

# A Wind River Rescue Story

by Kerry Ferguson

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## A SECRET ROUNDUP

There wasn't much publicity about the Wind River roundups. We only heard that massive removals were taking place on the Wind River reservation through a few advocates local to that area. Not a word on plans for what would happen to them after the roundups, either. Until...

## A CALL TO ACTION

It was a Friday afternoon when I received a call from a lawyer and wild horse advocate from Wyoming. She said she wasn't sure how much we knew... She then told me of the hundreds of horses being sent to kill pens in states like Texas -- and Colorado. She said that she and other advocates were trying to get horses out of the kill pen in Texas. Upon arrival at the kill pens, the mares were being separated from their foals and then shipped off to slaughter, leaving young foals orphaned.

Ginger and I were the only ones in the office that day. But after a couple of calls with our new friend from Wyoming, we both agreed that though TCF isn't a rescue organization, we wanted (and needed) to do something to help these foals.

After a strange call to the kill pen in TX, we were back on the phone with our friend when she paused and said, "I've just gotten a notification that there are foals in the CO kill pen."

It turned out that this was the *second* lot of foals and mares that had come through that Colorado kill pen. The scenario was the same as in Texas -- mares and foals were separated, and all the mares set to ship to Mexico. What happened to the stallions? Were there any stallions? To this day, I still don't know.

With Colorado being the closer of the two travel choices, I arranged to visit that location, intent on springing 4-5 foals.

## CHOICES

My husband and I, along with two of our friends, arrived at the ranch. There were many large corrals with horses. I met the gal with whom I had been in contact to find out about the foals, and

she directed me to the proper corral. She invited us to walk into the corral with them to see them and make selections.

Two hours later... My husband and I had chosen one colt. Without the formal approval of the TCF board to go ahead with this endeavor, I was hesitant to pick out all five. But I could purchase one who would eventually come home with me. Of course, the baby we selected was already sold. So, back to the drawing board and into the corral we went. Not knowing what would happen to these babies, the choice seemed very important. Actually, the KNOWING of what would happen to those not purchased... It made my decision very difficult.

We settled on a tiny colt with a darker coat and pale mane and tail. He had what looked like a hatchet for a star, and one white rear left sock. He was so tiny. And so perfect.

I went back to the owner and made my purchase. The brand inspector would be there on Tuesday, and I could pick him up then. I let her know that we would very likely want to get another 5 foals then, as well. No pictures are allowed on this lot, but we returned to get a picture of our little boy. There were many foals there and we wanted to make sure we could identify him -- and get the right foal -- on Tuesday.

Of course, the Cloud Board unanimously voted to go rescue the foals! Tuesday couldn't come fast enough.

## **THE PICK UP**

Tuesday morning, one of our board members, Jaime, put me in contact with a woman who had been trying to rescue one of the mares. She had been told that the mares weren't for sale (evidently, there have been too many incidents while working with adult wild horses that result in injury and death to the horses - running into panels, etc. - so they just don't deal with them anymore). Plus, the mares were already shipping. Miracle of miracles, the owners of the kill pen called her back the day after the mares were shipped and said that this mare had been left behind! The truck was too full! Would she like the mare?

Yes! But unfortunately, this woman didn't have the funds ready to rescue her, so she reached out to Jaime - and TCF - for help. I called and told her to go ahead and let the kill pen know that I would be taking her and to please set her aside for me. Then, I called our Cloud vet and board member, Dr. Lisa Jacobson, and asked if she thought that would be OK. A bit backward in the approval process, but... She thought it was a great idea. An adult to keep the babies in line, to teach them manners, and look after them... is invaluable. Humans just do not make the best horse parents. Especially when there are several foals alone! At the request of the woman who alerted us to her, this lucky mare was to be named, Grace. A very appropriate name for this one mare who escaped the fate of the rest of her Wind River family who were now on a truck to Mexico.

My husband, our friend, Steve, and I made the trip back up to the kill pen to pick up our foal, the mare - Amazing Grace - and pick out the foals who would come to Dr. Lisa's for quarantine.

Fortunately, the majority of the foals were sold. Thanks to all the wonderful people who jumped in to help these little ones, none would go to Mexico. We took the rest. A coincidence that there were five?

The picture we took of our boy on that first visit had been a great call. The foal that was pulled as "ours" was not the one we had chosen. We did find our little one with the "hatchet star," however. Of course, since he was already in the holding pen waiting for us, we kept the little colt that had already been pulled, along with one more colt and three lovely sorrel fillies. And, Grace. A perfectly even seven.

In person, Grace was absolutely stunning. A "miracle mare." The foals and Grace were loaded into our trailer, and we headed off to Dr. Lisa's.

### **TO DR. LISA'S/A GREAT ESCAPE**

On arrival, Dr. Lisa went into the trailer with the horses to look everyone over. We could hear her talking to them gently. Once she'd noted the condition of each (two babies had leg injuries), she signaled to open the door and let them out into her quarantine area. They emerged, Grace with her ears up but with a calm interest in her surroundings. She was followed by the colt who had been separated into a holding pen with her earlier that day. Then came the fillies, the other colt, and our tiny little boy with the hatchet star. The foals all followed Grace as she wandered around the area, at times looking back at the humans who watched them with great interest. Grace seemed happy to have charge of all these little ones and led them with a kind, calm confidence. Dr. Lisa commented on her wonderful disposition and noted that she would make a great partner for someone when the time came. "Grace is a thinker rather than a reactor," she noted.

### **A HEALING JOURNEY**

So began the two-month quarantine for these magnificent seven wild ones. Sickness is not an uncommon result of a stay in a kill pen facility. So many horses of various health scenarios come into these corrals that quarantine is ineffectual – if it's even attempted. Dr. Lisa and her team kept a close eye on the rescued horses. She is neither new to the experience of tending wild horses nor to watching over horses coming from a kill pen.

Sure enough, about 2 weeks from the day we brought them to Dr. Lisa, some of the foals and Grace did start to get runny noses. With loving care, good groceries, and a variety of homeopathic feeds to help get them through any colds or strangles-like symptoms, all made pretty quick work of the illness.

One colt, however, though he seemed to eat non-stop and never presented with a runny nose, was not thriving. He was a beautiful, red-colored sorrel with two perfect back socks. He had been one of the foals with a leg injury, though that had vastly improved. While the others were putting on weight and growing, he was losing weight and soon could only stand up with the help of Dr. Lisa. She had taken to calling him "Cherokee."

It was a difficult blow when Cherokee's journey ended on October 5th.

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## **MOVING FORWARD**

The rest of this little family is moving on without their friend. Soon, their 2-month quarantine will end. TCF friends and experienced wild horse trainers will begin visiting to work with the Wind River horses and start the gentling process. When they are ready, the foals and Grace will find forever homes with loving families and become ambassadors for the wild horses.

And our little "hatchet-starred" foal -- now, "Shoshone," for an area in the Wind River valley -- will come home to the Ferguson ranch.

**TO BE CONTINUED...**