

They've Only Just Begun...

It may be called the 'finish' line but it's only the start for many Thoroughbreds. Those who prove themselves on the track snag the headlines and the glory, while a select few go on to inscribe themselves within the lexicon of American racing. But the majority of racehorses become mere footnotes; their names hidden under the patina of dust left by the next year's crop. Although their stories may slip away, they live on - many into their teens and twenties. Often times they are adopted by new owners and retrained as hunter-jumper, dressage or trail horses. They receive ample feed, proper veterinary care and the love of adoring owners. Other times they don't.



Photo Courtesy Tierra Madre H.S.© 2009

The Kids:
Susie Q, (the late) Dawnie, Venture & Jericho

There are good plumbers and bad plumbers, good accountants and bad accountants; new owners are no different - some are good, some not. Others try. They try hard, yet the lack of time or help or finances cause them to fall short of the mark. Money plays a large role in the equation. In this poor economy animal shelters are finding themselves overloaded. Cats and dogs as well as horses are being abandoned or surrendered in increasing numbers. It seems people just can't afford to care for their pets anymore. Still others do little else but that. They take in those that others can not: the sick and unwanted, the abused or those in danger of slaughter. They don't ask why. They simply understand the bond between man and animal is a quid-pro-quo. We feed and love and care for them. In return, they fill our hearts with joy and give rich purpose to our very lives.

I began taking pictures of Thoroughbreds years ago with an agenda: to help support the efforts of the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation. Based in Saratoga Springs, NY, they are the oldest rescue organization in the United States. Because of their longevity they are also possibly the most well-known. Soon I realized that I had merely scratched the surface. Groups like the TRF exist throughout the nation. Apparently, the problem is more vast than I originally imagined.

Taking pictures of horses came to include writing about horses. I set out with a few rules: no politics and no rancor, just good stories about those who work with, care for and campaign the racehorse. I maintain those goals but recognize I'm telling only part of the story. One person picking up where I leave off is Jim Gath. Jim is the owner and caretaker of Tierra Madre Horse Sanctuary, of Cave Creek, AZ.

Jim was a founder of USA Today, and once had a

hand in several other national media projects. Like many he got older, and wiser - yet unlike many people, he chose to listen to his heart and devote his time to caring for those who truly need his help. He grew up around horses. His grandfather was a trick rider and his uncle was a jockey. Like most horsemen his day begins before the sun's but he still finds time to blog, and his musings are an education for even the most well-worn in the saddle. According to Jim, all one needs to do is listen to the horse, they'll tell you everything you need to know. After reading his blog I'd have to say listen to Jim - he and his horses have been doing quite a bit of talking. He has about thirty full-time residents on his ranch including several Thoroughbreds. Why? As his blog states, they frankly, "had no better place to go." At Tierra Madre, horses can simply be - there are no expectations upon them and there's nothing left for them to prove.



Photo courtesy Tierra Madre H.S. © 2009

The Mare Motel: (front to back) Bella, Heighten & Hudson

Why not visit the [Tierra Madre website](#) and read Jim's blog for yourself. You may not have the time or the room to properly care for these animals but you'll feel good knowing that there are others who do. If you can, send along a donation. By supporting these efforts you too may pick up where others leave off. May it be your hand that wipes away the dust and heralds the names of runners past. They may have crossed the finish line years ago, yet still and in so many ways, they've only just begun.

-DGH

[<Back to Home Page>](#)