FEATHER SOUND NEWS

Serving the Tampa Bay Area, Florida

TINY DHANZHIR

Dhanzhir certainly did not begin his life with a dance. As a small Shetland Pony he could have been ridden, shown, able to pull a cart or a sleigh. Quite unfortunately, many of his size and hardiness are taken for 'pony-lines'. Many pony-line animals die young, very uncomfortable - until such time.

Small people are given 'pony rides' which, if done properly, may introduce a youngster to the wonderful world of equines. Several tricks-of-the-trade allow little e□ort on human labor, easy cash, yet hard work for ponies. These can be on a leadline, a pony wheel (circular device that leads ponies without needing a handler beside them), or sometime let loose into a chute where they cannot go fast or steer anywhere except to the end. Otherwise, they are walked for hours for money, with little or no break, and hustled off before humane authorities come along.

Many years ago, animal protection agents confiscated 28 such ponies. When they went to auction, Dhanzhir and three of his companions were adopted by a woman who had the knowledge and facility to care for them. Two of the elders passed after several refreshing years in a gentle, quiet atmosphere. The remaining two stayed with the woman until her health took its own turn. Having known about our sanctuary years before, she had made plans with us to take the ponies if/when she was no longer able to care for them. Over a decade ago, Dhanzhir and his even older pal joined our family to spend more peaceful years without a pony-line plan in sight. Free to roam with several different herds of stallions, youngsters, or other elders, the duo became a comfortable fixture for visitors to see… and hear of their previous plight.

The pony ring that was broken to save these few had already buried many who could not last on little food and less care. A kindhearted carnival patron recognized the misery the ponies endured and filed a report. That report led law enforcement to stop the 'merry-go-round' of torture, all for the padding of human pockets with cash.

We get so many stories as the rescues come our way. This was one of the times our residents were saved before we came along. An interested party, animal protection offcers, and a woman who had enough room at her farm, in her heart, and pocketbook, altered the ponies' lives. For these two tiny men, our job was mostly done, but moving onto a different farm from the one where they had found safety, was a challenge in itself. With our decades of knowledge, they settled in just fine, and as two of our smallest, they became a novelty to visitors.

Often, people are misled as to the safety or comfort of an animal on display. Since Dhanzhir's early years of abuse, many new laws have been enacted. The size of a pony vs the height and weight of a mounted child, equipment regulations, qualified supervision, and of course safety precautions for the riders and handlers themselves. Feed, water and work times are also mandated in many locations.

For whatever reasons, human nature may cause a visitor to flaunt ignorance or arrogance about an animal. I have had a 'no pet rule' since my first farm in 1970 but I hear all too often, "oh, I have a horse", or "I'm not afraid". Our rules, alongside various national and local laws, are to protect all of us from that ignorance,

including designs to protect the ponies, or other applicable animals. I am less concerned that one of my horses might bite, than I am about a person hurting them by petting incorrectly or with a dangerous substance on their hands.

Simple respect, kindness, and some common sense can make a pony ride a life altering experience for a potential equestrian, or just another happy kid. It can also provide a pony with a job well-suited to a gentle temperament. Good food, safe shelter and loving hands can make a di□erence to a child, and a mount. Dhanzhir would have loved to give pony rides, had it not been at such a sacri□ce to his own quality of life.

Equestrian Spirits is a 501(c)(3) animal sanctuary. For those who are interested in supporting the cause of needy animals, please consider a tax-deductible donation to help us protect those who had no place else to go. Thank you, & may your own families enjoy a comfortable summer! www.EquestrianSpirits.ORG