

From Race Horse to Trail Horse and Pet

Chapter 1

I was standing alone in my paddock. I was scared. I was in pain. I was confused and worried. There were a few other horses close by in different paddocks, but not close enough to bring me some comfort. I didn't understand what had happened and wondered what would be next. With nothing else to do, my thoughts were drifting off while my eyes and other senses were searching for something familiar in the far distance...



Thoughts drifting off while searching for something in the far distance

My name is Billy and I am a thoroughbred gelding. I was born to become a race horse and from a very young age I was trained and handled to get prepared for this challenge. In my early life I experienced many of the ups and downs of being a career athlete, and I am full of memories. Good ones and bad ones; like most race horses experience during their careers. This lifestyle at a very young age, while still in the process of growing and maturing, sets many thoroughbreds apart from other horse breeds and often gives us a bad reputation. But still, we are just horses and only become the result of what people teach us or make out of us.

At the young age of only 18 months old, I was taken away from my horse playmates and had to learn to live in a small stall and to be totally dependent on humans. For the next several years I was deprived of most things horses would do in a natural environment. But I was young, very curious and excited towards all the new things around me. Mostly the humans around me treated me well, which made it a little easier to live without being in a herd of other horses.

I had to learn so many things at a very fast pace, always had lots of high energy food and had to learn to adjust to changes very quickly, which in general is not easy for horses to do. I met so many different people during this time, most of which treated me well, but each time I started to get a little closer to a special human, there were new changes coming and I had to start and adjust and learn new things all over again. Much of my racing career caused lots of stress and physical challenges, as well as some minor injuries and several indescribable experiences.

Being a race horse is a rough life. We are often very high strung and extremely energy loaded with all the high protein food and different drugs and medications which are administered to us. And since we are still so very young and playful, it often makes it very difficult for us to focus and behave as an adult horse would. But over time this is all we actually know, and we adjust well. During our morning training we usually have lots of fun and enjoy getting out of our stalls and to move around and get pampered. In the afternoons at the races it is much different and the atmosphere around us often causes some anxiety. The pressure we are under can be felt physically, and the after effects of the different medications and total exhaustion after a race also takes a huge toll on us. But mostly this feeling is forgotten relatively fast and we continue to live in the moment.

Over the years of actively racing, a thoroughbred has encounters with very many different handlers, riders and jockeys. Many of us are getting used to travel around and have to adjust to new surroundings quickly. We also learn to accept crowds of people, loud noises from speakers, and so many other things most other horses don't get confronted with. Yet, the one thing we never really learn is how to be and naturally do things like a horse. We also are never ridden by other equine discipline riders and never learn how to react properly to weight-, leg- or rein helps and signs from these different riding styles. It is part of the thoroughbred's breeding that we are very active horses and love to do something and please the people around us. We get easily bored when we have nothing to do and enjoy the challenges of learning new things. Some of us develop some bad habits, caused by living inside a stall for 22-23 hours per day, but with time and patience from our handlers, we mostly can be taught to change them easily. We are also known to be very smart and learn easy and quick, but this is a general assessment, and there sure are many different personalities within our breed as well. I, for my part, was always very curious and brave and loved to learn new things. I loved and trusted the people around me and was always looking forward to spending time with them, while going out for my daily exercises.



Going for a fun exercise, several years after my racing career

As I got a little older, it turned out that I was not a great or extremely fast race horse and my different owners and trainers started to lose interest in me. I was sold several times and each time I faced new challenges, new surroundings, new people, different food and care. Sometimes I adjusted easy, other times not so well. Towards the end of my racing career I had some very bad experiences with the people who were taking care of me. When they realized that I didn't make them any monetary profit, for whatever that means to humans, I received such bad treatment, which almost took me to the point of being broken down by my human handlers. More mentally than physically though. At some point in my life I found myself alone in a pasture with only little food and totally neglected from the humans I was dependent on, and there were no other horses around to give me any kind of comfort.

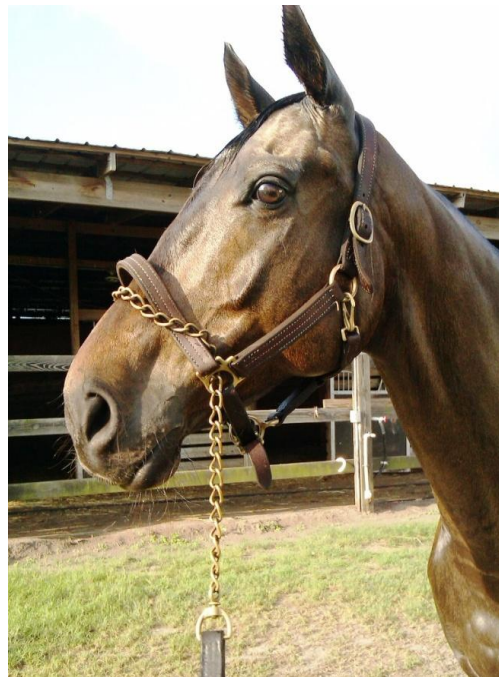
Chapter 2

Within months of being totally alone I was very depressed and lonely and had lost much of the trust I had learned to have towards humans. I became very insecure and displayed a few habits of defensiveness, which were misunderstood by the few humans who tried to come a little closer and look at me. I didn't trust them much and avoided being touched. Up until one man came to visit me one day, whom I trusted instantly. Horses are so very sensitive to energies and I knew instinctively that this man would do me no harm. I guess I was a very lucky horse and he felt the same way about me. He recognized almost instantly that I was not a bad or dangerous horse, but was only displaying the results of some mistreatment and wrongful handling. He rescued me from this sad situation and gave me a new home to feel safe and loved again.

For several years he kept his promise to me and I was never hungry or neglected again. I was living in a nice place with several other horses, but still only had one pasture to myself. I

thrived in my new life and became healthy, happy and beautiful again. The people who took care of us horses, but especially my new owner were nice and compassionate and always treated us very well. I lived like this for a few years and that gave me the great opportunity to let go of my past experiences, to get all medications and drugs out of my system and just to be my old self again. I turned back into a very curious, brave, loving horse and was always willing to please the people around me, hoping for something to do to feel proud and engaged again. But for a very long time I didn't really have any responsibilities and as time went on, I started to feel a little bit bored and depressed again.

When my owner noticed the change in me, he did everything he could to find another helper to take care of me and engage me in some activities again. This is how I met my new friend one day. My owner came with her to my pasture, and when I saw her for the first time, I had the very same experience as when I first met my owner. There was an instant feeling of calmness and nothing indicated that I would have anything to worry about. Within minutes my attitude changed. Just looking at her, listening to her voice and feeling her touch woke up all curiosity and spark in me again. I felt so much positive energy coming from her and was happily looking forward to the things to come. From this day on she kept coming back and we got to know each other better.



Well taken care of, but sometimes a little bit bored

Within a very short time only, my new friend and I formed a very close bond and friendship. We trusted each other and spent much time together, and oh, it was a wonderful feeling to get a little spoiled too! She took great care of me and we started exercising together. It was almost like back in the time when I was in race training, and I found out that both, my new owner and my new friend were jockeys when they were young and knew exactly what kind of experiences and knowledge an ex-race horse has. With this background, none of us ever experienced any

challenges or surprises. It was a wonderful time and I was a very happy horse again; probably even happier than I had ever been in my life previously. For a long time we basically exercised and trained together as if we were at a race track again, just without the pressure of very high performance. It was only meant to have lots of fun and I was very well taken care of and healthy.



Just hanging out in my pasture, with other horses close by

As time went on, my new friend had to take care of more horses from my owner and she worked with them every day too. That caused her to have less time to exercise me, and we didn't go out for our daily rides together anymore. But this was fine with me and I didn't mind to live comfortable and relaxed in my pasture. I had everything I needed, there were many horses close by, and she still came to see me every morning and spent time with me. I was groomed or bathed and she still took me for a little ride at least once or twice a week to make sure that I didn't feel neglected. Even though I didn't have a steady schedule or a "job" to do during this time, I always got enough exercise, personal care and much love. I still lived in a pasture with shelter by myself and only stayed inside a stall every once in a while when the weather caused too much flooding outside. Life was good! The other horses were in different pastures very close to me, and even though we couldn't touch each other, I always knew that I was not alone and felt safe.

Chapter 3

Then, one morning, something happened very suddenly and there were tremendous commotions around the farm, combined with the sense of panic all around. Our regular quiet and calm atmosphere was turned upside down in an instant and everyone, humans and horses, were just trying to figure out what happened. There was this incredible feeling of fear, desperation, worries, and panic all around, it affected all of us literally physically with much pain. Horses know when something is not right, but we cannot understand or comprehend what is happening.

Different cars and trucks were coming and going and after a very long time everything started to quiet down and the people left the farm, leaving us horses alone to calm down.

When they came back a few hours later, there was just this huge sense of sadness, pain and worries to be felt everywhere. When my friend came to feed me, I could feel her pain and knew she was crying, but I was not able to comfort her and started to worry too. So did all other horses and it took us a little while to realize that our owner didn't come back with everyone else.

After this day, things were not the same anymore and some of the daily routines changed. Still, my friend and the other people came every day and took care of us horses, but the energy and atmosphere around just did not have the same feeling of happiness and calmness anymore. Eventually we all adjusted to the changes and calmed down. Being a horse gave me the advantage to forget and go on living in the moment, so did all the other horses. But I still felt the change in my friend's energy every single day and tried the best I could to cheer her up. I kept following her around and tried to nudge her every chance I got. She always spent much time with me and after some weeks it seemed like things got better. Here and there was another day with some more commotion going on at the farm, and I noticed that some of the other horses were leaving.



Horses just know when something is not right

My friend didn't take me out anymore for any exercise, but I still got groomed often and also received lots of other close attention. And treats! As more horses were leaving, it got even quieter around the farm and my friend didn't come every morning anymore. She was now only coming to take care of me and the few remaining other horses every few days and I could feel a great sense of sadness coming from her each time I saw her.

On one of those days our farrier came to take my shoes off and trim my toes, which usually was a routine thing done to me every few weeks. But this time my toes were clipped extremely short and I didn't get new shoes, which caused my hooves to feel very sore and made it painful to walk. Many thoroughbred race horses have some problems with their feet; due to the special

trimming and shoeing we receive from very early age on. Even though I wasn't racing anymore for several years, my owner always kept shoes on my feet to make me feel more comfortable. Now, being the first time in years without them, I developed a few abscesses in my feet. I was in much pain and could barely walk and the next time my friend came to the farm, she was surprised and very angry to see me like this. She spent much time with me, soaked my feet and tried everything to help me get more comfortable, and again I could feel a huge change in her energy, which worried me.

She called the veterinarian for me and left crying after she spent some more time just caressing me and talking to me. Later that day the veterinarian came and drilled several holes into my hooves to drain the infections. He also gave me some pain medicine and I started to feel a little bit better. At this time there were only 4 of the other horses and I left at the farm and again I didn't see my friend for a couple of days.

This was the time when I was standing alone in my paddock. I was scared. I was in pain. I was confused and worried. There still were a few other horses close by in different paddocks, but not close enough to bring me some comfort. I didn't understand what had happened and wondered what would be next. With nothing else to do, my thoughts were drifting off while I tried to ignore the pain in my feet, just looking at and smelling my hay, but not even interested in eating.



Just looking at my hay, but not interested in eating

