

TWIST OF FATE

THE MIRACLE COLT AND HIS FRIENDS



CHAPTER SEVEN

BY CHRIS STUCKENSCHNEIDER

Willy isn't related to Willy Wonka, but he's sweet as sugar candy. I'm known as the "Miracle Colt" but Willy's nothing short of a miracle himself. Imagine being in a wrecked trailer for hours, not being able to see, wondering if you'll ever get out.

Willy was the last horse off the tangled mess of metal that lay on the highway. He was in the back end of the trailer. Rescuers found Willy under two horses that had died, and one that was still alive.

On first sight, rescuers thought Willy was gone, too—but then he blinked one big, brown eye. That's all it took. Workers brought the sled in, liquids were given, and within 15 minutes the plucky guy was trying to stand. Rescuers had to be careful though. Willy had been on his right side so long that his legs were asleep, and he was off balance. People get anxious at the idea of having a horse topple over on them.

Willy got his name from Dr. Stu Robson, the veterinarian in charge of operations at the accident site. Dr. Stu thought the name was perfect because Willy had a strong will to live. From the get-go, Willy had a winning personality.

The 4-year-old only had one nasty habit—he'd occasionally try to take a bite out of

folks. Humans might look tasty, but apples are better. Snortin' Norton tells me teachers like them, too.

The pressure sores on Willy's right side, face, hip and hock are now hardly visible on his brown coat, which is frosted with white. Willy is an Appaloosa, like D.D. You already know something about them, but I learned more about them from the ranch staff.

Appaloosas have spots, but don't have thick manes or tails. The Nez Perce Indians, who are responsible for starting the breed, liked the Appaloosa because it had endurance, and because the horses could be hidden. The spots made the Appaloosas blend in with the world around them, like a green tree frog does when it hunkers down on a leaf.

Willy has blended in with life at Longmeadow, which surprises everyone, considering the nightmare he endured. Horses react to trauma in different ways. Willy is a survivor with courage—one who sees the trough as half full instead of half empty.

Small but resilient, that's Willy. He isn't very tall, barely 14 hands. But he's a giant compared to the miniature horses, short-stuffs like Amigo and Rowdie, who live at the ranch. They're Barn Buddies, and so are Willy, Mama and me.

Hay, you probably want to know about the Barn Buddy program at Longmeadow—

that's how you can get up close and personal with the animals even if you live acres away.

If you would like to see mug shots of my pals, go to Longmeadow's web site, www.longmeadowrescueranch.org.

There you can see photos of various farm animals that were rescued, and watch me on webcam tooling around my stall. You'll fall in love with all of us but if you have a favorite animal you'd like to help care for, there are opportunities to do that. In exchange, you'll receive a photograph of your Barn Buddy and a biography too. If you live close by, you can also pay your buddy a visit.

All the Barn Buddies aren't in the horsey set; there's the the big guy Snortin' Norton, girly-cue Mama Llama, and bunches of goats, chickens, ducks and other buddies too numerous to mention. Some of the Barn Buddies have it made. They get to go on field trips, meet kids, spread the word on Longmeadow and teach the ins-and-outs of responsible animal care.

But I'm galloping on. Next chapter, you'll learn about caring for horses straight from the pig's mouth. Snortin' Norton will bring you our last chapter. It's been a great ride—but it's time to say "Happy Trails to You," because the staff has other plans for me.

Norton will explain.

In 2006, a truck carrying horses bound for a meat-packing plant overturned in Missouri. Twenty-six animals survived and were taken to a rescue ranch for treatment and care. One of the horses was pregnant and miraculously delivered a colt the following spring. This story is told from the colt's perspective. Learn more about these animals today at longmeadowrescueranch.org.

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WILLY

