

family. As she grew, Sierra exhibited a strong will and an alpha-mare personality. Although Carol didn't want to "take the wild out of her," as she puts it, Sierra's ground manners and basic handling became more difficult as she grew bigger and stronger. "She was a handful," says Carol. "She would bolt, spin at ninety miles an hour, and I got hit with her rear end and dragged a few times.

"For her safety and ours, we decided to send Sierra for training to HorseTenders, in Greenfield, New Hampshire," Carol says. Operated by the Kokal family on their southern New Hampshire farm, HorseTenders specializes in foundation training. The natural horsemanship training method includes developing mettle without metal (severe bits and spurs).

Winning third place overall in the BLM-sponsored Extreme Mustang Makeover, trainer Kris Kokal has worked extensively with wild horses. Spending time in the pasture with the Mustangs, Kris watches the social dynamics of a horse with the other horses in the field so he can understand their herd mentality and use it for human socialization.

The Pool family attended as many lessons as they could manage; the Pools were trained along with Sierra. "Sierra's training consisted of ground manners, desensitizing, and handling," says Carol. Among the challenges for horse and human were establishing boundaries and learning to trust each other. One day Carol's husband, Jim, had to walk Sierra on a lead down a steep embankment while Carol walked another horse. Carol had doubts that she could do it but, she says, she just "bit the bullet" and descended. Cautiously, she turned around to see Sierra and Jim deftly negotiating the rough terrain.

Together Sierra and Carol faced the challenges and learned to trust each other. "I felt I learned to work better with horses," Carol says now. "Sierra became a much more confident, calm, and respectful horse. And, she's safer to handle."

Sierra's journey to becoming a Bay State horse has been the Pool family's journey to understanding the spirit of a Mustang. "Sierra sees, smells, and hears things long before the other horses do. She's always alert out in the field," Carol says. "Sierra will leave the herd to investigate something she's either seen, smelled, or heard." The family know when the local coyotes are around just by Sierra's ears and eyes, which are watching the fence.

Sierra has become quite a communi-



cator. "She's very animated and snakes her head when she's upset, nickers in a very deep voice when she's really excited, and whinnies to get attention," says Carol. She laughs: "Now she loves to be scratched and stroked, and her eyes have softened. She's become quite the little love bug."

### Adopting Another

Taking on the challenges of a wild horse has not daunted the Pool family. They adopted their second BLM Mustang, a mare they call Wash-Ah-Kah Chon-Teh, which is Dakota Teton dialect for "Strong Heart."

"Sierra is a daily reminder to us of the ongoing plight of America's wild

Mustangs," says Carol. "We're always amazed by her incredible strength, intelligence, resilience, courage, and vitality. We're blessed to have her in our family but sad that she had to be taken from hers in the first place. We could never replace the family she lost, but we let her know every day that we're so happy that she's part of ours." 🐾

*Kathy Anderson is an award-winning screenwriter and freelancer who writes frequently about horses. She recently moved to Plymouth from California. But that's another story.*