

How do you cope with the loss of a horse?

For every horse owner, there is one day feared most; the day when their beloved companion dies and leaves them. In many cases, horse (and other animal) owners have the option of choosing when that final day will be, ending their pet's suffering through planned euthanasia.

In other instances, tragic accidents or sudden illnesses occur, which don't allow the owner any time to prepare for the loss. Even worse, many times the owner isn't even there to say goodbye.

No matter how your horse passes away, it's important to find a way to cope with such a tremendous loss. For many horse people, the experience is equated with losing a child. After speaking to a few horse owners who have lost their animals, each shared their coping methods in the hopes that it will help others currently going through the loss, or to prepare them whenever the difficult time comes.

Take A Vacation Or Daytrip

Many horse owners agreed that

simply getting away for a while helped them. Oftentimes, the first few trips to the barn after a horse dies are emotional and painful. Before jumping right back into the saddle (literally and figuratively), it's sometimes best to take some time for yourself and get away.

Dominika Nawrot from Hopewell lost a horse that she was riding a few years ago. She found that a simple daytrip helped her to get through that terrible time. "Rapphappy was a four year-old colt that I rode a couple of years back," Nawrot said. "He wasn't mine, but he meant a lot to me. Tragically, he died from anaphylactic shock as the result of an injection. I was devastated. The next day, a friend took me for a long

drive where I could take photos and get my mind off of it. That's actually how I found Bluestone Farms, where I work now."

Spend Time With Friends

Most horse owners who've lost a horse recommend not going through the loss alone. I lost my 19 year-old Thoroughbred gelding, Puppy, back in 2002. In December 2001, I found my horse walking sideways in his field. Upon a veterinary examination, we discovered that he had severe degenerative arthritis in his neck and back, possibly from running into a starting gate years earlier. The vet determined that he could never be ridden again, but there was hope that my horse could remain pasture sound. Sadly, the arthritis had already taken its toll and I had to put Puppy to sleep that February. It was the hardest and easiest choice I ever had to make; hard because I would never see my horse again, but easy because he was no longer suffering.

I dealt with my loss by spending as much time with friends as possible. I spent that weekend with a great friend and avoided doing anything horse-related. Having someone to talk to and go places with was the key to helping me



After a decline in the quality of life of her horse Max, Sue Robichaud of Stockton opted to make the difficult decision to euthanize him.

start the healing process.

Spend Time With Other Horses, Or Get Another Horse

For some people, maintaining contact with not only friends, but other horses is the key to dealing with a horse's death. Riding or spending time with other horses helped them overcome the loss.

Laura Von Glahn of Freehold lost her seven year-old Thoroughbred mare, Jazzy, to a tragic accident in 2001. "I owned my mare for several years," Von Glahn said. "During that time, I thought I had taken every precaution to ensure her safety. Tragically, she had an accident while in the care of a trusted boarding facility. I

cannot begin to express the overwhelming loss that I experienced when I was told that I needed to make the decision to end her precious life. In looking back over that painful period, the only solace I have is knowing that I was able to find the courage when it counted most to look beyond my own needs and do what was right for my horse."

For Von Glahn, the combination of being around other horses and having the support of friends helped her through this heart-breaking experience. "Over the months that followed, I found comfort in support from very close friends," Von Glahn continued. "One of them allowed me to care for her horse while away at college. My horse was raised with hers, so having that time with him comforted me, and in some ways brought me closer to my horse, making her loss more bearable."

Many horse owners overcome their feelings of grief by forming a new bond and adopting or purchasing another horse. By many reports, while each horse is different and can never be replaced, having a new animal to love and care for often makes the healing process much easier.

"Within a few months, I was introduced to a six year-old Morgan mare that had been mishandled by former owners," Von Glahn added. "I made the decision to purchase her. Over the past seven years, we have formed a strong bond and have both learned to love again."

Volunteer With A Horse Rescue, Or Become A Sponsor

If you're not ready to make the commitment to purchase or adopt

**Diana
Tuorto**

**HUNTERDON
HORSE BEAT**



The writer, a resident of Stanhope, owns a Morgan mare and spends time volunteering with equine organizations. In March 2008, she self-published a children's novel, "Janie's New Legs." She runs the the Horse Welfare Organizations Website at <http://horsewelfare.8k.com>. She may be reached at lunar_aradia@yahoo.com.

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another horse, but feel ready to spend time with other horses again, volunteering your time to a horse rescue is a great way to stay involved. Most horse rescues are desperately in need of volunteers to help care for their horses or perform other on-site duties.

If you can't help at the rescue farm itself, offer to volunteer your time on fundraising efforts. Another great way to help out is to consider sponsoring a horse. Most rescues offer sponsorships for as little as \$25 a month. In return, you'll often receive a newsletter or regular updates on your horse, which usually include photos. It's a wonderful way to help another horse, especially if you aren't emotionally or financially able to take another one home right away. In addition, most rescues are more than happy to allow sponsors to visit their horses by appointment.

When I first lost my horse, I was finishing college and did not have the finances to take on another one. I wasn't quite ready to get attached to another horse either. Since I wanted to maintain some involvement with horses and was living in a major city at the time, I put more work into my Web site, Horse Welfare Organizations (www.horsewelfare.8k.com), which I had originally created back in 1998. Ten years later, the site remains active and provides links and information on horse rescues from all over the world. Shortly after losing my horse, I created a Horse of the Month page, which allowed rescues to gain added exposure by spotlighting a different horse each month. Since that time, I'm happy to say that several horses have found homes as a direct result of the page, while others have gained valuable sponsors. By volunteering my time and energy, I knew that I

was making a difference in the lives of other horses.

If you're interested in becoming a volunteer or sponsor for a horse rescue, I recommend contacting any of these three New Jersey-based rescue/retirement facilities: Mylestone Equine Rescue-www.mylestone.org or (908) 995-9300; ReRun- www.rerun.org or (732) 521-1370; Standardbred Retirement Foundation-<http://www.adoptahorse.org> or (609) 324-1500.

Try Everything

Sue Robichaud of Stockton just recently lost Max, one of her beloved rescue horses adopted from ReRun, a non-profit organization dedicated to rescuing Thoroughbred ex-racehorses. In October 2007, Max suffered a navicular injury and was in steady decline.

"Following Max's injury and when an MRI revealed the seriousness of his condition, I immediately began grieving the loss of this fabulous companion and riding horse," Robichaud said. "When I was told that Max's riding days were over, I decided that he deserved the chance to be a soft sculpture in the pasture. However, after three months of lay-up passed, there was still no improvement."

"Following additional diagnostic work at Mid-Atlantic Veterinary Clinic, which confirmed changes in the navicular bone," Robichaud continued, "I reached the decision to euthanize Max. While making the decision was difficult, it was easy as I knew it would end Max's battle with pain and lameness. It was the last kind thing that I could do for him. At that time, my tears were selfish; I was losing Max. Through euthanasia, Max was being set free from a body, which was now failing him. This horse deserved a peaceful end and I was fortunate to be able to give it to him. Max's quality of life was gone and there was no hope for improvement. The decision to euthanize was easy; the pain and loss was difficult."

Robichaud found that a combination of the above coping methods helped her through this loss. "I found that a ski trip with my boyfriend, rekindling my volunteer efforts for ReRun, and visiting with my other horse, Buddy, have all been good distractions and reminders of what the high priorities are in my life."

Give It Time

No matter how you grieve, it's going to take time to overcome the loss of your special horse. Even

horse owners that have purchased a new horse within a few weeks or months admit that there is no replacing their original companion. For me, while I now have a wonderful Morgan horse named Luna, I have never considered her Puppy's replacement; instead, I love them both equally. The key to each of these coping methods is not to go through the loss alone; you'll need the support of friends or other horses to keep you going. While it doesn't feel that way when it first happens, time will surely make the loss easier to bear.

New Book Release

A book release party for children's book "Janie's New Legs," will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday, May 18, at the Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center Annual Horse Show at Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center 83 Old Turnpike Road in the Old-

wick section of Tewksbury Township.

This free event will feature horse-related door prizes, toy giveaways and readings from "Janie's New Legs," a new children's novel for ages 8-14 plus. The book will be available at \$12 per copy. All proceeds from books sold during the event will benefit Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center.

For more information on the book, visit <http://cayuse.8k.com/janie.html> or send email to lunar_aradia@yahoo.com for more information. For directions or information on the horse show, call Somerset Hills Handicapped Riding Center at (908) 439-9636 or visit www.shhrc.org.

Contact Us

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