

When we moved from Los Angeles to Lexington, Kentucky almost four years ago, many friends asked if we would have horses. My reply was always a swift “no.” We shared our home with five dogs, five cats and two parakeets. Having enjoyed the company of companion animals my entire life, I felt comfortable that I knew enough about animals in general, and my “gang” in particular, to give them everything they needed.

We live on fifteen acres and I thought that this much land would isolate us to a certain extent. Our neighbors seemed to be “animal people” and we thought it was an ideal

contact him to find out why the horse was in such bad shape. To make a long story short, I never got a satisfactory answer so I decided to take matters into my own hands. I went to the feed store in town and asked what I could feed a horse that didn't belong to me. I was completely ignorant about diet and I didn't want to interfere with whatever the owner might be giving him. I got a quick lesson about the varieties of hay and what might be best for him. I also learned that a bale is made up of “flakes” and this horse would probably eat four to six flakes a day. I bought sweet feed (a mixture of grains and molasses) and carrots and

door, but he was terribly underweight. It took a very long time for me to notice that his coat was looking better and his hooves didn't look so dry.

A couple of months after I began feeding him, I finally saw Frankie's owner one day. I was standing at the fence holding the feed bucket and Frankie's head was buried inside. Along came his owner and I thought, Oh my gosh, he's going to ask what I'm doing with this horse. I certainly would have asked that question of anyone attempting to feed my animals! Well, he just ignored us and walked right on by. I was surprised but relieved, and I just kept on feed-

The Fence That Separated Us

BY JUDY RUBY

situation. Not long after we moved in, the house next door was sold. I started seeing animals come and go, especially horses. I decided these people somehow made a living, or at least some extra money, buying and selling horses. Although there is a barn on the property, the horses were always out in the weather with no shelter whatsoever. I called the humane society several times to investigate but before they could act, the animals were gone. In the spring of 1998, a new horse appeared in the pasture. Although I knew absolutely nothing about horses, I thought his condition was appalling. He was skin and bones, his coat was lifeless, his hooves were cracked and broken, and he never lifted his head. I saw a large plastic bucket, which I assumed held water and other than that, I saw no food. The grass in the pasture wasn't what I was accustomed to seeing; it was very short and sparse. There were no hay bales or anything else for the horse to eat.

Well, that prompted another call to the humane society. They came out and photographed the horse and said they would investigate. The owner wasn't home and they promised to

biotin, a powdered supplement to make his hooves strong again.

I couldn't wait to get home and offer all of these goodies to the horse. Our property adjoins the pasture where he lived so it was simple for me to feed him over the broken-down fence that separated us. Every morning and every evening I fed him two to three flakes of hay and a hearty helping of sweet feed and carrots. The biotin went into the morning feeding and he seemed to love it all. Within a few days he ran to the fence when he saw me coming and soon after that, he began to snort and talk to me as I approached, as if to tell me to hurry up!

I named him “Frankie” and I really don't know why, it just seemed right. He learned his name, and my voice, quickly and when I called, he came running. I was disappointed that I couldn't notice an immediate difference in his appearance. When you are used to dealing with small animals that weigh no more than 60-80 pounds, it's hard to comprehend the idea of a horse weighing almost 1,000 pounds. I don't know how much Frankie weighed when he came to live next

ing Frankie.

Our routine went on through the spring and by summertime, Frankie was starting to look and feel really good. I was concerned that, since the owner seemed to “deal” in horses, I was possibly setting myself up for a huge disappointment. Here I was, feeding and caring for him, and he could be gone the next day. I just figured the longer he was there, the more likely it was he would stay. He'd already been there much longer than any of the other animals I'd seen.

That summer I noticed a “for sale by owner” sign on our neighbor's house. I worried about that too, but I just kept on feeding Frankie and hoped his story would have a happy ending.

During that summer and fall I learned about herbal fly sprays and brushes and combs and picks, all necessary tools for maintaining a beautiful coat, mane and hooves. As winter approached, I worried about Frankie being out with no shelter. When it snowed I was absolutely devastated to see him standing there in the cold, head down, back to the wind. But another call to the humane society didn't do any good.

Horses, they told me, did not require shelter. I was at least heartened by the fact that Frankie had gained weight and was better protected against the cold than he had been the previous year.

By the following summer I was still feeding Frankie and still being ignored by his owner the few times that he saw me feeding him. In July, I came home from work one day to see a strange car in our driveway. The driver introduced herself as our new neighbor. The house had sold and she, her husband and their nine thoroughbreds were moving in within two weeks. I asked her what was going to happen to the chestnut horse. She said, "Oh, the owners are such wonderful people (I almost

laughed) and they're going to find him a wonderful home." I asked what would happen if they didn't find a wonderful home in such a short time. She said they would send him to auction.

Well, I didn't know much about auctions but what I knew, I didn't like. And anyway, I loved this horse! I told her I would be interested in adopting him and again, to make a long story short, the sale of the house did not go through but with the help of the DDAL, I was able to adopt Frankie. We learned that he

was a four-year old chestnut American Saddlebred gelding named Prefer Me PHF (for Pine Hollow Farms in Michigan where he was born). We also learned that horses aren't considered adults until they are five years old, so Frankie is just a teenager.

Now we were faced with another problem: we didn't have any horse fencing on our 15 acres! We arranged with Frankie's "previous" owner to let him stay next door until we could fence a pasture for him. We got on the Internet, asked questions

of everyone we knew who had horses, and finally felt we had learned enough about fencing to attempt the job. We also wanted him to have a shelter so we bought a run-in, a three-sided shelter that does a wonderful job of protecting horses from the elements.

While he was boarding next door, I climbed over the fence twice a day to feed and water Frankie. As soon as he was ours, we called an equine veterinarian who vaccinated him and wormed him and told me he was still about 100 pounds underweight. I felt I still had a long way to go before Frankie was really healthy, but I learned from the vet that the diet we were feeding him was absolutely right and she had no changes to recommend. She did sug-



Neglected by his previous owner, Frankie got a second chance with DDAF boardmember Judy Ruby.

gest we have Frankie shod so his feet would be protected.

Finally, the Big Day arrived. We were ready to bring Frankie home. We walked him across our property and into his pasture and after he showed off a bit, running and bucking and snorting, he immediately started to graze on that lush, green alfalfa grass. He really was in heaven.

I've come a long way since the days when I emphatically said I didn't want a horse. But that was before I met sweet Frankie.

Postscript

Frankie has been with us almost a year and the change in his appearance is remarkable.

Frankie often lays in the grass on warm, sunny days and naps. He prefers his food on the ground instead of in the big, round bowl we bought him.

When I told the farrier (horse-shoe man) that we would love to find someone to work with us and Frankie, he recommended a lovely young lady named Kelly Brock who is an expert horsewoman. She's been here twice and will be working with us each week until we all feel comfortable. The first time she met Frankie I could tell she was impressed. She said saddlebreds tend

to be quite skittish and she was pleasantly surprised that he was so responsive and laid back. Since we don't know anything about Frankie's past, we aren't sure if he's been ridden before or if he's just brilliant—but being his proud mom, I tend to think the latter!

Frankie was awesome during that first lesson. Kelly says he's young and "green," but he'll be magnificent over time. We're finding it's just like working with your dog—repetition and praise are the keys to success. And if I play my cards right, it won't be

long before Frankie's allowed on the living room sofa!

About the Author: Judy Ruby has worked for Doris Day for 31 years. She was the director of the Doris Day Pet Foundation from its inception in 1977 until its retirement in 1996. Currently serving on the DDAF board, Judy now lives in Lexington, Kentucky with her husband, Ron, her son, Chris, five dogs, six cats, a parakeet and, of course, Frankie.