



THE Long way home

The HSUS partners with equine expert Pat Parelli to promote humane training methods and change the lives of rescued horses

by CARRIE ALLAN

As Miss Judge paces nervously around the ring, she keeps a cautious eye on Pat Parelli. With his expansive mustache, fringed leather chaps, and big hands, the horseman looks like he might have been cast as a hardened cattle boss in a John Wayne movie.

He's certainly not the type of guy Miss Judge got used to in her years at the race-tracks: tiny, lean jockeys who were constantly whacking at the Thoroughbred with a crop, urging her to move forward, forward, forward as fast as possible.

"Most horses like her, they don't have a future. They only have a past," Parelli tells a crowd of about 1,000 people as he watches the dark bay mare step uncertainly around the ring alongside her handler from Angel Acres Horse Haven Rescue, the group that saved her from slaughter.

That past—which clings to Miss Judge as she takes in the crowd, the smells, the man in the cowboy hat—is what Parelli is determined to help her move beyond.

From the stands of the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex, the spectators watch intently as he removes the chain from the horse's nose and places her on a long lead that allows her to stake out a comfortable distance. He studies her movements and reactions and tries to gauge her response to his trust-building techniques.

Parelli calls his training style "playing," and it's designed to be fun for both horse and trainer. During his work with Miss Judge, he never uses a whip to force her over a barrel or into a trailer. The method of handling feels more like extended meditation, as Parelli—through repeated tasks, small gestures, and hand pressures along the horse's flank and withers—figures out what

motivates her.

"Horses," he explains to the crowd, "are like snowflakes. They're individuals with unique personalities." And the more Parelli gets to know Miss Judge's likes, dislikes, and fears, the better he can communicate to her what he wants her to do.

The crowd is silent as they witness an animal learning—and un-learning—before their eyes. Miss Judge is remembering how to be a horse, studying what it means to be a companion to a human who's interested in something other than the garland of red roses bestowed each year on the jockey who wins the Kentucky Derby.

HORSE SENSE

Two years ago, Miss Judge was virtually a goner. She was sold at the New Holland, Pa., auction in 2007 to a buyer who intended to sell her for meat.

That she's here now, wowing the crowd; that one of the world's best known

horsemen is helping to rehabilitate her and prepare her for a new home—these things are small miracles, brought about not by divine intervention but by the human kind.

A born showman, Parelli maintains a steady stream of patter with the audience, dropping the occasional ribald joke. But for all his easy swagger, he practices and preaches a kinder, gentler method of training, one that works with the animals and not against them.

At his three-day "Celebration" events, Parelli employs knowledge of horse behavior and herd dynamics to stimulate the animals' minds and enhance their confidence. Each of seven shows this year features an animal from an equine rescue group chosen by The HSUS; at the conclusion of the event, the horse is offered for adoption.

The exhibitions are at the heart of an HSUS initiative to improve the care of horses, who all too often end up abandoned,



neglected, or killed for their meat at slaughter plants. Though many characterize the practice as a convenient means of ending the lives of pets or retired racehorses, the arduous journey to slaughter facilities—and the killing methods used there—ensure the animals an unacceptably awful last few days full of pain and terror.

While efforts to shutter such plants in the U.S. have gained ground in recent years, a federal ban is needed to keep them closed for good and to stop the transport of American horses to slaughter facilities in Canada and Mexico. But providing a kinder fate for them is only part of the agenda, says HSUS equine protection director Keith Dane, who also seeks to address the underlying problems that lead these animals to the auction block in the first place.

Like cats and dogs who land in shelters through no fault of their own, horses sent to slaughter or taken in by the nation's hundreds of rescues are usually healthy and adoptable, says Dane. Their owners often simply lack the knowledge or resources to care for them.

Yet even among horse lovers who are in the best position to adopt, the misperception lingers that homeless horses are somehow less behaviorally sound, less healthy, or less worthy of saving.

Some of them are horses like Miss

Judge, who, after a decade of being trained to run as fast as possible, had nowhere left to go.

MISJUDGED

After her racing career ended, Miss Judge's owner tried to use her for breeding, but she never managed to carry a foal. And so she was put out to pasture, where her care was sporadic at best. By the time she went to auction, her hooves hadn't been trimmed in months, and her feet were as big as dessert plates, recalls Jo Deibel of Angel Acres. Deibel saw something special in the mare, who was otherwise in good physical shape. "She was so outstanding, so quiet and gentle through all the chaos of the auction," she says.

By making an offer behind the scenes to the top bidder—a "killer buyer" who sells horses to slaughter plants—Deibel rescued Miss Judge. She saved one other horse at the auction, leaving with just two of the many animals she wishes she could have rescued that day in New Holland.

Though The HSUS does not endorse the practice of purchasing a horse from a killer buyer—a Pyrrhic victory because it enriches people who shouldn't even be in business—"we also don't condemn it," says

Dane, "because these rescuers are saving horses' lives."

The presence of rescued horses like Miss Judge at the Celebration events helps encourage adoption by showcasing the beautiful faces behind equine homelessness. To reach an even broader audience, Dane would like to recruit Parelli-schooled trainers to work with equine rescues around the country and provide confidence-building, humane training that will ease adopted horses' transitions to new homes.

Parelli's method has been years in the making: He's been thinking about horses, thinking about how *they* think, since he was a kid. It took him a while to find his niche and develop his philosophy. He even worked in rodeos for a while. But his disillusionment with the traditional, dominance-based models of horsemanship took root early.

At the second session in Harrisburg, he describes one of his first jobs, working with a trainer who scornfully told him that his idealistic notions about partnering with horses were just childish dreams.

"Six months I worked for him," Parelli tells the crowd, coaxing Miss Judge to walk over a green tarpaulin that, earlier in the training session, had caused her to stiffen and shy away. "In that six months, three horses were hurt, one died, several kids got hurt, and the trainer broke his arm."

Outside the ring after walking Miss Judge back to the stables, Parelli explains that he offers horse lovers a way to achieve the very dreams that early boss tried to quash. He doesn't project human qualities onto horses—just the opposite, in fact. Anthropomorphism, he says, keeps people from knowing the animals' true natures. If you want a good relationship, you have to understand that a horse is a horse.

Parelli says his sentiments are no different from those of people who've read the book *The Black Stallion*, in which a boy and a wild horse befriend each other on a desert island. "Instead of it being a fairy tale, I said, 'Well, what if you just did it that way? What if you did put the relationship first? What if you did get him to where he wanted to do things and follow you around and wanted

100,000
American horses
are slaughtered in Canada
and Mexico each year



Pat Parelli and his wife, Linda, promote a kind of training that both humans and horses enjoy.

Starting Over

The HSUS gives neglected horses a new life

Wild horses bound to freedom upon arrival at the Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch in East Texas in May. Just two weeks earlier, they'd been rescued from the worst equine cruelty case that officials in Nebraska had ever seen: more than 200 starving mustangs and 74 others already dead on the 1,900-acre 3-Strikes Mustang Ranch in the central part of the state. Many in the sea of bony, dispirited animals were so weak they couldn't even make their way to the bales of hay set out by rescuers from The HSUS and other animal welfare groups.

The teams had arrived after the Morrill County Sheriff's Department raided the property in April and charged the owner with cruel neglect; he had purchased the horses from the government for \$10 each, through an unfortunate loophole in the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. Called in by equine protection group Habitat for Horses, The HSUS helped secure food, trailers, handlers, and medical and sheltering supplies; rescuers then transported the animals to safety. Two weeks of intensive rehabilitation and feeding at the Morrill County Fairgrounds followed; 84 of the horses were then transported to Black Beauty Ranch, operated by The HSUS in partnership with The Fund for Animals.

In June, a team of experts from a California horse rescue and rehabilitation operation known as the Grace Foundation began evaluating and working with the horses to prepare them for eventual adoption.



to be with you as much as he wants to be with his herd?”

As Parelli himself points out, his methods aren't new. "It's the most natural way to relate to horses," he says. "People have been doing it for years, but no one's ever talked about it. No one ever gave someone a ribbon for doing it. It's like those stories, 'Scientists discover brand new fish at the bottom of the sea!' Well, that sucker's been there for years."

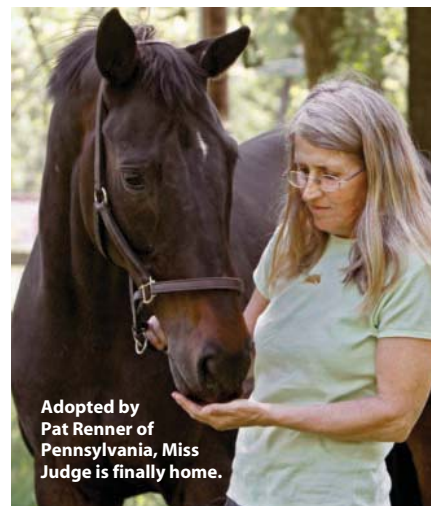
CREATING SECOND CHANCES

After one session, Miss Judge is less fidgety. By the second, she's responding to tiny

gestures, turning or retreating, slowing down or speeding up with barely more than a shrug or a head tip, and Parelli gets a jockey-sized assistant onto her back to ride her. Miss Judge trots and canters; her whole body looks more relaxed when she moves.

"Horses that go to these rescue centers are often really good horses," Parelli tells the crowd as his assistant rides Miss Judge slowly around the room to the gentle lilt of Nina Simone's "My Baby Just Cares For Me."

"Too many ex-racehorses, when they're retired, are kept in a stall and just become hothouse flowers," he adds. "They rarely get



Adopted by Pat Renner of Pennsylvania, Miss Judge is finally home.

A Grisly End for American Horses

While little girls may be most prone to the affliction, at some point in life, many people experience a bout of horse fever. Brought on by a majestic fictional horse or by the idyllic sight of a herd grazing in a sunny field, horse fever can make the most sensible person want to drop everything and start looking for an equine of her own.

For those committed to providing the right care, the condition leads to a life enriched by the presence of horses. But many others end up shouldering a responsibility for which they are ill-prepared. The economic downturn has exacerbated the problem, placing greater demand on horse rescue services and ensuring a steady flow of horses into the slaughter plants.

They're not there because they're old and sickly. Though slaughter proponents claim the industry provides a service by disposing of horses who are lame, sick, injured, or unwanted, USDA figures indicate that more than 92 percent of horses who go to slaughter are in good condition, says Nancy Perry, vice president of government affairs at The HSUS.

"Clearly these horses have productive lives to live, but the problem is that the killer buyers wait at the horse auctions and they scoop up the best and the healthiest horses that they can get," Perry says. "This is a meat industry, so they're looking for vibrant, healthy animals."

Many horse owners send their animals to auction because they're not aware of alternatives such as selling the horse to a properly vetted owner or giving him to a therapeutic riding program or rescue group. Each year, about 100,000 American horses are slaughtered after being acquired by slaughter middlemen who outbid responsible owners, respond to ads posted at tack stores, and even steal horses from open fields as they graze.

Once in the clutches of these killer buyers, the animals are forced to travel in cramped, crowded trailers for up to two days without food, water, or rest. Upon arrival, they see other horses dismembered right in

front of them as they're herded into narrow chutes. Though they're supposed to be stunned with a captive bolt pistol, many stunnings go awry and leave the horses conscious while they're shackled, dragged, hung upside down to have their throats slit, and then dismembered.

Though the animals are now spared this fate within the U.S.—thanks to Congress' decision to stop funding horsemeat inspections and state laws that have shuttered the last plants—American horses can still be shipped to slaughterhouses in Canada and Mexico. Undercover investigations have revealed horrors south of the border, documenting workers repeatedly stabbing fully conscious horses in their necks to sever their spinal cords.

Industry groups characterize the practice of killing horses for their meat as the only affordable way to end their lives, but a recent analysis shows that any horse owner who's been providing good feed and stabling should be able to afford a humane death. Costs vary by region, the horse's health, and other factors, but The HSUS calculates the monthly expense of horse ownership at \$300 to \$350. The average cost of euthanasia and disposal is estimated at \$450.

"Horses are big animals, and the cost of euthanizing them is not like burying your pet cat in the backyard," says Keith Dane, director of equine protection for The HSUS. "This is a cost of responsible horse ownership that people should be aware of and plan for from the day they buy the horse. It shouldn't be seen as, 'I can either provide humane care at the end of my horse's life or I can sell it as a commodity for a few hundred bucks to get rid of it.'"

If you're pining for more horse time but aren't sure you're ready for the responsibility, take a riding class or volunteer at an equine rescue group. Before you commit to the investment it takes to be a good equine companion, make sure your horse fever isn't just a 24-hour bug.



Panicked horses move through the kill shoot at a Mexican slaughter facility.

to be horses again.”

The horse lovers who’ve watched Parelli work with Miss Judge are clearly impressed. On the morning of the final session, a pair of men who’ve come all the way from Canada for the show talk over bowls of raisin bran at a nearby motel.

The older of the two, wearing a sweat-shirt showing a galloping horse silhouetted against a sunset, uses his hand to mimic Miss Judge’s reaction when the tarpaulin on the floor of the ring startled her and she refused to move forward. His friend chuckles when he trots his fingers over the table, stiffening them suddenly as his hand encounters the napkin standing in for the tarp. “But Pat had her much more relaxed by the end,” he says, lifting his coffee cup.

Two tables away, three women in cowboy hats are also talking about the mare. “That little racehorse, the rescue?” the blonde says to her friends. “Lordy, lordy, did she have potential!”

Conversations like this are taking place at almost every table. The diners finish their coffee quickly, and the motel parking lot empties as they all head out to catch Miss Judge’s last appearance.

During the ending session, Parelli finally gets onto Miss Judge’s back to ride. He takes it slow, urging her into a canter only briefly. They circle the ring, the horse taking long, relaxed strides. Moving in concert, they anticipate each other’s motions: The horse trots, the rider posts; the horse turns, the rider’s body turns with

BILL BOX

THE PREVENTION OF EQUINE CRUELTY ACT, H.R. 503/S. 727, prohibits the interstate commerce in horses and horseflesh for human consumption.

While horse slaughter no longer occurs in the U.S., legislation is needed to formalize a ban and prohibit shipment of horses to foreign slaughterhouses. Sponsors include Reps. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Dan Burton, R-Ind., and Sens. Mary Landrieu, D-La., and John Ensign, R-Nev.

THE HORSE TRANSPORTATION SAFETY ACT, H.R. 305, prohibits the interstate transport of horses in motor vehicles containing two or more levels. It is legal to transport horses in such trailers for all but the final leg of the journey to the packing plant. The horses must load and unload via steep ramps, and they’re forced to stoop under low ceilings. Also, a high center of gravity makes double-deck trailers prone to lethal accidents. Sponsors include Reps. Mark Kirk, R-Ill.; Steve Cohen, D-Tenn.; and Ed Whitfield, R-Ky.

TO CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS and urge support for these bills, call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 or visit humanesociety.org/leglookup.



her. Seeing them in silhouette, you could mistake them for a single being.

After a good ride, Parelli dismounts and, on foot, leads Miss Judge out of the ring to thunderous applause. They are once again separate, man and horse, two very different species moving in the same world.

As they walk side by side, they embody the natural approach to care and training, and the empathy that can help a human and a horse continue to move in sync long after the rider has dismounted. The needs of a domesticated horse are simple: a healthy, active life, with fields to run in, good food and water, and the companionship of humans who understand them; a

peaceful death, unencumbered by the pain and terror of the slaughterhouse.

Some people in the stands are crying.

“That’s the most moving thing I’ve ever seen Pat do, and I’ve been watching him for years,” one woman says.

Standing outside the show ring with Miss Judge after the final session, Deibel of Angel Acres says she was thrilled when she found out that Miss Judge had been selected for the event. She just knew, she says, that the horse would be a good candidate. She has intelligence, curiosity, grace.

The attendees haven’t missed those qualities either, snapping up all the available adoption applications by the end of the show. Several have been filled out and returned already, and Deibel is planning to go through them later in the week. The pile includes an application from Pat Renner, who will ultimately be chosen to adopt Miss Judge. Renner’s farm in Bucks County, Pa., is already home to four horses and her granddaughter’s pony—a little herd that the mare can call her own.

Deibel isn’t surprised by the flood of interest in Miss Judge. “I mean, look at that face!” she says, nodding to where the horse is standing.

As if on cue, Miss Judge turns her way, the faint star on her forehead gleaming through her mane. Her dark eyes regard Deibel serenely. If she’s nervous, she’s no longer showing it. Maybe she senses she’ll soon be going home. ■



Miss Judge gets acquainted with the equine members of her new family, mare Tory (left) and gelding Oliver.

TOP LEFT AND BOTTOM RIGHT: JOAN FARMAN KANES; BOTTOM LEFT: FRANKLOFTUS/THE HSUS