


SOCOTM

A person wearing a red jacket, yellow pants, and a black helmet is skiing through a snowy forest. The trees are heavily covered in snow, and the ground is a mix of white snow and dark shadows. The person is in the lower right quadrant of the image, moving towards the left.

AIR, WATER & SUNLIGHT

How They Can Affect Your Health

FREE HEELING:

IS "TELE" SKIING FOR YOU?

Setting the Date Is Easy

Planning the Wedding Isn't

WE HAVE SOME ANSWERS

LADY LUCK IS COMING

THE QUESTIONS ARE WHERE & WHEN

SULTRY, SMOOTH, INDULGENT, AND RECKLESS

We're Talking About Chocolate

good breeding



SAVING THE AMERICAN WEST

Carol Poole
photo by Kathy Anderson

One Mustang at a Time

by Kathy Anderson

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Her dark brown eyes focus on movement in the brush off the pasture. Her ears are up and alert. Her upper lip is curled as her nostrils sniff the late-afternoon air. Sierra Nevada, a black Mustang mare, is on watch. Her keen scent detection has earned her the position of “gatekeeper” at the Poole Farm in Oakham, Mass.

“Sierra and Chon-Teh, our other Mustang, seem to be more alert than our domestic horses when it comes to noises or scents nearby,” says Carol Poole, Sierra’s owner and Mustang advocate. Maintaining their feral instinct, they run off in the direction of whatever it is they sense is out there. It could be a coyote, a moose, or a black bear wandering near the Pooles’ rural farm in central Massachusetts. “Usually the other horses will join them, but the Mustangs definitely notice intruders or passersby first.”

Born in Glasgow, Scotland, Poole grew up watching American westerns that vividly imprinted the wild horse in her consciousness as part of the landscape of the American West. To Poole, “the Mustang is a symbol of the American spirit...wild and free, noble and strong.”

Poole was introduced to the life and plight of America’s wild horses through Ginger Kathrens’ PBS documentary, *Cloud: Wild Stallion of the Rockies*. Her interest sparked her and her daughter Fiona to research more about the “roundups” of Mustangs in the western states by officials of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), a division of the US Department of the Interior.

Poole learned through the BLM that the “roundups” were performed as an effort to manage the wild horse/burro population. After the animals are captured, they are offered for adoption through the BLM’s Adopt a Wild Horse or Burro program.

Upon further research through the Cloud Foundation and other wild-horse advocate groups, Poole learned that these “roundups” were often brutal, sometimes resulting in the death of horses. The 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act was enacted to protect the horses on public land, but was then amended by the 2004 Burns Amendment, which gave the BLM the authority to sell any wild horse or burro that had been offered three times for adoption, but not adopted, to anyone, including “kill buyers” for slaughter.

This knowledge propelled the Pooles to search the BLM website for a Mustang to adopt. They bid on a photo of a small black-and-white filly that looked like their Nokota gelding, Stitch. A \$125 adoption fee bought them a little part of the American West.

The young filly had been taken from her herd in the foothills of the high Sierra Mountains on the California/Nevada border, branded, and held at the Ridgecrest Holding Facility in California. She was then transported to a BLM adoption held at the University of Connecticut where she would meet her adopted family.

On August 10, 2007, a day that was “raining buckets,” Poole saw this diminutive horse in the pen with the small burros. “She was so small and frightened,” Poole, recalls “and she was wearing a red, white, and blue halter that read ‘American Mustang.’” They named her Sierra Nevada after the region where her herd once roamed.

Sierra’s journey to becoming a Massachusetts horse was challenging to both horse and family. “We didn’t want to take the wild out of her,” says Poole. “But for her safety and ours, we decided to send Sierra for training to HorseTenders in Greenfield, N.H.”

At HorseTenders, owned and operated by the Kokal family on their southern New Hampshire farm, Kris Kokal works extensively with Mustangs and has earned third place overall in a BLM-sponsored Extreme Mustang Makeover. Kris’s foundation

training and natural horsemanship methods taught Sierra socialization and ground manners. “We were trained along with her,” Poole said. As a result of desensitizing and handling Sierra, “she is a much more confident, calm, and respectful horse. We have all gained confidence and trust in each other.”

Bonding and socializing with a Mustang is a slow process. “I have a closer bond with Sierra because I was the one that handled her for the most part when we first got her,” says Fiona Poole. “Sierra never had bad experiences with humans and she has become a sweetheart.” Sierra greets the family at the gate and follows Fiona in the pasture.

As she gained experience with the unique and enjoyable qualities of a Mustang, Poole got more involved in trying to protect other Mustangs from their fate. “In 2005, I began calling my legislators and e-mailing everyone I knew informing them about the roundups,” she said. “Fiona and I created a Facebook page and reached out to other horse folks all over the country to protest the roundup of our wild horses, and advocate on behalf of them.” Poole joined other wild-horse advocates at Boston rallies wearing a sign that read “Stop Using Our Taxes To Kill Mustangs.” Poole believes the Mustang is an important part of American heritage in the western United States. “And it is vital that we try to save them.”

The Pooles adopted their second Mustang from a kill pen at an auction in Pennsylvania. The black mare once roamed the rugged range in the Three Fingers Herd Management Area (HMA) at the Oregon/Idaho border. (HMA is made up of designated acres of public land where wild horses and burros are free to roam.) They named her Wash-AH-kah-Chon-Teh (Dakota Teton dialect for Strong Heart). “Chon-Teh appears to have been abused by her adopter based on her condition when we rescued her,” Poole said. “She has become a little more relaxed around humans but still doesn’t completely trust them.”



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“It was evident to me some time ago that the roundups of our wild horses in the western United States was not going to stop,” says Poole sadly. “I decided that although we may not be able to save all of them, we could try to save as many as possible, one horse at a time.”

So she and her daughter started the Mustang and Burro Freedom Foundation. It is a nonprofit foundation that will rescue wild horses and burros from BLM holding pens, adoptions, and other situations including abandonment, auction, neglect, and abuse. They will relocate them to sanctuaries in the West whenever it is possible. Fiona put together the website, designed the logo, and created banners and T-shirts.

“We barely got the foundation off the ground when we were alerted to six Mus-

tangs, one after the other, who were all at auction in Pennsylvania,” says Poole. “This particular auction shops horses to slaughter.” By contacting everyone in her equine network, they managed to rescue all six and found reliable, safe, and temporary farms to quarantine them in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York.

“We are seeking and creating alliances with various organizations and private individuals for transport and foster homes,” said Poole, adding that the horses are often in need of veterinary care when they are rescued.

Believing that Mustangs should be free to roam, Poole has arranged for Sierra and Chon-Teh to be released to Return to Freedom, a wild-horse sanctuary in Lompoc, Calif. In the spring, Poole and Stephanie

Kokal will trailer them to California and set them free. They are seeking donations for their Road to Freedom Fund to pay for transport.

“We love them so much and will miss everything about them,” said Poole. “Knowing they will be running free and joining a band of other wild horses on several hundred acres makes it all worthwhile.

“They are brave, intelligent, and so full of life. Being in their company has been an incredible honor, and giving them back their freedom is the best gift we could ever give them.”

For more information, or to donate to the Mustang and Burro Freedom Foundation, visit themustangfreedomfoundation.com.

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