

# EQUINE AND CANINE NEWS

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## MEDICINE HORSES—EXPERIENCES WITH WELLBEING

By Jackie Iddings

Once a week, 10 AM sharp, students from the Independent Skills Program pile out of their vans at Heaven Can Wait Equine Sanctuary for Healing and Learning. Working with the rescued horses and donkeys is an integral part of developing important life skills for these students. Living with autism, downs syndrome, and a few surviving severe abuse, these young people learn life lessons about teamwork, confidence, anger management and positive self-esteem.

Following assignments from their teacher, Christina Reid, and assisted by Angela Vinther, Estrella 4H horse project leader and other volunteers, the students groom, exercise, and play with the horses and donkeys, and

good he had done for her by helping other horses.

“I do my best every day to keep that promise,” said Susan. “And, I know in my heart that if Dandy helped me—literally saving me from the streets of Haight-Ashbury—more horses could make differences in peoples’ lives. This is why Heaven Can Wait is a sanctuary for people as well as for abused horses.”

The life skills class from the Paso Robles Unified School District is only one of the groups that participate in the Someone To Smile For program. Other groups that attend include the Adventure Club SLO, and young

and donkeys. At the end of the visit, one of the mothers, Karen Cathcart, shared her experience, “I was shocked at how valuable our outing to Heaven Can Wait was for me and my daughter. In one morning, we accomplished

**“The students have shown great progress at HCW and this has translated to their other work sites, classroom duties and even at home,” reports Christina Reid.**

Heaven Can Wait holds a unique place among sanctuaries. Remaining strongly committed to their mission of equine rescue HCW is also committed to being of service to the community.

In addition to Someone To Smile For serving children and adults with special needs, and Medicine Horse Warrior Horse serving Wounded Warriors of all generations, Heaven Can Wait offers Project HoPE for helping people recover from the specter of disease and The Word Herd giving people the opportunity to improve reading and other communication skills through learning about horse care, working with the rescued equines, and reading, writing, and art projects. The Paso Robles Library and Recreation Services offers a number of programs during the year that take advantage of the educational and recreational benefits of The Word Herd.

The programs make a difference for the horses, too. One of the horses, Singer arrived at Heaven Can Wait a few years ago,

No matter the reason for a visit to HCW; a tour, an event, attending a program, or helping groom the horses and donkeys, everyone ends their visit on a personal high. People confronting disease remark about the physical endurance they discover. Survivors of abuse gain personal strength when a 1000 pound animal respects their personal boundaries. Children and adults isolated by conditions like autism or deafness find new avenues



**Mr Z upon rescue in 2010 (left). Here he is today with a Someone To Smile For participant.**

challenging themselves by leading the equines through a safe obstacle course.

“The students have shown great progress at HCW and this has translated to their other work sites, classroom duties and even at home,” reports Christina Reid.

Heaven Can Wait is home to 28 horses and donkeys that have been rescued from abuse and starvation. Susan Schwartz founded the nonprofit in 2002 to fulfill a promise she made years ago to a horse that saved her life and soul. The horse was unexpectedly taken away and she never learned what became of him. She made Dandy a promise that she would honor the

people from the Kinship Center, who call their regular visits, “Horse Friday.”

According to Susan, the equine-facilitated wellbeing programs have evolved from many sources. “Project HoPE was brought to us by a woman recovering from cancer. Medicine Horse Warrior Horse, for helping veterans recover from PTSD, was sparked by a comment from a Lt. Commander at a local military base. Our recreational and educational programs came from community volunteer energy.”

### **Adventures in Self Discovery**

In early February, a group of foster parents and children arrived for a recreational morning with the horses

starving, traumatized, and only trusting other horses. A war veteran in the Medicine Horse Warrior Horse program started spending time with Singer. Working with the Medicine Horse Warrior Horse program developer, the two have forged a friendship built on their understanding of one another’s trauma. Singer, who relied so strongly on the security of his herd, now leaves his herd to answer his hero’s call.



**Singer and his personal hero**



**Ortega the mini horse enjoying a story**

of communication with these highly intuitive equines. Survivors of war and other traumas find their fears and anger gradually replaced by comfort and purpose.

**Paying Back the Community**

In 2009, cancer survivor, Beverly Hausner, helped HCW launch Project HoPE. HoPE motivated the Board of Directors to find more ways the equines in their care could be of service.

Believing that the bond between horses and humans is healing the HCW Board launched the Equine Assisted Literacy and HoPE Project. This

project has become the learning and healing cradle for Heaven Can Wait's programs.

Heaven Can Wait's primary mission is to provide rescued equines loving, rehabilitative care. In return these courageous animals provide inspiration, education, and hope to children and adults by helping them discover inner strength, confidence, and self-awareness. The equines' work in the Literacy and HoPE Project is their way of paying back the community that helps support them.

**Making a Difference**

Heaven Can Wait is a volunteer organization relying 100% on community support. Support for the equines and programs, comes from contributions and events. Energy for helping with the equines, programs, and events comes from volunteers.

Group and individual visits are welcome at 6275 Cerros Pioneros Way, in San Miguel, California. Please call or email to schedule your visit.

Last year, contributions reached half of what is needed to support the programs and the equines that are the heart of the programs. Because Heaven Can Wait is a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit, donations are tax deductible.

For more information, visit the website at <http://www.heavencanwait.us>. To donate, or volunteer contact:

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