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The Power of
One Horse



NAIS Update

Fox Trotters at the Tevis

Multi-Gaited Horses



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Debi Metcalfe and Idaho, the Racking Horse mare that inspired international cooperation to stop horse theft.

The Power of **One** Horse

By Angela C. Kirby

We have images of brave horses carrying soldiers into battle, thundering across the plains, and simply grazing quietly in serene pastures. It is the heart and spirit of a horse that give it that courage, that freedom, and that peace. These qualities cause man to admire and envy this animal, sometimes misunderstand and often, underestimate it.

Throughout history there have been horses whose names we still recall as displaying the true heart and spirit of a horse, such as General Lee's Traveller, battle of Little Bighorn survivor, Comanche, and racing legend, Seabiscuit. And there is a horse that might not typically be considered a hero - she has never carried a general into a battle, escaped capture on the open plains, or proven herself on a racetrack - however, she is a hero to horses, as well as humans. Because of her, many other horses have been saved from an uncertain fate, even death - all because she once grazed quietly in a serene pasture.

The amazing story of Idaho, a Racking Horse mare, was told in the pages of this magazine many years ago after her theft in 1997 and recovery fifty-one weeks later. But no one, including her owners Debi and Harold Metcalfe, would have ever guessed the impact that she would have on their lives. One day, the Metcalfes were just an American family with two children and a few pleasure horses. The next, they became caught up on a journey that led to places they never imagined being. The horse they once admired became an icon they would never again underestimate. The Metcalfes have learned the power of one horse.

The Power of One's Self

THE DAWN OF SEPTEMBER 26, 1997 forever etched into the Metcalfes' memories. Even eight years after Idaho's recovery, Debi can hardly recall the events without choking on the words. Discovering that her husband's horse, Idaho, was missing was hard enough. But when the truth was uncovered, it brought them to their knees in despair and grief. While Harold searched the pastures and roads for some clue as to where Idaho could be, Debi was on the telephone contacting every person that could possibly know where their horse was. Eventually, she called local law enforcement to report the unthinkable - Idaho had been stolen.

Like many horse owners, Debi and Harold believed that once the sheriff's department was given the details and a report filed, action would be taken and

search for Idaho herself. Once the family knew that Idaho wasn't going to be found wandering down the road a few miles from home, Debi decided to expand her search, so she turned to the Internet.

At the time, Debi did not have any idea about the power to be found in a few keystrokes. Once she logged onto the Internet, her search expanded from a few-mile radius of



As a horse owner, you need to be aware that the grass isn't always greener. How safe are your horses from theft?

Debi discovered power within herself that she never knew existed, **all due to the love for one horse.**

Idaho would be found in a short period of time. Unfortunately, horse theft is not a part of most training academies so the deputies were as lost as the Metcalfes as to what to do next.

Realizing she and her family could depend on no one else, Debi began to

her own home, into homes thousands of miles away. But that was 1997, and the Internet was still wet behind the ears. There were no resources there about horse theft to turn to for help.

Horse theft existed as a silent transgression in the equine world.

People didn't talk about it much because it was somewhat accepted as a slim possibility. And if it did happen to that one unfortunate horse owner, there was little reason to report the theft, as there was an even smaller chance of the horse being recovered. Horse owners were just expected to move on and forget about the animal.

But try telling that to Debi. It was years later before Debi truly realized what had fueled her fight to find Idaho. While the

horse had worked its way into Debi's heart, she was driven more by the pain of loving a heartbroken man. Harold's grief pushed her onward even on the days that she was ready to give up. Debi refused to listen to those who told her that their horse was gone and to just go home.

As Debi gained momentum by working through her fears, frustration, and mistrust, she began an unexpected quest that eventually would lead to her breaking the silence about horse theft and tearing down the barriers so more horses could be recovered. Every free moment was spent sending e-mails, posting flyers, talking to strangers, and delving into a criminal world where few would dare to trespass. These shady people quickly learned who Debi was and why she was there. This unassuming small-town schoolteacher faced drug addicts and unscrupulous criminals without batting an eye. Through her yearlong journey, Debi discovered a power within herself that she never knew existed, all due to her family's love of one horse.

The Heart of the Matter

THIS PAST SUMMER, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY to spend a few days with Debi and her family in their friendly hometown located at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in North Carolina. I already knew Debi and Harold, and was eager to meet Idaho.



Harold and Debi Metcalfe lead Idaho down the same road that her thieves traveled the day their crime shattered the Metcalfe's lives.

Idaho Alert!

Missing Horses



Eddy

California: Eddy, chocolate colored Rocky Mountain Horse; went missing during a lunch break on a trail ride July 15, 2005. **Not recovered.**

REWARD!

California: Sweetie and Choice, Tennessee Walking Horses stolen April 22, 2002. **Not recovered.**

Colorado: Bonaventure, black Racking Horse gelding, stolen Nov. 27, 2003. **RECOVERED**

Colorado: Flash & Dash, 16-year-old chestnut and 18-year-old palomino Tennessee Walking Horses, stolen from ranch pasture Sept. 18, 2004. **Not recovered. REWARD!**

Florida: Beauty, 22-year-old, black Tennessee Walking Horse, stolen from pasture in the night July 17, 2005. **Not recovered. REWARD!**



Beauty

Florida: Lacey, 11-year-old black Tennessee Walking Horse mare, stolen through cut wire fence July 21, 2003. **Not recovered. REWARD!**

Kentucky: 13-day-old fawn colored Tennessee Walking Horse filly, stolen from her field in the night May 3, 2005. **Not Recovered. REWARD!**

Mississippi: Star, 4-year-old, chestnut Tennessee Walking Horse mare stolen from pasture through cut fence July 10, 2005. **Not Recovered. REWARD!**



Trigger

Ohio: Trigger, red roan/sabino 15.3 hand TWH stallion, stolen Nov. 9, 2001, from his pen. **Not recovered. REWARD!**

Pennsylvania: Ben, Tennessee Walking Horse/Appaloosa; missing from trail. **RECOVERED**

Tennessee: JJ and Littleman, Spotted Saddle Horses; stolen from "secure" barn. **RECOVERED**

Wisconsin: Buck, buckskin Paso Fino yearling gelding; stolen from pasture with locked driveway gate July 22, 2006. **Not recovered. REWARD!**

For more information, to volunteer, or to get help, visit Stolen Horse International at www.NetPosse.com

The Power of One Horse

When I first caught sight of this wondrous creature, she was not too different from the other horses in her pasture. I was very surprised to learn that she was not the alpha mare I had expected. Maybe it was her age that made her appear more laid back, as she is now in her 20s, but I was soon to find how deceiving appearances can be. Before my visit was over, I would discover beyond any doubt what made this horse so special.

On my second day there, though it was still hot and muggy, Debi and I saddled up a couple of horses for a late afternoon ride. While she rode Idaho, my mount was a smooth-riding Walking Horse named Secret. As we traversed the roads, fields and woods that lay at the Appalachian foothills, Debi and I finally had a chance to discuss the heart of the matter. Like so many others, I had read the story of Idaho on magazine pages and on NetPosse.com, but I had yet to hear what people refer to as "the rest of the story".

I knew there was more to the story and I heard it as close to "from the horse's mouth" as it could be told. The fact that Debi was relaying this from the back of Idaho was not lost in the moment.

With the scenic hills as a backdrop, my horse struggled to keep Idaho's pace, while Debi described the events of Idaho's theft and recovery as though no time had passed.

As a theft victim myself, I held back tears as I listened intently to the story she told. I felt the fear, grief, and anger that Debi and Harold had, and when she began describing how they had to identify Idaho from a videotape of a Racking Horse show, we were both nearly in tears. But there was no greater moment than Debi detailing Harold's reaction as they instantly recognized Idaho. This big, strapping, but quiet, gentle man broke down, and any emotion that had been withheld or hidden during their search, culminated right then.

Although Debi can capably convey her family's financial, physical, and emotional journey during the search for Idaho, it is impossible to guess what Idaho endured the first six months after she was loaded into that trailer and hauled away from her pasture. Only Idaho knows. Those involved in her theft certainly aren't talking.

While the Metcalfes will never truly know what Idaho suffered, the events during that time took their toll. It was apparent from the pieces of the story gathered that Idaho suffered neglect, abuse, starvation, and sickness before being unknowingly rescued by a family with a little girl who came to love the horse she called Lucy. Had it not been for that little girl and her family, Idaho's fate still might be uncertain, as her spirit was beginning to break.

One of the most astounding things that Debi revealed to me that evening was that she and Harold had

made a decision that they would search for Idaho for one year and then try to pick up the pieces and resume their lives. Fifty-one weeks later, the Metcalfes were able to get back on with their lives when Idaho came home, but it wasn't the life they expected.

Her Way of Fighting Back

THE FIRST TIME THE METCALFES LAID eyes on Idaho after her theft, they saw a broken horse. Her stride was slow and her head and tail hung low. But it only took one familiar whistle from Harold to bring the mare to full attention, seeking him out. At that moment, Debi saw her husband begin to heal, and she knew that once Idaho was home, they could resume their lives.

However, the Metcalfes' ordeal was far from over. Not only did they have to endure the trial of Idaho's thief, they had to answer all the e-mails from well-wishers and curious horse owners. But more importantly,

Debi found herself replying to e-mails from victims of horse theft from all over the country. These people wanted her help!

Exhausted from the 51-week search, but exuberant from the joy of bringing Idaho home, **Debi did the only thing she could. She began responding to the e-mails and helping others.**

Quickly, Debi discovered that this was her way of fighting back at the people that had devastated her world and caused her family such anguish. Before long, Debi - with Harold's blessing - quit her full-time job to form Stolen Horse International. But she was far from alone. Those people that had joined her family's journey now rallied around her and became known as NetPosse, a name given to them by the media during the search for Idaho.

Today, Stolen Horse International (SHI) is incorporated with non-profit status, and it has an international following in not just the equine community, but in law enforcement, as well. Professionals often seek out Debi for tips and advice, and through Debi's diligence and determination, SHI has become the number one resource on the Internet for victims of horse theft. Every horse that is brought home through the NetPosse volunteer network, an Idaho Alert (the horse world's Amber Alert), or a flyer, is one more horse that might not have been recovered if not for SHI.

When we returned to the Metcalfe's home that peaceful July evening, I had the honor of riding Idaho. After watching Debi's quiet confidence as she aptly handled Idaho during our ride, I was amazed at the horse I climbed astride. Gone was the unassuming horse from the pasture or the leisurely paced pleasure mount. In her place was power waiting for a chance to be released. As I gathered the reins and signaled Idaho to move off, I discovered all I needed to know about how this creature survived the bowels of hell that she'd been swept into, and I couldn't help but admire

her strength and courage.

As Debi says, "Never underestimate the power of one." I don't believe, however, even she realizes just how profound this statement is. In only a moment of time spent with Debi, Idaho and her family, I discovered how the theft of one horse had shattered a family's faith; how the spirit of one horse had taught a young girl self-confidence; how the pride of one horse had frustrated hardened criminals; and how the love for one horse had brought a grown man to his knees. But most amazingly, how the power of one horse inspired an international quest to end horse theft.

About the Author:

A native of Alabama, Angela Kirby is a mother, wife, and editor. Horses have long been a passion for her. Naturally artistic, Angela has always enjoyed writing stories and poetry, drawing horses, and designing graphics, but most of her free time now is spent assisting Debi Metcalfe, founder of Stolen Horse International, Inc., on a daily basis.

Angela knows too well the effects of horse theft. A victim herself of civil horse theft and criminal tack theft, Angela has a great respect and admiration for Debi's commitment to educating the public about horse theft while aiding victims in the recovery of stolen and missing horses, tack and trailers.

As Angela reflects on her own experiences, she tells others, "Debi is the only person that quit her job in order to help other victims. **Although there are thousands of victims of horse theft, there is only one Debi Metcalfe.**"



The author shares a special moment with Idaho, knowing that she will never again underestimate the power of one.

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704-484-2165
stolenhorse@netposse.com