magnificent, lived happily ever after."

Habitat for Horses (HfH) is a not-for-profit equine protection agency committed to the prevention, rescue and rehabilitation of neglected and abused horses. The largest organization of its kind in North America, HfH operates a rehabilitation ranch in Hitchcock, Texas, as well as a growing network of foster homes throughout Texas, Oklahoma, Florida, Tennessee, and Louisiana. The organization has taken a leadership role in horse protection issues and has been instrumental in developing and promoting legislation to eliminate the slaughter of American horses.

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