

COMMENTARY



Xena the Arabian filly runs free after healing from a broken leg.

Jamie Huizenga

A filly's fight for life

This is the story of Xena, the Arabian filly, who broke her leg on April 24 — the second day of her life.

My 25-year-old Arabian mare foaled out a beautiful black filly in the early morning hours of April 23. It was a nice day, so the two spent the day outside. That night, as a storm loomed, I put them both inside the barn. I was proud of the filly and figured it was her dam's last foal.

Early on the morning of the April 24, I went down to do my morning chores and my filly was what we call "three legged." She wasn't putting any weight on her right front leg. I immediately called Dr. Alicia Nolfi from Central Colorado Veterinary Services. She was out within an hour.

We X-rayed her leg and Dr. Nolfi was able to instantly read the radiographs. I sat in the stall with the filly's head on my lap, waiting and praying that the problem was just a sprain of some sort. I saw the pictures on the computer, and I could see the fracture line. Her leg was broken.

My heart fell down to my feet. In my mind, a fracture was automatic euthanasia. My eyes swelled up with tears. Dr. Nolfi looked up at me and quickly told me, "We can splint it. We can heal this."

My surprise was evident. So, the work began and the little filly (we hadn't named her yet) had a brand new splint, or what I called her own "wooden leg." That night, I got up every hour to make sure she could nurse. By the 5 a.m. check, she was popping up on her own and trying to be a bucking bronco.

She had a fight in front of her — for sure — so she needed



Julie Klug

a strong name. Yet, she was a very pretty, feminine filly, so she needed a very special name. We came up with Xena — the Warrior Princess. She has proven to live by that name with her courage, heart, disposition and ability to "fight" for her life.

My job was to "keep her quiet." Nothing worked, her spirit was just too great. We kept Xena and her mother inside a stall. After two weeks, we rechecked, and it wasn't healing as fast as Dr. Nolfi wanted to see. The filly was just too active. The original prognosis was for her to be splinted six weeks, heal and go on with the summer. That did not happen.

She had some setbacks during the summer. At one point, she developed a splint sore, which caused an infection.

During this whole process, I had faith in Dr. Nolfi's treatment plan. But doubt and fear filtered into my thought process.

I had many conversations with Dr. Nolfi about "quality" of life for both Xena and her mother. Xena's warrior-like spirit wanted to live. Every time, after working on her leg, she would put her head on either Dr. Nolfi's shoulder or her veterinary assistant Lacey as if to say, "Thanks, we can do this."

In August, we took off her splint. Her fracture was healed. She just needed a support shoe to help her strengthen her tendons and joint as well as a bandage. We still had to keep her somewhat confined to make sure the joints and ligaments were strengthening and healing properly. Every day, she got stronger.

Today, she is running free and loving life. She has the most unbelievable personality and self-confidence. She is expected to have a 100 percent recovery and live a normal, productive life.

Most veterinarians would have advised for her to be put to sleep. Some people ask me why I did it all, and the answer is because I am responsible for bringing her into this world and feel a deep commitment to her life. I think about other horses that are euthanized unnecessarily because the owners and or vet doesn't know that some fractures can heal.

One day, when Xena wins a big competition or is riding through the Colorado mountains, I will know she is there, only because of Dr. Nolfi.

Once during her healing process she "escaped" her pen as I was cleaning it. When she figured out she was "free," her tail went straight up and she starting running around and bucking. I was nervous she would re-injure her leg.

She didn't. After about 10 minutes of freedom, she quietly followed her mother back into their small pen. It made my heart sing.

(Julie Klug is owner of Powderhorn Creek Ranch, which breeds and sells Arabian horses.)

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