

# A special little donkey

*Bindy lives on in new children's book*

For those familiar with the Equine Spirit Sanctuary near Taos – where rescue horses find a home and in turn provide comfort and therapy to humans – one little figure lived large: Bindy, the mini donkey.

He stood only about two-and-a-half-feet tall. “He was small, even for a miniature donkey,” said the sanctuary’s founder and director Ruth Bourgeois. “He came with the first horse that we took in when ESS was incorporated as a rescue. He was 5 years old at that time, and had been a companion to the thoroughbred.”

ESS is home to a number of horses, donkeys and ponies. Even among them, Bindy was special.

Bashful and “super sensitive,” Bourgeois said Bindy “also had a calmness about him that seemed to make horses want to be with him, and he was so cute and lovable that people were drawn to him also. He seemed to intuitively know how to act around children and people with disabilities, and was always endlessly patient and safe with them.”

Bindy’s fan club grew, especially after he became the central figure in a program started at the ESS to encourage children to read.

He was 20 years old when he died of a bad case of colic this year, further upending the lives of Bourgeois and volunteers in the midst of the pandemic. Bourgeois had been in the middle of finishing a children’s book about the little donkey’s life that she intended to use in the reading program, once children can again come in person to the ESS barn. She set the book aside for a while. But she finally completed it and it is for sale on Amazon with revenues to be used in support of the Read to the Donkeys program. The book – “Bindy, the Tiny Donkey with a Big Heart” – is available as a paperback print book and also as a Kindle book.

Bourgeois shared more about

the book and the little donkey that inspired it.

**What was it about Bindy that made him special?**

Bindy had a kindness about him that seemed to draw horses and donkeys in, and to attract people of all ages. He got lots of attention as a resident of the horse rescue. He was a permanent resident and became our mascot, a therapy donkey and ambassador.

**How and why did ESS start the Read to the Donkeys program?**

We began the Read to the Donkeys program last summer, as a pilot program, using the Bindy story. Visitors always wanted to hear Bindy’s story. Over the winter we did practice sessions for reading to the donkeys. We’d bring Bindy and Marley, his best friend, into our classroom where volunteers sat in a big circle. One practice session we had a volunteer in a wheelchair and another using a walker, with others seated on folding chairs and others standing. That was a fun day.

The program is a form of pet therapy designed to connect kids with animals, building a bond that makes learning to read fun, encouraging kids to improve their reading skills. The donkeys are small, calm and well behaved. Reading out loud to the donkey, with the assistance of a volunteer, is motivating. Age-appropriate donkey and horse story books are used for this program, including Bindy’s story.

**What made you set aside the book for awhile?**

All I needed to do was to complete the final edits on the book and get it published. I started working on that and figured I’d get it done over the winter months. I was making good progress, until this March. Then we had to shut down due to COVID-19. It didn’t really matter then when I got the



COURTESY PHOTO

**Bindy the mini donkey was a star at the Equine Spirit Sanctuary in Taos until his death earlier this year at age 20. A new children’s book about his life is available on Amazon with proceeds benefiting a reading program at ESS.**

book done. We wouldn’t be doing our program until the pandemic was over. So I put it aside and didn’t get it finished.

Then we lost Bindy in August. That was devastating. I never expected to lose Bindy like that. He was such a part of our activities and my life. I was so upset I couldn’t even look at that book again for a long time. But I needed to finish it, as a tribute to Bindy.

It feels good to have actually completed something. For the past months, it seems like I’ve accomplished nothing. I know that’s not true, but this project means a lot. I look forward to sharing Bindy’s story with the whole world. I’m sure he would approve.

**How can people help?**

A special fund was set up in Bindy’s memory. The fund is designated to ensure that the Read to the Donkeys program will continue, as well as to help take care of the program donkeys at ESS. All children who participate in the Read program will get a copy of the Bindy story to keep.

– Staff report



**Bindy and his human Ruth Bourgeois snuggle for a portrait. Bindy died unexpectedly this year. Bourgeois has just finished writing a children’s book about his life.**