

Colorado, A Mustang's Story. . .from slaughter to celebrity.



Ginger & Colorado in 2006

Colorado, a Spanish Mustang, was born wild in the Pryor Mountains of southern Montana, the son of the magnificent dun band stallion, Shaman. But, he was removed from his home in a round up and adopted out as a two-year-old in 1997. As one of the new equine additions to a large Montana ranch, he was put into the string of horses to be saddle broken. He was resistant to the rough ways of the insensitive ranch hands assigned to break him. After several brutal attempts to break his spirit, he was turned out as a hopeless case with Boomer, another Pryor mustang who was also rounded up in 1997 as a two-year-old.

Colorado and Boomer were left to fend for themselves for the next 8 years. When the rancher's lease ran out on a portion of the ranch, he decided to sell Colorado and Boomer. They were run in from the expansive grasslands that had been their home and locked in a barn. Their owner planned to ship them to the killer buyer horse auction in Billings, Montana within a few days.

Well, God had a hand to play, and the rancher made one call before shipping the two Pryor mustangs to the auction. Remarkably, he had saved a note from 1997 when he bought Colorado and Boomer at the BLM auction at the base of the Pryor Mountains. The note was from Ginger Kathrens, creator of the PBS programs about Cloud, a wild band stallion in the Pryors. Because of her concern for the future safety of the horses she had grown to love, she wrote a note to each buyer: "If you have to sell your horse for any reason, please contact me." She included her phone number. Now, what are the chances of his finding her note over eight years later? To his credit, the rancher made that call.

Within the week, Ginger was on the road to Montana to pick up the two horses. With some difficulty she and John Nickle, President of the Pryor Wild Mustang Center in Lovell, WY, found this isolated ranch and trailered Colorado and Boomer to Lovell where they over nighted before coming the rest of the way to Colorado Springs.

Instead of becoming expensive entrees for restaurant goers in Europe or Japan, these two Pryor mustangs became the wards of the highly regarded *Front Range Equine Rescue* where their training began. Once gentled and trained, the plan was to adopt the two to carefully screened adopters. Boomer, who took easily to training and had a more confident personality, found a home within a few months with Jaime Johnson, an expert trainer and rider who lives east of Colorado Springs.

But a home for Colorado was harder to find. It is difficult enough to place young mustangs, let alone an older one with a deep distrust of humans. He washed out of training with two different trainers, one of whom he kicked in the leg. Then, during a training session, and contrary to instructions, an unsupervised cowboy/trainer roped Colorado around his hind legs, leaving him with painful rope burns and an even deeper distrust of people.

Colorado was then written off as untrainable. . . yet again. That's when Ginger found Juan Gonzales, a trainer near her Westcliffe, CO. He had seen the Cloud films and was fond of the great feet and bone of the pretty little bay mustang. He agreed to take Colorado on as a project. Slowly, with expert training, Colorado started to trust this human with a confident manner and a gentle spirit.

As fate would have it, Sheryl Crow and a couple of her friends happened to take a few days vacation to go horseback riding at the same time Colorado was under Juan's care. They never imagined how this vacation would change their lives.



Sheryl Crow & Ginger

Sheryl and friends, Sue and Donna were guests of Ginger Kathrens whose ranch sits at the base of the breathtaking Sangre De Cristo Mountains. (The girls had all met when a segment for "Trail Mix", a two-hour Animal Planet special was filmed at Sue's Red Horse Ranch near Dripping Springs, Texas. The program, which Ginger was producing, featured Sheryl and her exhibition horse Lady "C". Sue was Lady "C" s trainer and Donna is an associate trainer at Red Horse Ranch.) Ginger invited them to come ride with her in Colorado.

The mounts provided by Ginger for their July ride to above timberline in the Sangres were Spanish Mustangs, born wild in the spectacular Pryor Mountains of southern Montana. Two of the horses are owned by Ann Evans and are Cloud's birth sisters, Smokey and Mahogany. Sheryl rode Smokey. Sue rode Mahogany. And Donna rode Ginger's blue roan, Trace. The girls loved these compact, sure-footed

horses who gave them one of the most memorable rides of their lives and won their hearts with their willing, loving natures. The girls listened, spellbound to Ginger's stories of her adventures in filming "Cloud" and to the ongoing saga of the Pryor Mountain herd and her plans to fight for their preservation through the Cloud Foundation.

Ginger also told them about Colorado, a bachelor friend of Cloud who, unlike Cloud, had lost his freedom. She recounted the story of his rescue from slaughter, his struggles to trust a human, and what was promising to be his training turnaround. When Sheryl heard his story she asked if she could help by adopting him and within several months the little bay horse was on his way to Red Horse Ranch for Equine Agility training. Sheryl has a passionate heart for horses and with her help Colorado's life has gained a new and deep meaning.

The road to trust has been a long one for Colorado but with folks like Sheryl Crow, Ginger Kathrens and Sue De Laurentis to look after him, he'll never again have to walk alone.