

Finding Tucker

By Anne Ensminger

If two pictures are worth two thousand words, nothing more needs to be said after you see the ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures of this horse. However, the happy ending to his story involves the efforts of many and I would like to give you a short synopsis of what I know of it. How something like this can happen, I will never know, but it does. It happens more often than people, who are simply going about their daily lives, could ever imagine.

This story began on a hot day late last summer when I was made aware by my friend Dennis Bryant, of a very thin horse being kept in a bare lot near his home. He was wondering if anything could be done on behalf of the poor animal. Another friend, Leisa McCannon and I drove to the location to check it out and what we saw broke our hearts. The horse was “grazing” near the road. I use quotation marks because there was absolutely nothing except bitter weed for the horse to “graze”. He was, indeed, very thin. It was easy to adhere to the GERL rule not to go onto private property when investigating a cruelty case. The owners of this poor horse had made no attempt to hide their criminal negligence which should have caused them great shame. It was easy to take pictures from the road without stepping one foot onto their property.



I could hardly wait to get home to call the Georgia Department of Agriculture, report the case, and email my pictures. I was told that they would send an Inspector out to investigate. Well, when!?! If the Inspector had been in route at the very moment, it wouldn’t have been soon enough to sooth my anxiety at realizing that someone could let a horse’s condition decline to such a level.

Thankfully, within a short time, I was able to learn that the horse had been seized by GDA Inspectors and taken to the Mansfield Equine Impound. I could now relax somewhat as I knew that he was in very good hands. Time went by but I could not get the horse off of my mind. Around that same time, we at GERL learned that the Mansfield Impound was under strict quarantine because of an outbreak of Strangles. That meant that, as much as I wanted to, it would be best if I did not attempt to visit “my” horse.

I waited, what seemed like forever, until it was safe to visit the Impound. What I found made my heart soar! The wonderful staff and volunteers at the barn had given “my” horse the barn name “Kaput” (I guess

because he was almost kaput when he arrived there!). As luck would have it, Kaput, on top of all of his other problems had contracted the highly contagious Strangles bacterium and suffered a severe case but, in the end, had come through it with flying colors. Looking at him now, one would have trouble believing it was the same horse about which I had been so concerned for the past few months.

Kaput now stood before me, body score perfect, revealing his lovely conformation. In full winter coat, he was beginning to shed but his hair still shone in the sun. He walked up to me and let me rub him all over. His very gentle nature, the reason he was a favorite with the Impound staff, was evident.



It was then that the “other shoe dropped”. I learned that the Inspectors had evaluated his saddle experience and found him to be quite advanced BUT they also discovered lameness in his left front foot. The veterinarian had injected the joint and he seemed to be going sound. What could the problem be? Of course all of this would be disclosed before the bidding began but would that mean that he might not find a good home? There was a very good chance that the lameness was temporary and the result of a minor accident in the pasture. What kind of bidder would be understanding about that and be willing to take a chance on this wonderful horse? My heart was in my throat. Oh, how I did not need another horse!

Just then the bidding started and there was “my” Kaput in the ring! There was a bid of \$200. Who was bidding on “my” horse? I strained to see who it was. Was it that lovely lady with the blond ponytail standing beside a young boy? Yes it was! They seemed excited. I liked the look of them. It all went so fast! There were a few more bids but all too soon, the gavel fell and Kaput was sold to the pretty lady and the boy. Somehow I just knew it was going to be alright.

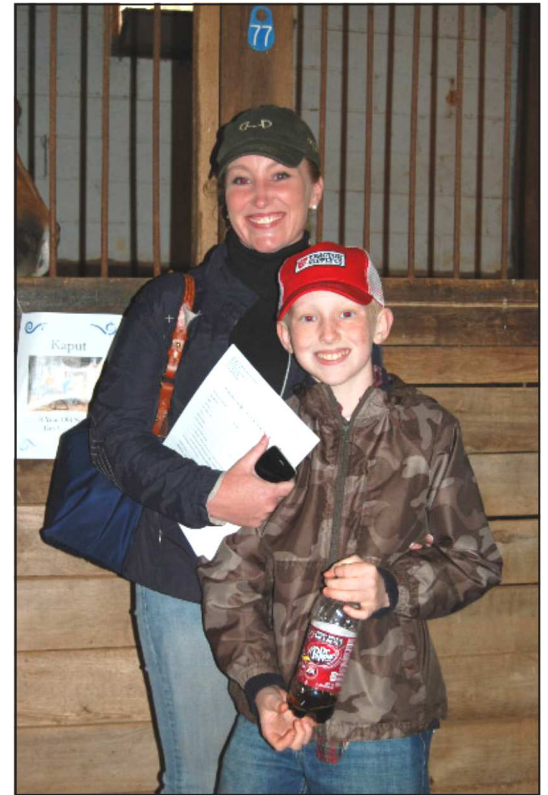
I couldn't wait to speak to them...to tell them what a big part of my heart their horse held. It soon became clear to me that he was already a part of their hearts as well.

Her name is Stephanie Emory Doolittle and the young man is her son, Jackson Emory. Stephanie trains Thoroughbreds but they are a bit large and strong for Jackson so he had been saving his money to buy a horse of his own. He and his mother had visited the Impound days before the sale and had decided that Kaput was just the right size and disposition for a young rider. He was also beautiful. They attended the auction solely to bid on Kaput.

So now the best part of the story begins. Kaput is in a comfortable paddock on their farm near Monticello. He wears a new red halter and has a lovely new name. Jackson will call him Tucker which is the surname of his late great grandparents. I like that.

As of this writing, Tucker has been ridden by Stephanie and earned rave reviews. It is certain that he is the right horse for young Jackson. Tucker will never know another day of hunger or the weakness that comes from carrying a heavy parasite load. His feet will be regularly trimmed and he will have veterinary and dental care as needed.

He got to this place only because there were people who cared and because there are laws in Georgia to protect equine from owners who would let the condition of a horse decline to the point of near starvation. He got there because the staff and volunteers at the GDA Impound gave him the kind of excellent, knowledgeable care they give to hundreds of starving horses that come through their program each year. I am proud to be a part of GERL, an organization that works very hard to support the GDA Equine Impound Program which insures that horses like Tucker get a second chance after they have suffered unconscionable neglect at the hands of uncaring owners. The GERL Feed a Horse Program has been responsible for the purchase of large amounts of feed and hay for the GDA Impounds. We sincerely thank those who regularly contribute to this very important program and I hope that the story of Tucker will make each of you smile. As for me, my heart is full of joy as I realize that Tucker is going to be okay and, as a bonus, I now have two new friends in Stephanie and Jackson. I will be permitted to follow the story of Jackson and Tucker and see just exactly where it leads. That feels good to me.



My joy at seeing what a wonderful job the Impound staff had done to rehabilitate Kaput, was soon tempered by the realization that since he was now totally rehabilitated, he would be scheduled for sale in the upcoming GDA auction, just weeks away. Who would buy him? Would they give him the care he deserved? Would they be kind to him? Would it be necessary for ME to add him to my small herd of four which was about all a 68 year old woman could manage? Must I now start to worry about him all over again!?

Auction day arrived and it was raining cats and dogs. I arrived early with my GERL friends who were to help with the auction. There was a surprisingly good crowd and the driveway was lined with horse trailers. Kaput was housed in a stall with a very pretty Paint as he waited to go into the auction ring. OMG! He was to be FIRST in the sale line-up!