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A Story of Humane Connection**

Buddhism teaches that the universe itself is compassion. SGI President Ikeda has said: "The path of the bodhisattva lies in supremely humane action. And such action, fundamentally, is at one with the function of compassion of the universe."

I was born with a great love of horses pulsing through my half-Hungarian blood. Although I was brought up in New York City, I cherished the times when my grandmother would take our family to Atlantic City, where I could rent a pony to ride freely on the beach. Each summer at my grandfather's country home in the mountains, my powerful Hungarian father — pretending to be the horse I was never able to have — would pull me in an antique buggy.

But by the time I was in my teens, very painful circumstances in my home life turned me inward and made me afraid of life. I forgot my love for horses, as I was enveloped by sorrow and panic, eating binges and starvation.

As my neurosis grew, I plunged deeper into despair until Debra Cohen introduced me to the SGI and Buddhism. On Feb. 22 of this year, I celebrated my 20th "birthday" as a Buddhist. Over the years, I have had many powerful transformations, including victory over my anorexia and depression. I also went on to great success as a photographic muralist, culminating in my biography being published by Times Books in *Visible Light*.

As I cured myself, my original dreams resurfaced. One summer, in my sixth year of practice, I had a desire to vacation in Montawk, where I could ride once again on the beach. There, at a dude ranch, I saw a horse that was skin and bones. I was told by a neighboring ranch that the owners were methodically starving their horses to death.

I came home from that vacation perplexed and wondering how I could rescue that brown mare, who swaggered so gracefully in her dissipation. The Buddhist members in my New York group all encouraged me to save her.

I chanted hard about the situation and opened Nichiren Daishonin's writings to a random page and read: "Incidentally, I pastured the mare you gave me, and she has found a mate and given birth to a chestnut-colored colt. What a wonderful horse!" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 73). That was enough to convince me. I purchased her for \$600, shipped her to a farm upstate and found out that the owner of the farm had owned her five years previously. I had purchased a \$5,000 Tennessee Walking Horse.

She was frenzied, and when the farm owner heard me chanting to her, he started to chant to her, too, while I was in the city during the week.

Going to visit Princess became the joy of my life and reconnected me to a dream of living in the mountains. As the years went on, I began looking for a small, inexpensive farm to move to with Princess. I decided to look in Tennessee — to bring Princess "home." After my dear mother passed away, my daughter, Amanda, and I found a beautiful farm in Greeneville, Tenn. and moved here two years ago with Princess.

For a while, I felt content to own a farm with my daughter and have Princess close. But one evening, my daughter and I decided to acquire a companion for Princess at the Kingsport Livestock Auction. I had an image of a black horse. On the way up, I told Amanda the story of Black Beauty. There was a wild lightning storm that night, and we arrived at the auction late. We approached the dark, dank auction corrals only to find a few horses left and men riding them too hard. I was mocked and laughed at as I asked to buy a black horse.

Suddenly, from across the huge room, I saw a startling black mare with bold white blaze and powerful neck staring straight at us. I pulled my little girl through the corrals and said, “Honey, there she is!” I felt we had made that journey to find her.

When I looked down, though, I saw such a horrifying sight that I almost puked. Her back left leg from knee to ankle was as large as a ham shank, open to the bone, a bleeding mass of scar tissue. She was dragging it as they began loading her onto a wagon.

I spoke to the man in charge, who said that she was being sent to slaughter. With fury and ferocity, I shouted, “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo!” The man stopped and walked over to me threateningly and shouted, “What did you say?” as if I were cursing him.

I said: “Those are Buddhist words that mean compassion — and that’s what we need around here — a little more compassion. Take that horse off the wagon now!”

He came toward me, then started to laugh, grabbed my arm and said: “Lady, I like you. You’ve got guts. Get the mare off the wagon.”

I asked what he would take for her. He said \$400. I said fine and went to the office to pay. They refused to accept my New York check, and as I was imploring them, the man loaded the mare and drove off with her into the raining, thundering night. I ran out and watched them disappear, put my face up to the heavens and wailed a cry of great despair — great defeat — great pain and great compassion for all the living beings at the mercy of man’s cruelty.

I returned home in dismay. A friend called and I shared my feelings of defeat. But, paradoxically, our conversation instilled in me an iron-willed determination to find that horse — this was my turning point from cowardly failure to courageous victory. I went to the Gohonzon and began chanting hell-raising, gate-breaking, General Stone Tiger daimoku to reverse the situation and win.

I assumed that she was on her way to Canada, where many of the horse slaughtering plants were. (Horse meat is used in dog food and is consumed by people in some countries.) For me, the entrance to hell on earth is through the gates of a horse slaughtering plant. I spent several hours that night, early the next morning and the following night trying to block the slaughter and putting up a reward for this astonishingly beautiful black mare with a mangled leg.

One call led to another and another. All were dead ends. I had one number left to call in Kentucky. Discouraged, I let the phone ring a long, long time. Just as I was about to hang up, a man answered. He told me, “The guy who shipped out your horse is at the Sugar Creek Auction in Ohio today.”

I called there and told the man, “I’ll double her price — just bring her back.” Two days later, he drove up to my farm and unloaded my stunning black mare. Because our search was so singularly directed and because we went through a severe storm without faltering, I named the horse Storm Quest.

Because acquiring her gave me a sense of absolute and exhilarating mission to save horses, I named our farm Storm Haven Farm, an equine sanctuary. I have subsequently rescued six more horses.

It’s been more than a year and a half since I have been treating Storm Quest and healing her. Her leg closed up just recently. It is larger in circumference than her other legs and the hardened scar is ragged and ugly, but she is sound. She gallops and rears magnificently. Because she is such a fine horse, I felt I needed to learn correct riding and the proper guides; I started taking equitation lessons.

Recently, I saddled up my beautiful black mare and rode her at sunset to the top of our land. From that vantage point, we could look out at the full panorama of the Great Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee.

As she pranced feistily and powerfully down that hill, I felt at one with her. Because of her, I was able to manifest the never-give-up spirit of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. She enabled me to test how victorious this life could be — how one, based on compassion and unfaltering strength, can change the impossible to possible and create even just a small stronghold for kindness in our rather cruel world.

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