

Benny the "Orphan Syndrome" Horse

Missy Wryn



One day, Cindy, the owner of my local feed store, asked if I would help train a horse that she had gotten for her 8-year-old daughter. "Sure," I said, confidently. "What's his story?" Little did I know that that one innocent question would lead me on a journey of discovery and affirmation.

Cindy had rescued a beautiful Palomino Paint gelding, Benny, from the Humane Society seven months prior, when he was on his way to be euthanized. Benny hadn't done well with the first trainer Cindy hired, so she moved him to a new farm, this one with a pasture. Since my specialty is problem horses, she thought I could be of help in getting Benny trained for her daughter to ride in 4-H. Thinking that Benny's was a simple case of neglect, I decided he probably just needed herd leadership, which I could certainly teach Cindy and her daughter.

On the day we were to begin training, Cindy called me, obviously tired and frustrated. "Would you just take him? He's too much. I'm spread too thin, what with selling my business. I simply don't have time to deal with him."

Cindy really loved and cared about Benny's welfare and wanted him to have a good home, especially because of his past. She explained in detail Benny's history, which was more than a classic case of neglect. Currently he had Stringhalt, in addition to weight loss from being moved to a new location and pasture. But still I was thinking "How bad can it be? He was rescued over seven months ago?" I agreed to take him. However, nothing could have prepared me for my first meeting with this long neglected horse.



The next day we were to drive together to pick up Benny. As we started to leave the feed store, one of Cindy's employees came running out with some treats, asking if Cindy wanted them to catch Benny. When Cindy responded, "No, Missy, the horse whisperer, will catch him," I

cringed. Now the pressure was on, especially since the prior trainer was going to be there, too.

Once in the car, Cindy handed me a well organized notebook with loose photos, Benny's registration and a transfer report dated April 1, 2004. She continued the details of Benny's rescue. This poor horse had been locked in a stall for two years while the owners were dealing with a family crisis. Benny was rescued by the Humane Society along with a few other horses. The people who owned him were instructed to dismantle their barn to avoid prosecution.

Cindy pulled out one of the photos from the notebook that showed Benny covered in fecal matter. It was appalling. She explained that Benny had had to be left to shed out his coat since the fecal matter was stuck to his skin and any attempt to clean it off resulted in raw open sores. Not only that, but when Benny was pulled out of his stall, his left front hoof had to be hack-sawed off because it had grown out to the point of curling. Now his front leg hoof was still a club and he had to be tranquilized for the farrier each visit due to the Stringhalt.