

Ulysses

By Elizabeth Zarkos, Ph.D. Founder, Hanaeleh Horse Rescue

It has taken me over a year to write Ulysses' story, mostly because anger pervaded my thoughts whenever I thought about the horrors the poor boy had suffered before coming to Hanaeleh. Now that I believe Ulysses has truly conquered his demons, I can tell the story of his journey.

I wasn't supposed to pick up Ulysses from the Riverside, California animal shelter. It was one warm July day in 2012, and I was there to pick up a little bay Arabian who was scheduled to be euthanized. When I got to the shelter, however, the shelter volunteer told me about another horse, a gelding, who had come in a few days prior and having been diagnosed as neurological, was going to be euthanized as well. I did the math: I had a two-horse trailer and therefore I could take two horses.

When I met Ulysses, he was scared and didn't want to leave his stall (most likely that was the only safe place he had been in a long time). There was nothing to indicate he was dangerous – only terribly abused. Abuse can be a vague concept: sometimes it means emotional scarring (we cannot see) and sometimes it's physical scarring (we can see). Ulysses had scores of both. From the tip of his nose to the top of his tail, there were scars—some fresh—lacing his entire body. There were scars (old and new) on his nose, there were scars along his sides, his flanks, up and down his legs. There were bowed tendons scarred over old bowed tendons. Whatever he had been through it had been vicious and it had been of a long duration.

Ulysses when he arrived at Hanaeleh







It took me several minutes to get Ulysses out of his stall, and it took several of us even longer to get him in the trailer. I loaded the little Arabian (we named her Maggie) and with little fuss (Ulysses was quite happy to have company), we went home.

Ulysses and Maggie



Ulysses stayed with Maggie in a paddock for a few months, happily eating his hay and grain. His surface wounds healed, bit by bit. After only a few hours with Maggie, Ulysses made it his job to follow her around the paddock as if he was her personal protector, and would call and scream for her whenever we took her (or him) out.

Eventually we needed to separate them. Ulysses spent the first two days screaming for Maggie before settling down and meeting his new neighbors. He did not like particularly sunny days, nor was he comfortable at night and we discovered quickly that he suffers from some blindness. Once Ulysses was strong and sound, a veterinarian was able to confirm Ulysses' original neurological diagnosis. His belief (that I happen to support) is that Ulysses was trained by charros, or Mexican cowboys, and often their training methods are particularly brutal.

If you have ever seen horses "dance" in the streets at a parade, you may wonder how they get the horses to move like that. Sometimes it is after many hours of patient training. Other times, however, it is from several hours of people hitting the horses with whips and chains, beating the horse so that they "dance" in order to avoid being hurt. In order to "break" the horses of putting their heads up, their heads are instead tied high for several hours, weakening the muscles so the horse does not have the ability to put their heads up, or they are tied with their noses to their chest – again for several hours. This is what our vet believes is the cause of Ulysses' neurological issues- not a blow to the head, not anything physiological, but pinched nerves in the neck resulting from his previous "training."

Ulysses slowly began to trust again. I made a decision that warm day in Riverside: that I would somehow make up for those injustices that were perpetrated on him. I don't have magical powers but I could offer him one thing: life.

I'd grown fonder and fonder of the silly horse Ulysses was becoming. Seeing things through Ulysses' eyes reminded me of some of the disabled students at my school site; some days were better than others, but there is such an innocence in his demeanor that I wonder how anyone could have thought to ever be cruel to him.

Ulysses allowed me to be able to see the world in a new way that I had not experienced since first starting my work with horses. I discovered that apples can be quite impossible to eat unless a human friend can take a bite out of it first. I found that hay is much more fun when one is able to

fling it about, and grain should be enjoyed with as much gusto as possible (apparently the more rice bran one can get on one's face, feeder, legs and stall, the more one shows the chef his appreciation for the meal).

One of my favorite parts of the day is when I give Ulysses his grain. He paces back and forth against the stall while I make it, sometimes putting his nose down, nudging me to help me move faster. When he finally gets his grain, he stops, throws his head down, and takes a ridiculously large bite – so big that half of the food drips down the side of his mouth and falls back into the bucket. Then his eyes close slightly and he chews with great satisfaction. And after he's done, he puts his head back out, either to say thank you or to ask for more, and I gently place my hand on the side of his muzzle. For the briefest of moments, he will be quiet and still, and some part of me thinks he says, "Thank you," and I stroke a gentle, "You're welcome."

For Ulysses, I was able to grant him one of the most precious things we can ever give another: the gift of life. But for my part, Ulysses was able to give me something I think we often neglect: the appreciation for life. For so long I felt so angry at those individuals who destroyed what I thought could have been an amazing horse, until I realized that Ulysses *is* an amazing horse. He has gone through so much, and has come through it, scarred yes, but still happy and trusting and able to take joy from the smallest things. That is a gift, and I thank Ulysses every day allowing me to be part of it.

Ulysses today.





About Hanaeleh Horse Rescue: we are a non-profit organization dedicated to the welfare of horses. We rescue horses that would otherwise be sold to slaughterhouses, promote horse advocacy, and manage a social network for all who share an interest in horses. Hanaeleh was created after its founder purchased an untrained Arabian horse from a feedlot, two days before the horse was scheduled to be shipped to the slaughterhouse. Hanaeleh is both a horse rescue and a strong advocate against horse slaughter.

We are 100% volunteer-run and are a verified rescue with GFAS (Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries). We survive on private donations from people like you.

Hanaeleh (pronounced Hah-nah-lee) is named after the dragon's home in the song "[Puff the Magic Dragon](#)." While it may not be the easiest to spell, Hanaeleh's purpose is the same as the place in the song – a safe haven away from the evils of the world. At Hanaeleh, horses are rehabilitated both mentally and physically so they can find new lives with people who love them. Please click [>>>HERE<<<](#) to donate!