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Special Education Section

Rescued Pony: The Thriller

**Amazing
Glenda
McElroy**



Flashpoint ©2008

Stockyard Ponies Find New Lives at Fox Run Farm

By Lauren R. Giannini

Cindy Bellis-Jones has spent 30 years rescuing equines destined for slaughter. She's adept at looking beyond external appearances — all too often aggravated by dirt, disease, poor nutrition, wounds and fear. She takes them to Fox Run where they get good food, fresh water, clean air, health care and liberal doses of TLC. The rescues begin remedial training, sometimes from scratch, as soon as they are well enough to be led and worked in hand. They're priced very affordably for 'adoption' into homes suited to their abilities.

"I got started because I was looking for a horse to train after college," recalls Cindy. "I didn't have a lot of money to spend and I looked for horses at the stockyard. It just went on from there. I found bargains that nobody else wanted. In the early 80s, it evolved into finding ponies for my children. I wanted them mounted on wonderful, happy, well-mannered ponies. Eventually, I quit buying horses and concentrated on ponies."

The Bellis-Jones household, located northwest of the Kentucky Horse Park, revolves around fauna that includes llamas, dogs, exotic birds, and a camel. Out in the pastures, horses and ponies graze peacefully near the exotics: perhaps they're aware that they owe their new leases on life to a foxhunting family of animal-lovers.

Cindy and her daughter Heather have many success stories to their credit. The greatest one of all involves My Thriller, the large pony hunter champion owned by Jessica Rubin.

"That pony was probably in the worst shape of all the ponies I ever rescued," recalls Cindy. "But I knew the moment I looked at him that he was something special. He was so skinny, had snot running out of his nose, and a two-foot laceration across his chest had maggots crawling out of it. I marveled at him. I saw that everything was right, that he was the best-put-together pony. He was sick as a dog, but he walked over to me and gave me goose



Thriller's starting to look like a real pony in this shot, taken about a month after his purchase from the stockyards.

Photo by Cindy Bellis-Jones



Heather and My Thriller: looking like a million dollars and already winning tri-colors.

bumps. I don't get goose bumps – I do 100 ponies a year and I do not get goose bumps."

That might have been true... until she met the pony with four socks and splashes of "chrome" on his body.

"The other lady who had gone with me to the sales found a pony and she didn't want him to share the trailer with mine," adds Cindy. "But it was my trailer, and I wasn't leaving without that pony. I told her, 'I'll tie mine in front and you can tie your pony at the back or find another ride.' I work free of charge, helping people to find ponies. I drove them both home."

Heather told her mother that the pony reminded her of Michael Jackson with his trademark white glove. Cindy, recalling the Thriller video, replied, "Why don't we call him Thriller?" They registered him as Fox Runs Thriller (PTHA number 103156Y).

In 2001 Heather decided to make the pony her 4-H project. They earned the Kentucky State Fair 4-H championship for Pony Hunter Under Saddle. The next year Thriller teamed up with a new owner and finished third overall in the Large Green division at the Pony Finals at Kentucky Horse Park, #1 in Zone 5 and #10 nationally for Large Green Pony Hunters. He competed in Large Ponies the next two years, winning Zone 5 both years and finishing 37th and 50th nationally.

Then Thriller found himself with a new rider. Larry and Teri Rubin used to have Thoroughbreds, but still they were surprised when their daughter got bitten by the bug and asked for a horse.

"Jesse had only been riding six months when we got her first pony," recalls Teri. "Joey was fairly green and Jesse had to teach him. A year later (February 2006) we got her Thriller. She was 11 and he taught her so much. That pony is special. I feel very safe and secure with Jesse riding him."

That year, Thriller and Jesse earned five championships in Children's Large Pony Hunters at HITS Ocala. They did very well on the equitation circuit, too. At Devon they took home the top tri-color for Large Pony Hunters. After cutting his head in the trailer, Thriller made up for lost time in 2007 by winning the Zone 2 Finals at Harrisburg.

"We absolutely adore him," says Rubin. "Jessica has a knack with her ponies. She spends time with them, grooms on them, and they respond to her. She doesn't just ride them. She really connects with them and they try to do well for her. We tell people don't judge a pony by its appearance or where it comes from."

For now, he's not going anywhere. Cindy made it abundantly clear that Thriller will be welcomed back to Fox Run Farm anytime for the rest of his life. However, he's right where he belongs. It's an equestrian fairy tale.

"When I started, I had a green pony," says Jesse. "As soon as I got Thriller, he taught me everything – my changes, how to sit down. I used to be a timid rider, but he takes such good care of me and I learned so much. Now I feel more confident that I can ride anything and do a good job."

"I would never in a million years sell him," she adds. "My parents promised me. If I get too big, I would probably let one of the little kids at the barn ride him. He's the best. There are tons of horses out there who can be rescued and trained properly and loved and be a champion like Thriller. I think that's one of the reasons why he's so great and takes care of me. He's grateful for someone saving his life and giving him a second chance."

For information about Fox Run Farm's ponies, please call (859) 338-7520.



Jessica (Jesse) Rubin and My Thriller – champions at Garden State.

Photo by Jared Rubin



My Thriller and Jessica Rubin; when one photo is worth a thousand words...

Photo by Jared Rubin