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West Coast Theft Wave

Surf's up on the sunny coast, and so is horse theft.
by Angela Kirby

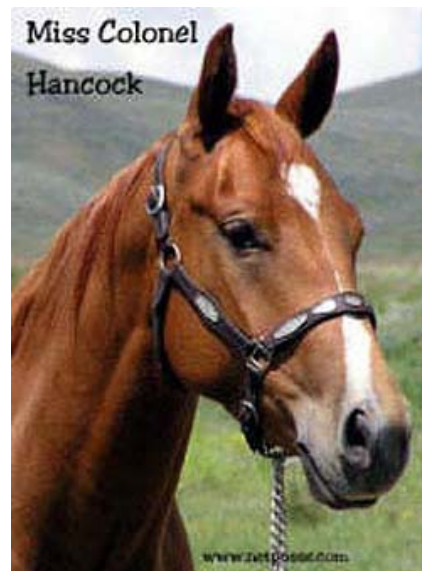
Sunny California is getting hotter, and it's not because of the wildfires burning out of control. Horse thieves have hit the coast time and again over the last few years, leaving a path of destruction and victims to rebuild their lives from the ashes.

Too many people do not understand how the theft of a horse affects so many lives and how much devastation it can cause the victims. The fallout can be daunting ... and there are those who say "let it go ... it's just a horse" But it's not. It's your animal, your pride, your time, your money, your security, your trust, your privacy. You have been violated, and it's not like your car was stolen. This is a live animal that you have put time and effort into. You worry about the horse's well being, and every time you see a horse that resembles the one you long to find, your head whips around and your heart jumps, thinking that just maybe ...

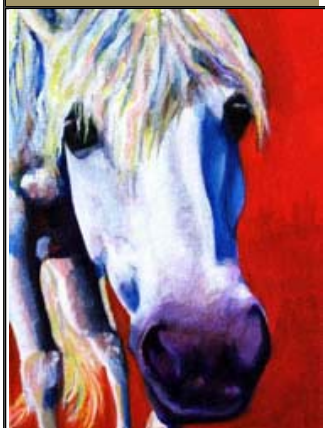
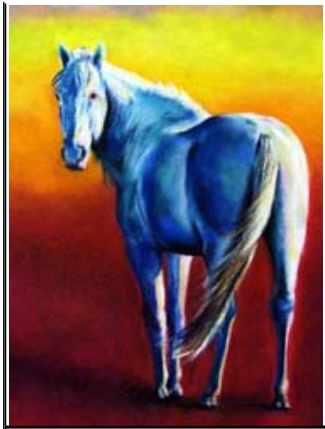
When Debi and Harold's horse Idaho was stolen, their son began sleeping on the floor, wondering if he would be next. Harold's heart broke, and Debi, who had never been a fan of Idaho, found herself doing everything under the sun to find her husband's horse. She did what she did for her love of Harold and his love of a horse ... and the entire event forever changed the course of their lives. People told her to give up and get on with her life, and when Idaho was recovered, her family planned to go back to life as "normal." However, the Metcalfes discovered quickly that normal didn't exist any more.

So Debi did what any courageous person would do ... she adapted and moved forward. Her experience and need to help others compelled her to

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form Stolen Horse International, aka NetPosse.com. But in her heart, Debi knows that she would never have given up or forgotten if Idaho hadn't been recovered 51 weeks after her theft. And every time she saw a spotted white horse, her heart would have stopped.

one of the stolen ranch horses not yet recovered in California.

This is how the victims in this article feel. Whether their journeys began weeks ago or years before, whether the horse is recovered or not, horse theft has a lingering affect in a victim's heart, and it has the ability to reach into areas of their lives no one could imagine.

Winning Isn't Everything

"I have no chance of winning, but it's for a good cause" How many times have we muttered that same pessimistic phrase while filling out a raffle ticket and handing over our money? The horse community, no matter what the discipline, is a tight-knit one, and we'll give our last dollar to a worthy charity without expecting anything in return.

This is just how Monet Templeton felt when she stopped to buy fly spray at her feed store.

Spotting a picture of a gorgeous buckskin gelding that was being raffled off, with proceeds supporting a local therapeutic program, Monet had no problem shelling out the money for two tickets. Besides, it's not like she was going to win.

While the image of the horse remained with her, Monet didn't give the thought of winning another moment. She left the store with the tickets in hand, and a few days later, left town for good. Monet and her husband had decided to return to her hometown of Redding, California, to raise their children. So in May 2008, they loaded up their belongings, three horses, and two dogs and hit the road.

But only two days after arriving in Redding, the Templetons hadn't even settled in to their new home when the phone rang. Monet had won the raffle! The beautiful buckskin called Whiskey was hers. Now, how did she possibly convince her husband to drive the eight hours back to Visalia to pickup yet another horse?

Monet had no reason to worry. Her concern was met with her husband's laughter. Joe had no problem returning to retrieve his wife's new love.

She describes her anticipation of the upcoming trip with uncontained excitement. "I felt like a kid that was trying to go to sleep the night before Christmas knowing that all of those shiny presents under the tree were just waiting to be opened. Sleep was not an option and daylight took forever to come around."

Her joy at having Whiskey join the family in Redding couldn't be diminished either. Monet acted just like a girl who had gotten her first horse for that highly anticipated Christmas. Joe finally had to convince her to come to the house about 9:00 that night. She had spent all evening bonding with Whiskey. Even the other horses welcomed the new family member.

That next morning couldn't arrive soon enough. As soon as the sun slipped over the horizon, Monet's feet hit the floor and she was racing outside to check on the horses.

But what Monet discovered left her stunned and heartbroken. While three horses eagerly greeted her arrival, there was one missing. Whiskey had vanished. Joe scoured their 6-acre pasture before he and some neighbors tacked up searched the



Monet felt she won the lottery after winning Whiskey in a raffle.

area on horseback. However, it became clear fairly quickly that Whiskey was gone.

While Monet only had a few hours to bond with this sweet gelding, they emptiness cut her deep. "I know that we only had Whiskey for a very short time, but he is still a very large part of my heart. Our hope is that one day he will be returned to our family."

What left Monet even more stunned was the discovery from a local trainer that Whiskey wasn't the only horse stolen recently in the area. After learning of this two days after her horse's theft, Monet contacted the sheriff's department to report Whiskey stolen, and then she filed a report with Stolen Horse International's Web site NetPosse.com.

This nonprofit organization's volunteers quickly created an individual webpage and flyer for Whiskey and issued an Idaho Alert, the horse community's Amber Alert, to thousands of volunteers and list groups. The information was also forwarded to another NetPosse victim, Lisa Barrett.

Déjà vu for Theft Victim

One year, 8 months, 4 weeks and 4 days prior to Whiskey's theft, and 8 hours and 520 miles south of the Templetons, Scottish Bart was stolen - from his pasture. His buddy was left behind.

But that's not where the similarities end, and to Lisa, receiving the report about Whiskey from *NetPosse.com* was like having déjà vu. In an email to Monet's mother, stunned Lisa says, "Your story sounds exactly like ours! We had two horses and the next morning Scotty was gone but the other was still there."



Scotty's theft was the last straw, causing his owners to sell the farm and move.

In fact, when you compare Monet's and Lisa's horses side by side, it is hard to tell them apart, except that Whiskey is a lighter color. Both are AQHA buckskin geldings with a little white in the manes. They have the classic buckskin coloring with black leg markings and black manes and tails. Both were bred to engage in rugged eventing. At three, Scotty had begun roping training; just having turned two, Whiskey is expected to excel at reining and cutting.

Scotty was raised and trained by Lisa's boyfriend, John, but his disappearance left a void in her heart, as well. And the gentle gelding's theft from the small community where Lisa and John lived got the whole town talking. In fact, rumors and hearsay about who might have stolen the horse spread more rapidly than a California wildfire. Lisa even received threatening phone calls. Eventually, Lisa and John sold the farm and settled elsewhere. However, Lisa sadly reveals that John "still keeps one eye open for [Scotty] where ever we go."

And while the distance between the two locations seems far, eight hours is actually a very short stretch. So the question stands - are these thefts almost two years and 520 miles apart connected? The possibility cannot be discounted. But perhaps these two thefts are merely the two that might help solve the rash of thefts reported to NetPosse in the last few years - and those that maybe the public is less aware of.

Do the Map

When mapping the California thefts reported to NetPosse since 2002, the pattern becomes disturbing and perhaps obvious. While there are more cases listed on NetPosse.com, the fifteen thefts mapped appear fairly random, but all occurred along a line

drawn almost straight down the western coast. Though the breeds vary somewhat, the ones mapped are mostly trained, full-size horses that were perhaps stolen for resale. These include:

- Choice and Sweetie (San Diego Co)
- Blue Stetson (San Diego Co)
- Twister (Riverside Co)
- Keno (Riverside Co)
- Scottish Bart (Los Angeles Co)
- Baby - (Kern Co)
- Eddy (Kern Co)
- Concha (Santa Barbara Co)
- 4 Ranch Horses (Monterey Co)
- Silver Blue (San Benito Co)
- King (Santa Clara Co)
- Gregor (San Mateo Co)
- Wizard (Contra Costa Co)
- Freckles Belle (Sonoma Co)
- Whiskey (Shasta Co)



There is an obvious trail of horse theft traveling along California's coast.

So the pattern of thefts, begs the question: Are any of these thefts related? For those living in the Templeton's area, consider yourself warned. There are thieves in your midst. To learn how to protect your farm and your horses, visit NetPosse.com. The information is available to the public so that you do not find yourself in Monet's and Lisa's shoes... always wondering... always looking... always hoping.

People like the victims in this article and those shown on the map, are the reason Debi and her family formed Stolen Horse International, a nonprofit organization known as NetPosse, which aids in the recovery of stolen and missing horses, tack and trailers, while also providing horse theft education.

In the last decade, NetPosse has grown to include thousands of individual members and list groups, and has established credibility in the media and law enforcement arenas. Yet, despite the organizations power and presence, there are still times that all Debi and the NetPosse volunteers can do is remind these hurting people to keep the faith and not give up... or simply let them know they are not alone. But above all, remember to "Never Underestimate the Power of One." It only takes one flyer, one email, one phone call, one sighting to bring a missing horse home. You might be that one.



This gorgeous Rocky Mountain gelding known from Kentucky to California was stolen during a trail ride after arriving on the West Coast.

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