

# The Whisper Your Heart Hears

By Kelly Bowers

At first, you notice the attractive barns, fences, fields, spacious corrals occupied by quietly munching equines.

Watching the small herd of horses peacefully mill about the watering trough and another group share a bale in behind, you might not think the world was being changed at this rural sanctuary. But it is, one horse at a time for just over a year now. Congratulations go out to Dave Thompson and Brenda McArthur on the 1st anniversary of their Whispering Hearts Horse Rescue at Haldimand Road 20 and Concession 10 in Hagersville, ON.



Brenda and her own horse, Sabrina, a 19 yr old Arabian.

The couple moved to the 48 acre farm in December of 2007 with a small start on their dream of operating a horse rescue. They had rescued five or six horses, when out of necessity, they moved to the larger facility which they named Whispering Hearts Horse Rescue. The name was inspired by McArthur's experiences with horses at auction. "When you see the horses standing there, they have no way of communicating with you, but you can almost hear their hearts calling to you," she said. "Hence the name Whispering Hearts." Their goal was to care for and rehabilitate neglected and abused animals or those at auction heading

for slaughter. They even give owners, who can no longer care for their horses, an option other than neglect, auction and even death. Brenda hopes that means the horses will arrive sooner and healthier, rather than later and in worse condition.

In one short year they have welcomed 42 horses who arrived at Whispering Hearts in pretty poor condition. Currently, they house 32 with 2 more waiting to be picked up. They nearly always come emaciated and lethargic, dirty and infested with parasites. They have scars from ingrown halters and swollen joints from a previous lifetime.

They suffer from untreated injuries and overgrown hooves which hamper their mobility. Often they are scared or wild from years of neglect or abuse. Some have rarely been handled by humans and need to be resocialized, learning how to be a horse again. Still, as you walk among them, there is the overwhelming feeling of contentment, peace and hope for their future. Some arrive past the point of being saved. Tragically, despite the best efforts, 4 did not make it last year and had to be euthanized. Fortunately, the great majority not only survive but recover and thrive. In 2008, they were proud to have successfully adopted out 22 to new homes. Hope may be the greatest gift they offer each animal that arrives.

Brenda realizes that it takes more than good intentions to be effective and endure in the horse rescue world. The time, energy and expense required to run a privately funded farm are immense and relentless. Though thousands of dollars are spent monthly on regular horse necessities, the most staggering amount, due to the nature of rescued horses, is veterinarian bills. The equine medical care bills are constant, necessary, and often needed in emergency situations. Without any type of funding provided by government, they depend on donations of cash, services and goods, and the rest comes out of their own pockets.

And just like raising children, "It takes a village". As the numbers of horses and the needs increase, so do the offers of help. A while back they needed blankets as winter approached and the equine community stepped up to dress the vulnerable herd. Whispering Hearts Horse Rescue is grateful to have received attention from several local print media and they were even interviewed on TV. and the community has been supportive. Fourteen volunteers arrive six days per week to help with barn work and a terrific young farrier, Eric Proulx is generously providing regular hoof trimming. Tom Shields, a silver certified Chris Irwin trainer volunteers to train the horses. Master Feeds donates a bag of feed every month. There are 18 donation boxes dis-

tributed all over the region in stores and businesses and they are still looking for more locations. Used tack is sold at Cayuga Feed and Farm in Cayuga and the Tack Connection in Beamsville to help raise funds. The rescue is in desperate need of a veterinarian that would be willing to donate some time to ease with medical expenses.

Brenda and Dave would like to say thank you to all the volunteers, all members of the public that have sent donations. Their message is that "together we can make a difference". Brenda also speaks at local humane societies and service groups to raise awareness and educate the public on the needs of the rescue. Contact her if you would like a presentation at your board meeting.

Brenda and Dave have come up with some ways of attracting funds. They are selling 2009 Whispering



Dave checks the water supply.



Above: Lethara, Cheyenne and Jahara share a bale of hay.

Left: Welcome to Whispering Hearts Horse Rescue.



Hearts spiral bound calendars which feature the rescued horses on each page for only \$20. Their latest effort, is an appeal for used tack and farm supplies that are no longer used or wanted. The rescue will either put it to good use or will sell it to help pay for horse care. They will even pick up items if you are unable to drop off, although a drive out to see their farm and meet their wonderful friendly horses is worth the drive. Just call ahead. To find out how you can help, check out [www.whhrescue.com](http://www.whhrescue.com) or call 905-768-9951.

## Attention Horse Owners – Opportunity to participate in research study

A research survey of horse farms, under the supervision of Dr. Trevor Smith, is being conducted by Melissa Mortson, fourth year student in the B.Sc. Animal Biology program in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science at the University of Guelph. The researchers are in the process of recruiting interested horse farms. Hay and concentrate samples will be taken from each farm, as well as, a blood sample from one of the horses. The purpose of this study is to identify a potential biomarker in the blood that will allow the detection of possible early exposure to mycotoxins.

Equine mycotoxicosis is a syndrome in the horse that can be the result of consumption of feed or forage that has been contaminated with mycotoxins produced by molds. Mycotoxins are secondary fungal metabolites that can cause severe, acute symptoms of disease in animals when consumed at high levels. When consumed in relatively low amounts over a long period of time, however, they can cause chronic and sub-chronic toxicological conditions that may affect subsequent equine performance and/or breeding ability. It would be valuable, therefore, for the equine industry to be able to identify if a horse has had an early exposure to mycotoxins before symptoms arise. Some mycotoxin-specific biomarkers have been identified but it is necessary to determine a more general marker that will reflect exposure to a wide range of mycotoxins.

Each farm participating in the study will receive the results of the analysis from their farm and will be kept informed of the progress of the study as it is completed.

For those interested in participating or for more information please contact: Melissa Mortson, [mmortson@uoguelph.ca](mailto:mmortson@uoguelph.ca). Department of Animal and Poultry Science, University of Guelph

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