

I was no longer thinking—at this point I was just numb with shock. Cindy warned me that because of the Stringhalt Benny would pull his back legs up involuntarily and slam them down, making it difficult for him to stand, especially when he was excited.

“Oh, by the way,” she continued, “Benny’s in a three-acre pasture and stopped eating in the last few days ever since his pasture pal was sold and taken away.” I assured her that I still wanted him.

We pulled into the driveway of a lovely home surrounded by forest and pasture. In sharp contrast to the beauty of the place was Benny, his gigantic head—like the bobble head on a toy—bobbling on a rack of bones, his fur barely clinging to his skin. He was running up and down the fence line crying and whaling to the other horses across the fence.

I took my halter and lead rope and headed out to the three-acre parcel. The owner of the property, the uncle of the prior trainer, offered, “I’ve got a shot gun if you want it.” I flinched in disgust and assured him I wouldn’t need it. Benny turned to look at me and then resumed his crying and pacing.

I began my “W”Holistic Joining, moving him off by twirling the lead rope and pointing in the direction I wanted him to go, then releasing my pressure by turning my back when he moved. I continued moving him from here to there as a lead horse will do until he finally turned and looked at me. I immediately turned my back and said, “Good boy.” I slowly walked up to him with my hand outstretched and my eyes lowered with one shoulder towards him. He allowed me to touch his face and then he started to run off, so I made it look like my idea and acted as if to run him off. Each time Benny allowed me to approach he gained confidence, little by little, as I rubbed him with the halter on his face and then on his neck.

In half an hour I had the halter on Benny. I started walking him to the gate when suddenly his back feet started kicking at his chest, springing

upwards as his back-end muscles quivered. Cindy cried out, “That’s the Stringhalt. Keep moving forward so he doesn’t fall down.” I quickly walked him through the gate to the trailer, and he stepped inside without hesitation.

“Phew.” I quickly took off his halter and slammed the door. We immediately began driving, as all the while Benny’s feet slammed on the trailer floor, one after the other, his fear and excitement escalating. With each stop for traffic, I knew Benny was struggling to keep himself upright while his legs continued to fail him—his feet kicking his chest uncontrollably. My heart ached for his suffering.

I got Benny unloaded and put him out in a small pasture, with a loafing shed, adjacent to a larger pasture where my mare and gelding lived together. The ground was soft from days of rain. Benny soon wore a muddy trench along the fence line, wanting to be with the other two horses. Every day he would pace, crying and sweating, making it difficult to get him to eat, let alone get any weight on him.

I finally broke down after a few days and decided to put him in with my other two horses. This proved to be a huge mistake. Immediately, poor Benny was ruthlessly chased by my gelding, Paco. I intervened within moments, screaming at Paco to stop, but to no avail. Benny saw me at the gate which separated the pastures and thankfully he came running up to me, the terror filled eyes pleading for my help. I opened the gate and he ran in with Paco close behind, but I slammed the gate shut just in time, locking out Paco.

Benny was shaking like a leaf as I

cried over him apologizing profusely for allowing him to get hurt. He had several large patches of flesh missing where Paco’s teeth had torn it away. I believe Paco would have chased him down and stomped him to death if he had had the chance.

That experience was a huge revelation for me about Paco and herd behavior. Benny smelled bad, looked bad, limped and appeared to be a threat to the herd, so Paco was only acting out of instinct to protect his herd mate. I had made a terrible mistake and Benny had paid a painful price. In order to help Benny with his herd bound loneliness, I rotated my mare between the geldings. This helped tremendously.

I started working with Benny on foot handling and basic ground manners, but he would rear and try to bite me. He would completely flip out when I tried to take him in hand for a little stroll down the road. One day a curious neighbor stopped to chat. He had noticed Benny’s strange gait, due to the Stringhalt, as I walked Benny along the road.

As we stood there chatting, Benny had a melt down. He tried to run over me, then reared and struck, trying to bite. My neighbor was very concerned for my safety, but for some reason I wasn’t scared. I just knew that Benny was going to be a challenge and needed time to heal.

Look for the continuation of Benny and Missy’s heartwarming story in our March/April issue. ■

Missy Wryn is a “W”Holistic Horsemanship Trainer specializing in getting to the source of behavior and training problems in dangerous horses. To contact Missy for an event or clinic in your area, call toll free 1-866-821-0374 or visit www.WHolisticHorsemanship.com.

