

November 2022

Dear ESS Friends,

2022 has been an interesting year here at ESS. This update is late, very late, in getting written and sent out. I try to do an update mid-year usually. But this year has been so “not normal” and unpredictable, it seemed like all my time and energy was spent trying to cope with ongoing challenges and unexpected twists and turns.

We had been eagerly awaiting springtime, anticipating a return to regular activities after the past two years with very limited lessons and programs. Instead, springtime turned out to be smoke-filled and stressful with devastating forest fires east of Taos and heavy, endless winds. We were fortunate that the fires did not make it to our area, but they were a bit too close for us to relax here. The thick smoke in the air made it impossible to safely work outdoors, for both horses and volunteers, so we were unable to prepare for the summer programs. When the fires finally were under control, the monsoon rains began. It rained and it rained and it rained, for months!

In between smoke and fires and rain, we did manage to get a small number of kids’ lessons and therapeutic riding lessons completed. We had scheduled a training clinic with Anna Blake for May, which had to be rescheduled for the end of August. Then the middle of August we had the heaviest rain ever here, flooding the property. The arena was over two feet deep in standing water after hours of intense rain. I almost canceled the clinic, but decided to not give it up. Luckily it did dry up enough that we were able to have the clinic. Finally, something that was positive!

Our sweet Scout, the big paint horse that everyone loved and little Dulcy absolutely adored, her soulmate, had an eye irritation that at first seemed like a simple dust/smoke issue. But in just a few weeks it spread rapidly. Turns out it was a cancerous tumor that would have required the eye to be removed, but it was possibly already infecting the facial bones. We made the difficult decision to have Scout euthanized rather than put him through the surgery, which may or may not have mattered with this cancer. Choices like this are hard at the best of times. This was worse than usual. Along with little Dulcy, we all grieved for Scout.

Then in August we lost our beloved Kat to colic. That ended what few kids’ lessons we were doing. Kat was our primary kids’ lesson horse. Losing her was heartbreaking to all who knew and loved her. Since 2009 Kat had been a solid, safe, sweet lesson and program horse, our beautiful unicorn horse.

We had our spring open house in May and did a couple hours of pony rides with Kat in spite of the windy conditions. When the wind got too strong and it was time to end the rides, I watched as one of the volunteers led Kat out of the round pen. I had worried that the work was too much for her. But Kat was in her element. She walked out with head held high, a happy, proud expression on her face and a spring in her step. As I walked back into the office I stopped and looked at the painting of Kat on the wall that Barbara Meikle had done many years ago, titled “My Heart is Open.” Barbara had captured the beautiful expression on Kat’s face when Kat was happy and working, the same expression I saw again that day. Kat was an amazing, special horse. She touched the lives of many, many people here at ESS as a lesson horse and program horse for all our equine-assisted therapy programs. She was a real super star.



The fires created many gorgeous sunsets and colorful moments!

The clinic at the end of August with Anna Blake was the best event of the summer. We actually had good weather for the clinic, with no rain!

We've had many visitors this year. It's always wonderful to meet people who are interested in what we do here at ESS and to share our love of the horses with them. Our volunteers have been great about coming to help take care of the horses and donkeys, and we have done extra training and bodywork with many of the horses. We are planning to be able to do a lot more next year! Over the winter months, we had done classes with the volunteers, teaching them the basics of the Masterson Method®. That has proved to be a wonderful thing for both the people and the horses.


We're starting to do small workshops with expert help from Robin Waugaman, a highly skilled horsewoman who moved to Taos recently. Robin's experience and values are right in alignment with ESS's mission. We're also now able to offer individual and small group equine-assisted learning and therapeutic classes and clinics, with the assistance of Aline Gittleman. Aline has volunteered at ESS off and on for several years and is completing her degree in counseling. It's exciting to see how Robin and Aline's experience and expertise combine to offer a high level of quality, meaningful opportunities for people as they interact with the horses.

We are also now busy preparing for the coming holidays. I'll be sending out another update shortly with information about our Holiday Open Barns, which will be held the first three Saturdays in December.

Horse rescue and working with equine-assisted services programs can be extremely stressful and heartbreaking at times. But it is also incredibly rewarding. Thank you, everyone, for helping us take care of the horses and donkeys (and people, too)!

For more information on our activities, call or email office@equinespiritsanctuary.org. If you want to come visit, or have any questions, please call or email. We welcome visitors! As always, we are grateful for your support and friendship.

From all of us at Equine Spirit Sanctuary,



Ruth Bourgeois
Director, Equine Spirit Sanctuary



The horses are enjoying fresh new hay that was baled in September when we finally had enough dry days for the growers to cut and bale it. We had a summer hay fundraiser, with enough donations that we were able to purchase enough hay for the next four to five months.



Above, Hope making friends with Mocha, who came to ESS in July of this year.



Left, Jack and Jackson, miniature donkey and miniature horse, returned to ESS this summer. They are looking for a forever home.