

Pixie

There is a plain white envelope with pictures inside that I keep tucked away in a file in my office. Every once in a while I come across it. I know what's inside. Sometimes I open it, but usually I just hold it for a few moments and then put it away because the memories those pictures hold are just too overwhelming.

They are the reminders of a terrible night over 10 years ago when a little three-legged pony mare lay in her stall fighting for her life after her foal was born dead. I don't want to look at them, but I can't throw them away either. They are a reminder of the struggles Pixie has endured, and her unwavering courage and determination to survive the unbelievable turn of events that brought her into my life.

The first time I heard about Pixie I knew we were destined to be together. I worried about her constantly and wondered how she was surviving where she was living.

I had never seen her and didn't know anything about her until the cold winter day she hopped out of the back of a stock trailer and into our lives. The minute I saw her, she had my heart, but Pixie had different ideas as she reached out and bit me in the fanny. No crying allowed! She wasn't going to let me feel sorry for her. She had things to do and I had better get out of her way. I didn't know it then, but I was about to go on the journey of a lifetime, and it was going to be with a three-legged pony.

Missing Leg A Mystery

How Pixie lost her leg will always be shrouded in mystery. We were told that she lost it as a baby in an attack by a pack of dogs, and we also heard rumors that her leg was somehow injured and allowed to rot off, but we will never really be sure what happened. We did know that, at barely 3-years-old, she had somehow managed to survive on her own in a mountain pasture with her right hind leg torn off below the hock.

We also found out she had been left with a band of horses. We heard how she would stand and fight, and then, with her little stub dangling, would drag herself away as they ran her down, and that she had been attacked repeatedly by a full-sized stallion who was also the sire of the foal she was carrying.

The day after she arrived at our home stable, Pixie saw a vet for the first time and started on her new life with good food, care and a barn to live in. With little or no information available on horses with prosthetic limbs, I set out to find out what I could to help her and soon learned she had to have a prosthesis to support herself and keep her other legs from breaking down if she was to survive.

Several braces and legs were made, but everything we tried would leave her jumping up and down in pain and was worse than no leg at all. Then x-rays showed a sharp broken bone in her

stub that pressed down with every step and caused so much pain that she could never wear a prosthesis. Surgery, actually an amputation, was needed, but she would have to wait until her foal was born before she could be helped.

Pixie grew huge as the weeks passed, and we did everything we could to make her comfortable and help her, but she lost her foal during birth. It was heart wrenching to see how she wanted that baby. As the days passed and Pixie got better, we knew she had to have surgery and a prosthesis if she was to live.

When KMJ Radio DJ Ray Appleton in Fresno heard about Pixie and her need for an operation and leg, he held a rally for her in the studio parking lot. Pixie stood up in her trailer on three legs while hundreds of children and supporters visited and wished her luck.

Pixie was going to have her operation and get her new leg. She was loaded into a trailer before dawn on a bitterly cold and foggy November morning and started her journey to a clinic in Southern California that specializes in amputations and prosthetics. If her life now seemed to hold promise, cruel fate was about to visit Pixie again.



More Misfortune

Two days after she arrived at the clinic she was to have surgery. The vet who was to perform the procedure decided that it wasn't needed. Instead she was loaded with pain killers and fitted with a heavy cast that she had to drag around for several months while her stub was burned with a caustic powder.

Her leg was left wrapped for days and not checked. I called every day and was always told she was just fine and they were only waiting for a donated prosthesis before they sent her home. The reality was that Pixie was in real trouble and getting worse every day.

Then a call came telling us what was really happening. They had experimented on her and let her suffer. Everything they were told we had already tried and didn't work, they had done. She was even featured on a news show touting how well she was doing and telling about the handicapped children she was visiting, but in reality, Pixie was being sent home to die.

On top of that, there was a huge payment discrepancy. Before Pixie went to the clinic, we had made an agreement for a set, "out the door," pre-paid amount, and now we were told that we owed thousands of dollars in additional charges. (The clinic was given a paid-in-full check for her care when she arrived). There was no surgery, and we were never told what they were actually doing, which we would never have allowed, so we thought that she was using up those funds in board.

Pixie had to be ransomed and brought home. Calls went out for help and some wonderful people came to her rescue, including former Beatle Paul McCartney (Thank you all so very much!). Three days later a horribly thin and suffering Pixie came home in a trailer relay over a snow covered, and sometimes closed, Grapevine.

Racked with guilt and despair, we had to save her. Pixie never gave up and didn't deserve what had been done to her. She just kept trying and wanted to live. Her once-healed stub was now an open sore covered with proud flesh that kept growing. It had to be cut away a number of times. The procedure was always a terrible, bloody, painful mess. Time was again running out. We had to do something!



Pixie's regular (local) vet, who has always been there for her, wanted to give her the chance she had earned. Her clinic did not have an operating table to accommodate a horse, so she did Pixie's surgery, (actually another amputation), on a blow-up mattress in the back yard of her hospital.

Pixie came home right after the operation and stood in front of a fan for days in 105-degree plus heat while her stub was kept wrapped and treated. Actually, Pixie and I both stayed in the barn and took care of each other. Two days after Pixie had her surgery, I also had surgery. When I came home I was determined to stay with her, but every time I woke up, she was standing over me.

Pixie got better and now needed a prosthesis. With nowhere to turn, my husband Bill made a leg for her, put it on and off she went. Of course, there are always adjustments and repairs to be made. He keeps her in legs, and is always there to tell me that I worry too much. He will tell me something can't be done, and then he will do it. When you have an animal that wears a prosthetic limb, you have to be totally committed to caring for them every day. There are no exceptions or short cuts.

Pixie's prosthesis/legs have evolved and changed greatly over the years and she wears them out. Her current leg is very lightweight and made from used knee braces bought on eBay as well as parts bought at Lowe's and Orchard Supply Hardware. They allow her to bend her leg at the hock and walk more normally, which prevents her joints from stiffening and her leg from atrophying.

Undaunted

Pixie dances to her own tune. She makes the most out of her life and lives every day to the fullest. Leg or no leg she has places to go and things to do. She hates to wear a halter and will go to the barn if you shake a piece of bailing twine or rope at her. She will squeal and turn her backside to you if she doesn't get her way, but more than anything just wants to be like the other horses and bosses them around every chance she gets.

She gives big kisses (sometimes), and is often referred to as, “Little miss you are not the boss of me.” Over the years she has visited with many, many people, including special needs individuals and groups such as 4-H.

If she gets tired during the day she will go into her stall and sit on her couch, actually a covered shelf in a corner. She also breaks water lines and chases cars. She can take her leg off if she wants to and, when she does, usually drops it in the nearest water trough. She can open gates, will devil a potbellied pig and steals feed.

She loves shavings, is a world-class tail rubber, and sometimes dirt eater. She will stand in the covered corral that goes out from her stall and watch the cars that go up and down our road for hours. She notices everything.

Every day, Pixie’s stub is washed and dried. A clean diaper is put on and then covered with an over-the-calf tube sock. Specially-made felt pads that wrap around the areas below and above her hock are then put on and then she steps down into her prosthesis that is held in place with small fitted front pieces that are secured in place with Velcro straps. When she lies down at night, hopefully around 10 p.m., her leg and felt straps are removed. Then the same procedure is repeated in the morning when she gets up.

I know she must remember the days as a baby when she ran and played like other horses, when she kicked up her heels and couldn’t be caught. I can see the longing in her eyes when the other horses run and she hears them whinnying and the sound of their hooves hitting the ground, I see her head and tail go in the air and she whinnies and wants to run, and if only for a fleeting moment, she is whole again in her heart.

She has overcome her handicap and has triumphed with courage and dignity. She is very much loved and cherished for just being who she is. She has brought great joy into our lives, and has touched so many others with her invincible spirit and determination.

Pixie and I have made this journey together along with my husband, who has always been there for us. It has been one of devastating despair and great triumphs as well as intense compassion and dedication. It has been the journey of a lifetime.