



Rich and I realized long ago that our ‘horse days’ were over. We had been young; the years had been fun. But now it was time to attend to family and say good-bye to horses. That was until we turned 62 and we learned about abandoned and abused horses, what two retirees could do in this situation, and what these incredible animals did for us.

We first met Lily in a secluded paddock at a horse shelter. She had been seized by the Livestock Board from severe abuse and neglect that had already claimed the lives of several of her companions. She and three other mares were rescued from the Matthews feedlot south of Albuquerque. Lily and her band were known as “The Survivors” at the shelter, and everyone respected that status. All four mares were unapproachable.

On the day I met Lily in February of 2009, she was pacing, prancing, worrying, and tossing her head as she ran back and forth in her paddock. Her reputation kept most of the volunteers at bay. But something captured my soul when I stood by her fence and watched her that day. It was a soul-to-soul experience, I realize, and not possible to capture in human words. Lily stopped at my end of the paddock every time she reached me; she turned her back and stood, waiting, until I scratched her rump. I was satisfied to scratch her from outside the fence and watch her head slowly lower, her muscles stop twitching. Then without warning, she would lift her head, whinny, and begin pacing again. We kept up this ritual for a few weeks on my Thursday visits. Eventually I stepped through the pole fencing of her paddock and stood quietly until she approached. Once again, she turned her butt in my direction and waited. There was nothing about her to say, “I’m turning to kick.” She was just waiting. I stepped up to her and scratched. Once again, her head lowered, her muscles relaxed, and she stood—accepting the attention. That is how we began our relationship.

Lily was moved to a large paddock after a month or two, where she shared her time and space with several other mares, most of whom shared their distrust of humanity. Admittedly, if a human came bearing *FOOD*, he might be worth approaching—very warily. But if more than one person approached at a time—alert! Alert! To Lily, wherever two or more humans were gathered, there was an agenda, and she was off! I spent a lot of time with Lily in this paddock just scratching her backside. As time went by she allowed me to groom her whole body except her head and feet. And ultimately, she accepted a halter, but only with a bucket of goodies for an incentive. OK bribe.



After almost half a year, Lily accompanied Rich and me to the round pen where we played games and worked with her on leading and circling. We took Lily to a trainer named Mike Sikorski where we all learned many lessons in communication and trust. We also learned how severely abused Lily had been in her former circumstances. Not only did she have scars up and down her back, but her tongue had been nearly severed with a chunk of it missing.

Time, circumstances, and serendipity led us to consider adopting Lily and moving to the Walkin’ N Circles family at the New Mexico Horse Rescue. It was at this time that an incredible journey with Lily began.

It has been over a year since we have been at WNCR. Lily is a new mare. She is still the soul I bonded with two years ago, but now she is so much more trusting. We still have some traveling to do, but she does seem a bit calmer every time we go on a trail ride. The scars in her mouth might always be wounds in her psyche. We still use a bitless bridle. But our times just hanging out are pure serenity for me—and she seems delighted as well.

God has been good to us both.

