HORSE CARE ISSUE—Country Heir II Hunter Derby; Luhmühlen CCI**;
Collecting Gaits Farm/USEF Dressage Festival Of Champions**

THE CHRONICLE of the Horse

BREEDING · DRESSAGE · HUNTING · SPORT WITH HORSE AND HOUND · SHOWING · CHASING · EVENTING

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Show The Way

Sharon Lynn Campbell

Courtesy of Olivia Golden

Details on Page 100

Death Is A Part Of Life

Owning a horse, in some ways, is like a marriage—you care for him in sickness and in health. And, sometimes, until death do you part. As difficult as this situation is, there are times when death becomes inevitable and we must say goodbye to a cherished partner and friend. But, as you may have already discovered if you've owned horses for any length of time, when you choose to euthanize a horse, it's usually just the first step in lengthy process that can take many different paths.

In this year's Horse Care Issue, we've developed a three-part article package that addresses euthanasia and what to do with your deceased horse's remains. Written by Anne Lang, one of our most talented, trusted and credentialed freelancers, the package begins with "When Someday Becomes Today" (p. 12). In this article, Anne details the options horse owners have in euthanasia, dealing with the horse's body, and the costs and legal aspects associated with each choice.

Anne's two complementary articles, "The Grieving Process: Taking Care Of Yourself" (p. 26) and "In Their Own Words," (p. 28) delve into the psychological aspects of losing a horse. Dr. Paul Haefner, a horseman and psychologist, talks about grief and the emotions that surface when faced with such a decision and what to expect in the aftermath of losing a horse. In addition, two longtime horse owners openly discuss the choices they made during the course of euthanizing their horses. For each person who has made this choice, the story is slightly different, but knowing and understanding what others have done and why might be of help if you someday face a similar situation.

I know that a few people will take exception to these articles, and some might even choose not to read them. And, yes, there are details that might make you cringe or shudder, but the information isn't meant to offend. It's provided so that if or when you face the loss of a cherished horse, you'll have a basis of understanding that may make this difficult time easier.

The decision to present these articles wasn't made lightly. For many years we tabled the idea (once even after having an article prepared), thinking that such a topic wasn't appropriate for a magazine focused on sport horse competitions. But, as we all know, even with the best care, attention and intentions, our horses are fragile. They have accidents at home, in the competition arena and even when retired.

Whether you choose to read these articles or not, I hope that you'll retain this issue in an office file cabinet or the tack room. You just never know when the unimaginable could become reality.

Hopefully, the information we've provided will assist you and help to make a difficult situation more bearable. We all wish our animals could live forever. In a way they do, just deep in our hearts and in our fondest memories.

TRICIA BOOKER, Editor

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THE CHRONICLE of the Horse

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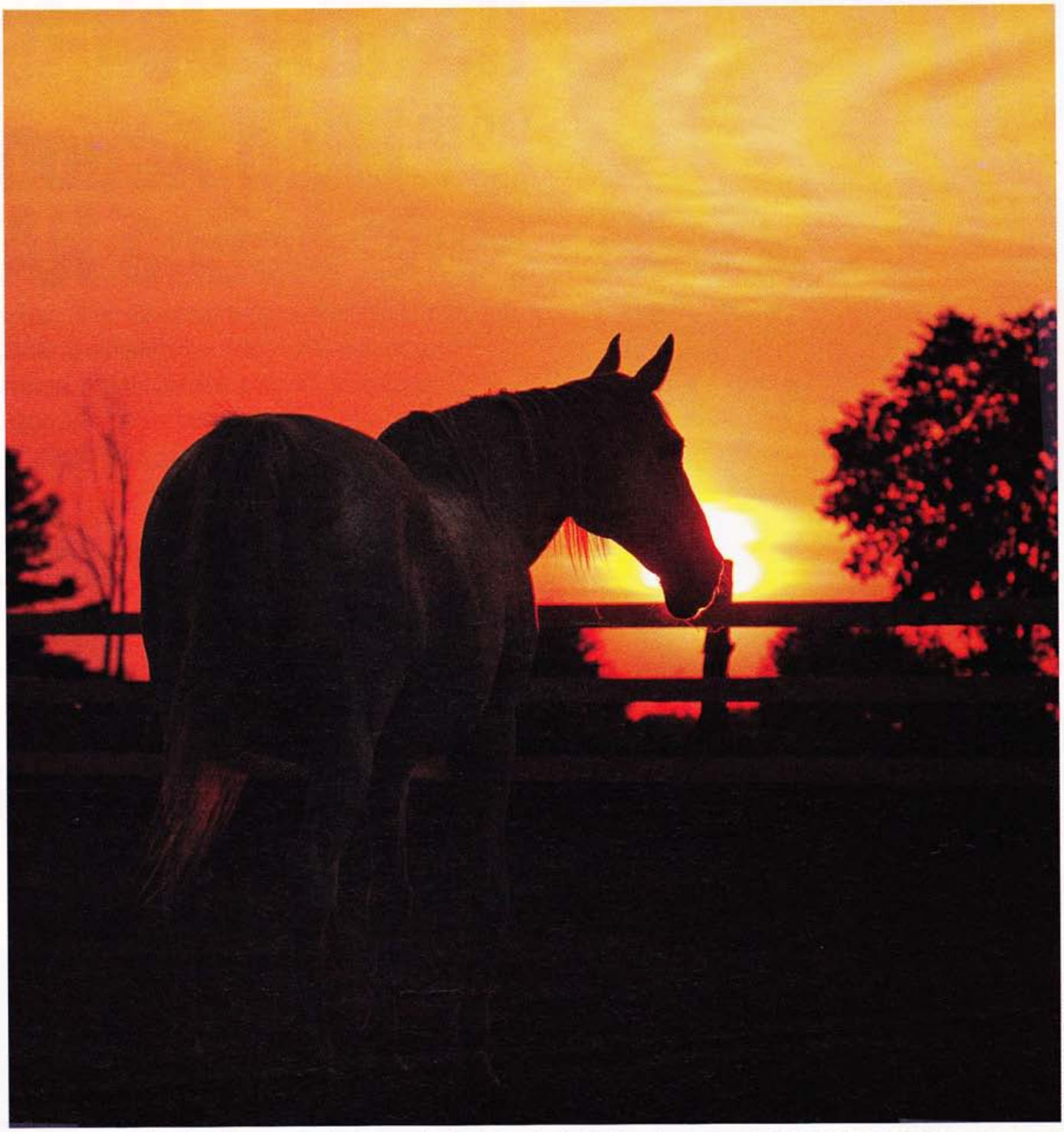
When "Someday" Becomes Today

Putting down a beloved horse or dealing with a newly deceased one can be an enormously traumatic experience. Here's a guide to help you plan or react with a level head.

Anne Lang



(Shawn Hamilton Photo)

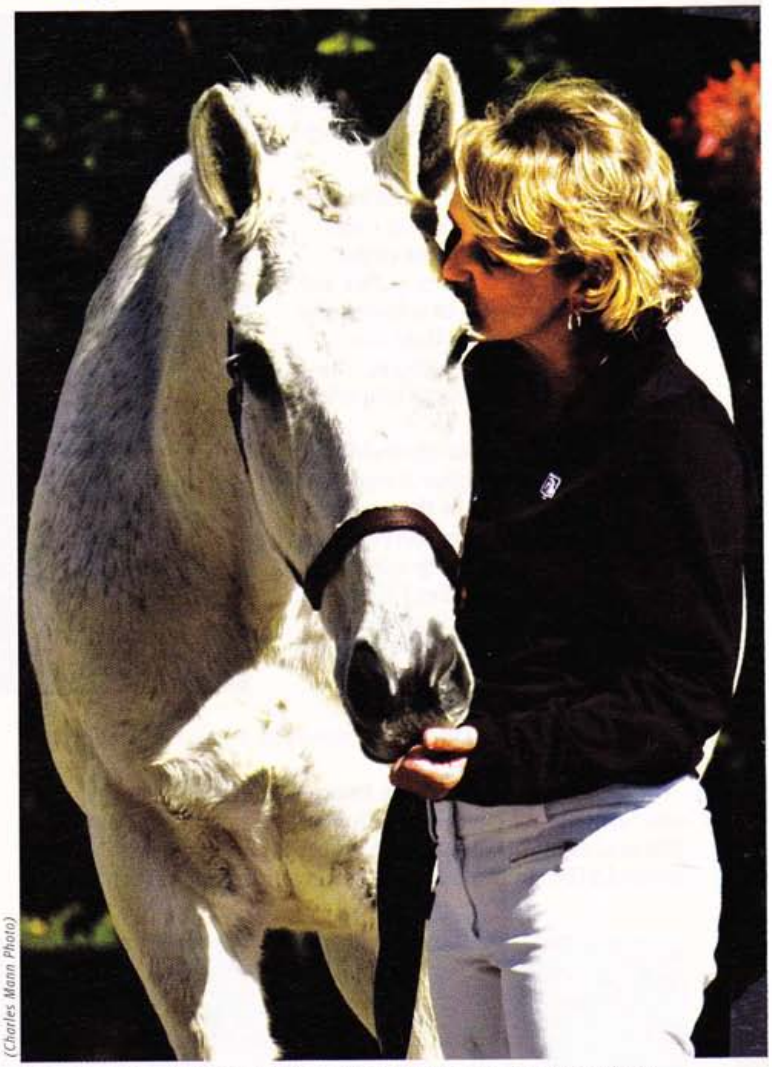
As heartbreaking as each situation may be, death is an inevitable life-cycle component of every being on earth.

IF YOU'RE A horse owner, try to picture yourself in any of these "what-would-you-do" scenarios:

- It's the middle of the night, and you're pacing the floor at the veterinary hospital where your gelding is undergoing emergency colic surgery. The door to the waiting room finally opens, and the surgeon trudges toward you, shaking his head. Despite his team's best efforts, they can't save your horse, and your approval is needed to adjust the IV fluids for euthanasia.
- Your long-retired mare has lost most of her teeth, her appetite and (it seems) her will to go on. The light has left her eye, and she hobbles around her paddock with arthritic stiffness. Sometimes, she appears to be silently begging you to help her permanently escape the discomforts and indignities of her dwindling life. Your veterinarian has gently suggested that it's time to consider putting her down.
- Your horse and several others are being hauled home from a show. Suddenly, you receive a frantic call from your trainer: Her van was violently broadsided by a cement truck, and your jumper was crushed in the resulting crash. He's still alive, but with massive injuries, including two shattered legs. A state trooper on the scene is urgently advising that he put your horse out of his misery with a merciful, well-placed bullet to the brain.

If you think none of these particular situations could ever happen to you, hopefully, you're right. But the solemn fact remains that as a longtime owner, sooner or later you're probably going to have to deal with losing at least one horse.

As heartbreaking as each situation may be, death is an inevitable life-cycle component of every being on earth. And the better prepared we are for that unavoidable occasion, the better for all concerned—horses and humans alike.



(Charles Mann Photo)

The solemn fact remains that as a longtime owner, sooner or later you're probably going to have to deal with losing at least one horse.

Difficult Decisions

To begin with, how does an owner know when it's time to put down a horse? Offering guidelines on that poignant subject is Nat T. Messer DVM, who teaches at the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine and is a spokesman for the American Association of Equine Practitioners.

Messer said the first step toward planned euthanasia is to determine whether your horse is a candidate, and he added that most veterinarians will advise owners to consider euthanasia under the following circumstances:

1. If the medical condition is chronic, incurable, and the cause of inhumane pain and suffering.
2. If the immediate medical condition has a hopeless prognosis for life.
3. If the horse is a hazard to itself or its handlers.
4. If the horse will require continuous medication for the relief of pain for the remainder of its life.
5. If the horse must be confined to a box stall for the remainder of its life because of the medical condition.

If your horse's description matches one or more of those five criteria, and you ultimately make the brave decision to put down the animal, the next step is choosing a means of doing so.

The most common method of putting down a horse is chemical euthanasia administered intravenously by a licensed large-animal veterinarian, usually in a veterinary clinic or vet-school setting.

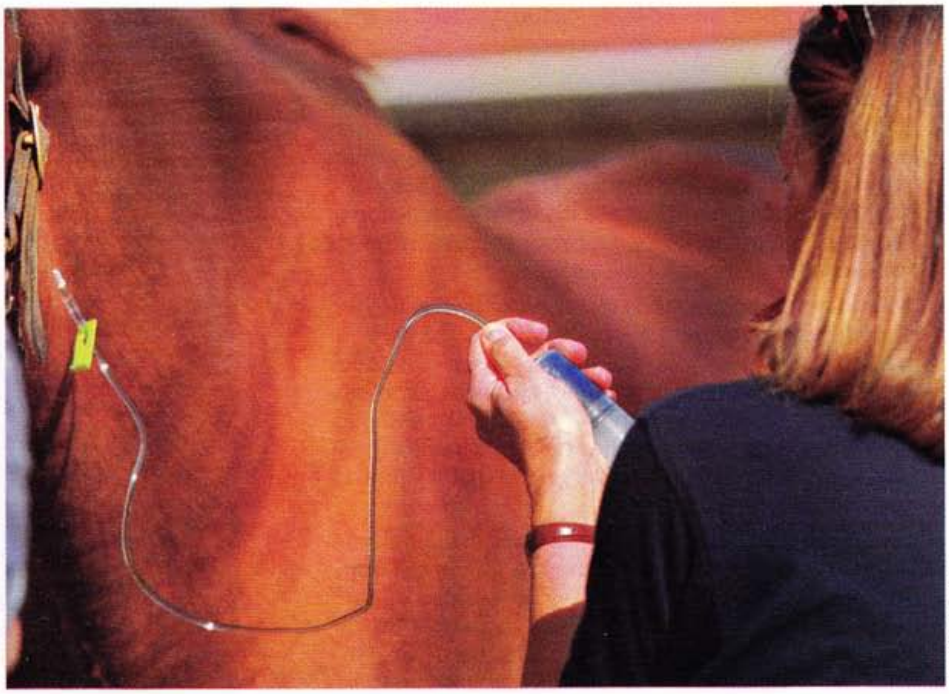
Shooting a horse in the skull to put it down is a far less common option, and one that's usually only exercised during emergency circumstances in which chemical euthanasia isn't practical or possible. Here is a review of both options:

Chemical Euthanasia

As Messer explained: "The only method of euthanasia by injection involves the intravenous administration of a concentrated solution of pentobarbital. The amount is determined by the size of the animal."

(Many veterinarians will inject a sedative prior to the pentobarbital, to make the process as calming as possible for the horse.)

Keith Dane, director of equine protection for the Humane Society of the United States, provided his take on the matter:



(Amy Dragoo Photo)

Most veterinarians will advise owners to consider euthanasia if the horse has a hopeless prognosis, is suffering chronic pain, has lost quality of life or is a hazard to itself or its handlers.

"Euthanasia of horses by barbiturate injection is preferred as the most humane method. In most cases, horses do not struggle or suffer any distress, and the risk of a faulty procedure is much lower than the other less-preferred methods. The vast majority of equine veterinarians utilize this method.

"The only possible downside," Dane continued, "is that it may limit options for disposal of the carcass. [For example, some rendering plants won't accept horses with euthanasia chemicals in their bodies.] However, this situation is being handled successfully by horse owners across the country."

As for the estimated cost of euthanasia, the HSUS recently surveyed veterinary clinics across the country.

"We determined that the range of prices charged by veterinarians for chemical euthanasia of horses was between $30 and $200," Dane said, "with most charging right around $100. In our survey, the range for farm visit charges was between $15 and $200, with most charging under $50."

Clinics surveyed for this article revealed a similar range, with a high end of $300–but that price usually includes a pre-euthanasia sedative. The high end for procedures that include pre-exam, sedative, euthanasia, necropsy and body disposal is around $500.

Pre-Mortem Planning For...

Owners Of Private Horse Farms Or Boarding Stables

- Familiarize yourself with city, county and state laws (including your Environmental Protective Agency) regarding livestock burial on private property and any other legal and/or logistical issues related to dealing with deceased horses.
- Find out if your veterinarian is willing to perform euthanasia on a farm call, if necessary.
- Find several local contractors who can provide backhoes for equine burials, tractors for moving a deceased horse and/or vehicles for transporting a horse's body off your property should the need for any of these services suddenly arise.
- Post these contractors' names and phone numbers on your barn wall, and add them to your personal cell phone directory in case you need to make a quick decision while away from home.
- Make a list of area facilities that might help you in dealing with a newly deceased horse, depending on your choice in the matter–including equine veterinary clinics, rendering plants, veterinary schools, livestock crematoriums, foxhound-based hunts and animal cemeteries. Post this list (including phone numbers) on your barn wall next to the list of contractors.
- If you live in an extremely remote area where emergency veterinary help may take a long time to arrive, acquire a firearm and ammunition adequate for putting down a horse and learn how to properly deliver an immediately fatal blow. Your equine veterinarian or local law official can probably teach you this grim skill that may end up saving your beloved horse a lot of agony if it's suffering from a sudden illness or severe injury from which the chance of recovery is slim to none.

Boarders

- After familiarizing yourself with available options, write a detailed summary of what you want done with your horse's body if it should die from a catastrophic injury or severe illness while you're out of town and unable to return home right away.
- Make a copy for the owner of the stable where you board your horse, and review it in person with that owner to make sure your wishes are understood.
- Include the names and contact numbers of professionals, family members and friends who are authorized to act on your behalf in your absence. Give copies of the summary to all of these individuals and to your equine veterinarian.

"The worst misstep a horse owner can make with a dying horse is to turn him loose–i.e., abandon him in the wild, or to haul him to an auction in the hopes that someone else will take care of the problem."

–Keith Dane

Firearm

"They Shoot Horses, Don't They?" The title of that 1969 film is a good question as well. And the answer is: Very seldom, these days. As Dane pointed out: "Few veterinarians are equipped or prepared to administer a penetrating captive bolt or gunshot."

Indeed, none of the many veterinary businesses or veterinary schools contacted for this article offer shooting as a clinic-based method for putting down a horse. Most veterinarians readily acknowledged, however, that when the option of administering drugs for euthanasia cannot be carried out, shooting becomes a viable alternative–providing the shooter is highly knowledgeable and skilled at killing a horse with just one perfectly-placed bullet, and can avoid the risk of injury to himself or bystanders.

For those occasions when shooting might be the only option for putting a suffering horse out of its misery, Messer outlined the following instructions:

"The recommended method of shooting a horse is to draw lines between the ears and the opposite eyes [forming an X] and aim where the two lines cross on the horse's forehead, aiming the gun toward the horse's first cervical vertebrae nearly perpendicular to the skull. [The tip of the gun should be held 2" to 6" from the horse's skull.]

"This must only be done by someone familiar with the anatomy of the horse's skull and the use of firearms," Messer cautioned. "If done properly by an experienced person, it results in instantaneous loss of consciousness and death. If done incorrectly, it will create more suffering.

"I would recommend at least a .38-caliber pistol or a 9mm caliber pistol," Messer said. "A .22-caliber weapon may not be satisfactory, especially for an inexperienced person."

Hollow-point or soft-nose bullets are recommended as ammunition for the task. But be aware that many urban and suburban areas have laws prohibiting the use of firearms, so familiarize yourself with those laws if you're planning to keep a gun at your barn for emergency purposes.

When owners are dealing with chronically ill or aged horses, one of the most common missteps that Messer has witnessed is "not ending a dying horse's life at the appropriate time. The owners delay because they can't deal with it."

Dane has another perspective: "The worst misstep a horse owner can make with a dying horse is to turn him loose–i.e., abandon him in the wild, or to haul him to an auction in the hopes that someone else will take care of the problem of how to dispose of the animal.

"The owner of a deceased horse has a responsibility to properly dispose of the carcass through whatever legal means are available to him," Dane concluded. "Leaving the carcass of a deceased horse to decompose is not a responsible option and is illegal in many places."

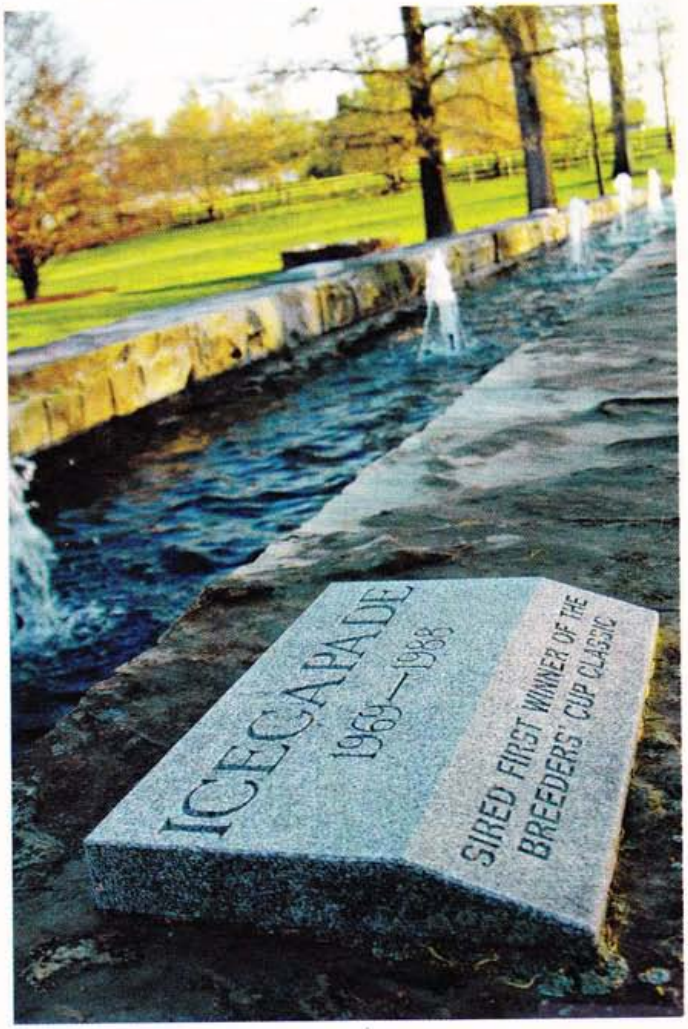
Resting In Peace

Dane's statements dovetail into the topic of what to do with your horse's body after it dies. Here's an overview of the many options:

Burial On Private Property

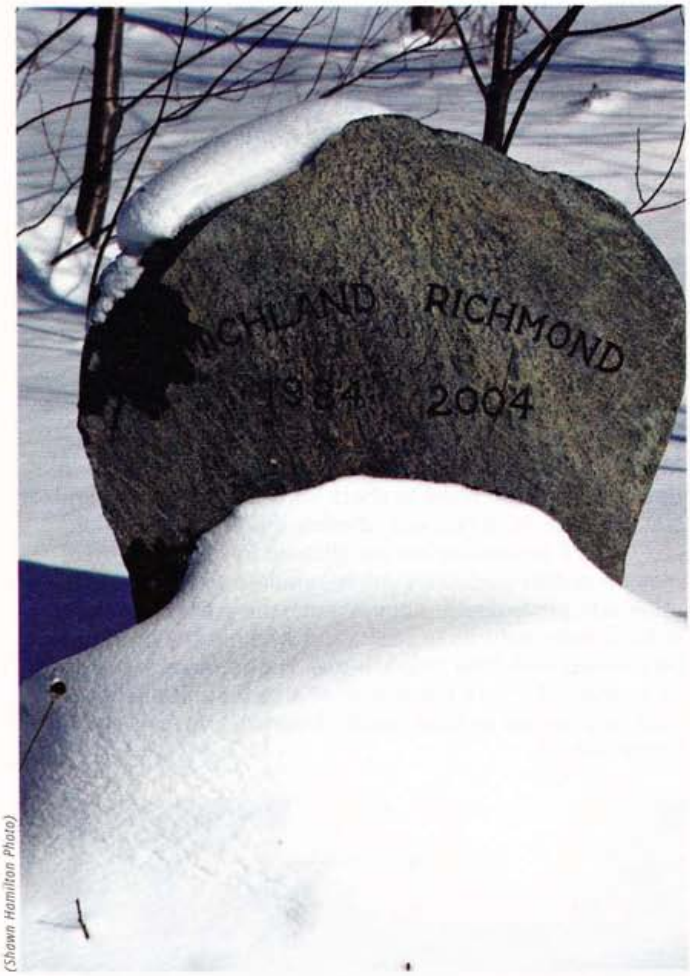
If you recently bought a horse farm, you may be comforted by the concept of burying future deceased equines in the bucolic, shady pasture that's visible from your kitchen window. But first, you need to check with the city, county and state you live in to find out whether this is a legal option.

Even if private burials are allowed in your area, there may be certain guidelines you're required to follow–such as minimum grave-depth requirements; the grave's proximity to natural water sources or wells; and whether the body must be covered with lime before burial. Furthermore, burial may be prohibited if your horse died of a communicable disease. Your veterinarian or local health department can give you further advice.



(Tricia Booker Photo)

In many locales burial isn't a legal option, but setting up a memorial to your lost horse on your farm is one way to have a gravesite in a place where you can take comfort in its presence.



(Shawn Hamilton Photo)

"If burial on one's property is allowed," said Dane, "this can be the easiest and most cost-effective carcass-disposal option. The owner may enjoy some peace of mind knowing that his constant companion is interred nearby, and the cost of the burial-site excavation is among the lowest of all disposal options. The only possible downside is that not all jurisdictions allow for carcass burial on one's property."

If euthanasia is scheduled to take place at your farm, it's helpful to arrange for grave digging ahead of time. The cost to hire a backhoe operator for this job ranges from $150 to $400. Often the backhoe can do double duty in transporting the horse to the burial site from the place where it died.

The average minimum grave dimensions for burying a horse are 3 feet wide, 7 feet long and at least 4 feet deep. Practically speaking, keep in mind that rigor mortis occurs within hours after death, which might necessitate a wider grave–so be prepared to act quickly on arranging burial, if possible.

If your horse dies unexpectedly and the backhoe driver cannot make it to your farm for several hours or even until the following day, protect the body from predators by covering it with a very thick all-weather tarp–making sure the tarp is weighted all around with rocks or cement blocks. Before you cover the body, though, you might consider letting the horse's pasture mates see and smell the body, as ghoulish or counter intuitive as that may seem.

"Some horse owners believe that the companions of the [deceased] horse are better able to accept the loss this way," said Dane.

If burial on one's property is allowed, this can be the easiest and most cost-effective option.

Burial In An Animal Cemetery

While hundreds of animal cemeteries exist across the country, few accept horses for burial, according to Brenda Drown, executive secretary for the International Association of Pet Cemeteries (*www.iaopc.com*). The reason: "You need a lot of space to bury a horse," Drown said. "And you need heavy digging equipment that a lot of pet cemeteries don't have."

Of the cemeteries that can accommodate horses, Drown said, most have contracts with haulers who can transport the horse to the cemetery (for a separate fee). The average cost to inter a horse in a pet cemetery is $850 for a single plot, with yearly maintenance fees that start around $30.

When searching for a cemetery for your horse, Drown advised, you should make sure that the facility has two important elements in place: One, that the cemetery land is dedicated (meaning that it's legally protected in perpetuity against any use other than a pet cemetery); and two, that the owners have a maintenance fund to ensure that your horse's gravesite will retain its dignified and attractive appearance.

Burial In A Local Landfill

Many states or counties don't allow landfill disposal for horses. Of those that do, the average cost range for drop-off is $100 to $300. Some landfills set their fees according to the animal's size.

Usually, landfill operators will need to dig a sizeable hole for the body, and this service is factored into their charges. Contact your local landfill or county health department for information specific to your area.

Cremation

Cremation is performed by a licensed crematorium that accepts horses, and these facilities house furnaces capable of producing the ultra-high temperatures required for fast and efficient equine cremation.

"Cremation is OK," observed Messer, "but there are very few places to get a horse cremated, and it is very expensive."

The cost for horse cremation ranges from as low as $500 for foals and small ponies to around $1,600 for large horses–assuming that you've opted for individual cremation over communal cremation, and that you want your horse's ashes retrieved for you to keep.

On top of the cremation fee, fancy keepsake urns can cost between $70 to $1,000. Most crematoriums sell urns but also will allow you to furnish your own. Just remember that any container you provide needs to be sturdy and large enough to hold the 45 to 60 pounds of ashes produced by a full horse's body.

You won't need a fancy container if your goal is to spread all of the ashes; a heavy-duty rubber tote is adequate for this purpose.

Owners who opt for cremation over burial often rationalize that while a horse's gravesite on your farm provides a poignantly comforting memorial, that grave can't travel with you if you move away. Worse yet, would you want to drive past your former property in five years and find that condominiums have replaced the old chestnut tree that marked your faithful hunter's final resting place?

Although it's more expensive than most burial options, cremation may prove to be a better long-term choice: You can scatter some of the ashes on the farm, then take the rest with you in a keepsake (and highly portable) urn.

Incineration

Numerous veterinary schools offer incineration services, for fees ranging from $150 to $800. For instance, at the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Illinois, a $200 fee includes incineration as well as a pre-euthanasia exam, sedative and euthanasia.

Check with veterinary schools in your state if you wish to pursue the incineration avenue of body disposal for your horse. Be mindful that having your horse's ashes returned to you is usually not an option, as most incineration activity is communal.

Burning your horse's body yourself on private property is not advisable and is most likely prohibited by environmental laws in your state or county. Even if livestock burning is allowed in your area, be forewarned that a horse's body burned on a homemade pyre takes many days to turn to ash–and creates a very strong, unpleasant odor in the meantime.

Rendering

If you're a "green-minded" owner who's active in efforts to preserve and improve the world environment, sending your horse's body to a rendering plant might seem like a satisfactory and logical post-mortem option, regardless of the degree of sentiment attached to the horse when it was alive.

On the other hand, if detailed analysis of what happens to your horse's body after it dies makes you squeamish, you might want to nix the possibility of rendering–and avoid reading the following description of this method, as provided by David Meeker Ph.D., senior vice-president of scientific services for the National Renderers Association (*www.nationalrenderers.org*):

"Horses sent to rendering plants will enter the raw

State Laws: A Sample Comparison

We contacted regulatory agencies from four different states to compare laws and policies related to the issue of deceased horses:

State: Florida.
Governing entity: Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Animal Industry Division.
Post-Mortem: Private property or landfill burials are allowed. Horses must be buried at least 2 feet below the surface; owners also need to be mindful of the water table. Horses can be incinerated or sent to a licensed rendering plant. There are only a few places where the EPA will allow the burning of livestock.
Transportation: Inquire at the agency.
Time limit for disposal: No 24-hour rule exists in the Florida statute for disposal of horses.

State: New York.
Governing entity: New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets.
Post-Mortem: Private property burials or landfill burials are allowed. Grave-depth minimum is 3 feet. The NYSDAM will field inquiries concerning the disposal of dead animals, and if asked, will provide a list of licensed renderers.
Transportation: The NYSDAM issues licenses for dead-animal carcass transporters, as well as licenses for rendering plants.
Time limit for disposal: Disposal within a specific time frame is not mandated. State law requires burial, composting or movement to renderer within 72 hours of notification by a peace officer or representative of the commissioner. If the disposal does not occur in that time frame after appropriate notification, the owner can be ticketed.

State: California.
Governing entity: California Department of Agriculture.
Post-Mortem: Off-site disposal is regulated by state law. On-site disposal is determined by local ordinances and/or regional water-quality control boards. Landfill burials are not allowed except in emergency circumstances, and this requires a waiver via a Notice of Quarantine issued under authority of the California State Veterinarian.
Transportation: Unless a waiver is granted by the California State Veterinarian, no dead-animal hauler or any other person can transport any dead animal to any place, other than to a licensed rendering plant, a licensed collection center, an animal-disease diagnostic laboratory acceptable to the department, the nearest crematorium, or to a destination in another state that has been approved for that purpose by the appropriate authorities in that state. The CDFA Meat and Poultry branch licenses the dead-horse haulers, collection centers and rendering plants noted in the code.
Time limit for disposal: This is dependent on local authorities and/or specific regional water-quality control boards.

State: Illinois.
Governing entity: Illinois Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Health & Welfare.
Post-Mortem: The disposal of dead horses is regulated by the Illinois Dead Animal Disposal Act and accompanying regulations. In addition, the owner must comply with the appropriate Illinois Environmental Protective Agency requirements. The IDA does have authority to prevent transport of animals that have died from highly contagious, infectious, or communicable disease. In these cases the body needs to be disposed of on the premises. Burial restrictions also may vary from county-to-county or site-to-site. Landfill burials are allowed.
Transportation: Vehicle permits are issued to vehicles that deliver to licensed renderers. In some cases, animal collection services have permitted vehicles in areas where rendering is not available. These permits are issued through the IDA.
Time limit for disposal: Dead animal disposal is required within 24 hours of death. Violations of the act are referred to the state's attorney for review and possible action.

(Kat Netzler Photo)

If you board your horse, make sure that the stable owners have a detailed plan that outlines your wishes in the event your horse experiences a catastrophic injury or illness

material stream, which includes offal from food-animal slaughter," Meeker explained, "trim from butcher shops and fallen livestock from farms. In most cases, the entire carcass would be ground, then cooked en masse with tons of other material. After cooking, which removes the 60 to 65 percent water content, fat is pressed from the material–which is mainly used for animal feed and biodiesel. The remaining dry material is ground into meat and bone meal used for animal feed.

"Animal by-products are derived directly from the meat-processing industry," Meeker continued. "These animal by-products, which include fat trim, meat, viscera, bone, blood and feathers are also collected and processed by the rendering industry."

According to Messer, "rendering is the best option for a horse that has died or has been euthanized."

Dane agreed: "Rendering is a cost-effective carcass-disposal option. Depending on the location of the euthanized horse, if there is a rendering plant within a reasonable distance of where you live, the only cost involved is typically the payment to a carcass hauler.

"There is minimal involvement on the part of the horse owner," Dane continued, "and the horse is utilized for a variety of purposes by the renderer. The only possible downside to this option would be the absence of a rendering plant within a reasonable distance of the horse owner, making rendering infeasible or cost prohibitive."

Ross Hamilton, director of research nutritional services for Darling International Inc. (a leading U.S. rendering network), said: "There are statutes in most states sanctioning transportation of dead horses to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. [Possible sanctions: The animal must be covered; it must be transported in a leak-proof and/or refrigerated truck; etc.]

"Many states require that haulers be specially licensed to carry dead livestock," Hamilton said. "Often, the license is issued to the hauler via the rendering plant, which holds the license."

Check with your state veterinarian's office on these matters, or call your local rendering plant. And be aware that none of the 100 or so U.S. rendering plants that do accept horses are set up to euthanize them.

"We're concerned about animal welfare, too," Hamilton explained. "We want to know that the horse was put down correctly and humanely."

Echoing that attitude, Meeker remarked: "Most rendering plant employees are animal lovers and have pets themselves, including horses. Handling fallen animals is a difficult job, but it must be done. Our workers take their responsibilities seriously and do a good job. They understand that the recycling activities of renderers are very advantageous to the environment and to animal health.

"The heat process that is used for rendering kills

Advice For The Insured

Nancy Hansen, of Houston, Texas, is the owner of H&H Insurance, underwritten by American Live Stock. She has advice for owners of horses that are insured, whether death is planned (as with some cases of euthanasia) or unplanned (due to sudden illness or injury).

With scheduled euthanasia, "the owner or the veterinarian definitely needs to call the agent beforehand," Hansen said, "so that the insurance company can be part of the decision-making process."

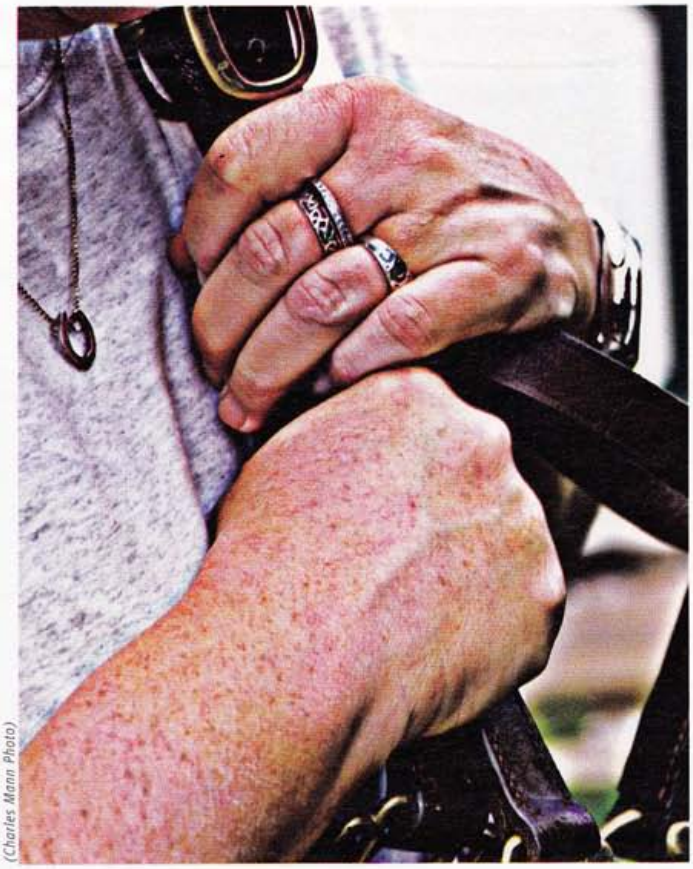
There also are numerous times when a necropsy is called for, said Hansen.

"Normally, if there's a situation where a horse has fallen ill and things aren't going well, it's likely that the insurance company has already talked to the veterinarian," said Hansen. "Very often, in those cases, no necropsy is required. But if a deceased horse is discovered in its stall or pasture by grooms in the morning, then most always a necropsy is required so we can learn what happened."

[Necropsies, conducted by veterinary clinics or veterinary schools, generally cost in the range of $70 to $250.]

If an insured horse has to be put down very quickly due to an emergency situation (such as failed colic surgery, a bad trailer wreck or foaling catastrophe), how should the owner proceed with alerting her agent during those frantic decision-making moments?

"The key word is 'emergency,' " said Hansen. "Those emergency decisions sometimes have to be made by the state highway patrol, for instance. The first step is to analyze the quality of life for the animal. If there's time to call the insurance company, great, but you do what you have to do first, for the animal. Afterward, you can proceed with getting reports, witnesses, etc."



(Charles Mann Photo)

One of the most difficult aspects of owning a horse is inevitably saying goodbye.

pathogens dangerous to animals and humans," Meeker summarized. "Without the rendering industry, it would be necessary to discard or dispose of animal by-products and mortalities in community landfills, compost piles, burial sites and incinerators; or worse, left in illegal dumping places, causing a potential public health hazard."

Donation To Veterinary Schools

"Horses can be donated alive to veterinary schools," Messer suggested, "then euthanized and preserved to be used for teaching purposes. I am not aware of any need for organ donation at this point. Not many veterinary schools are interested in a dead horse for donation because they can't be preserved for any length of time."

Donation To Hunt Clubs

Lt. Col. Dennis Foster is executive director of the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America, and is one of the many people who have donated their horses (those deemed by a veterinarian to be viable candidates for euthanasia) to a local hunt, which typically puts down the horse with a firearm and then processes the body to feed the hounds.

Foster estimated that there are about a dozen or so hunts in the United States that are set up to handle this method from beginning to end, although the practice is much more common in England. A horse donated to any hunt must be chemical-free and disease-free, said Foster, who is an avid proponent of this option.

"There's a lot of research that suggests if done properly, there's no question that the gun is the quickest and most humane way to put a horse down," Foster stated. "I've watched it done about 100 times, and the horse never knows what hit him."

He said he donated one of his horses, a grandson of Secretariat who developed a neurological disorder, to be put down by the hunt with which he rode.

"I cried like a baby," Foster confessed. "He was one of the best horses I ever owned. Afterward, I buried his head, heart and hooves underneath a fence that we'd once crashed together."

Final Road Trip

Transporting a deceased horse to the location of any of the above options is a logistical element that must be preplanned in detail. As we all know, horses are big, heavy animals that can be challenging to transport even during the course of their healthy lives. That challenge increases significantly after they die.

If a horse that's scheduled for euthanasia is so ill or infirm that it cannot be transported to a veterinary clinic (or if an injury has rendered it immobile), your veterinarian may be willing to come to your farm or boarding stable to perform euthanasia. If this is the case with your horse, try to choose a euthanasia location that will ease the way for post-mortem activity.

For example: If the horse will be buried on your property, consider having the veterinarian euthanize it near an appropriate-sized pre-dug hole to minimize the transfer process

(Charles Mann Photo)

Karen O'Connor wears a bracelet made from the mane of Theodore O'Connor, her gold-medal Pan Am Games eventing partner, whom she lost in a stable accident.

(Kat Netzler Photo)

Before you cover a horse's body, experts note you might want to consider letting the horse's pasturemates and companions see and smell the body. "Some horse owners believe that the companions of the [deceased] horse are better able to accept the loss this way," said Keith Dane.

from ground to grave. If you've arranged for your horse to be transported off site, try to arrange the euthanasia to take place in a truck-accessible pasture; inside a large, non-partitioned horse van; or close to an accessible driveway.

Other challenges can crop up, too. As stated earlier, some states require drivers of vehicles used to transport dead livestock to be specially licensed. Some states have restrictions on the vehicles themselves–for instance, they must be leak-proof and/or refrigerated. And some states require that an animal must be disposed of within 24 hours to prevent a public-health risk.

Most crematoriums and pet cemeteries will accept a horse that's been delivered by an independent hauler who's unfamiliar to them. But most rendering companies don't allow bodies to be delivered to their facilities; they will send out their own pick-up person, or dispatch a local hauler with whom they've contracted. (You will then pay that hauler.)

Under any circumstances, drivers who regularly transport deceased horses typically arrive with an appropriate-sized rig (trailer, truck, flatbed) that's equipped with a winch, sturdy straps and all of the necessary accessories needed to efficiently remove a body, even from difficult places such as stalls. The average cost range for deceased-horse pick-up and transportation is $150 to $500. Some haulers charge by the mile, and some will only travel within a certain mile radius.

If your horse unexpectedly dies out-of-state (say, at a horse show) and you want to transport it home for burial or cremation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends contacting the respective agriculture departments in all of the states whose borders you will be crossing (including your own) to determine whether transportation of deceased livestock is allowed, and if so, under what rules and restrictions. Most agencies will consider deceased-horse transportation issues on a case-by-case basis, if you contact them in advance.

Jay Brown, of Lago Vista, Texas, has a regular day job but transports and buries deceased horses on the side.

"The reason I decided to start doing this," Brown said, "is because before I owned the equipment to do it, I couldn't find anyone to bury my horse."

Brown admitted that despite the many times he's handled dead horses, the owners' grief and sorrow always touches his heart. And even though Brown himself had difficulty finding a backhoe operator to bury his horse some years back, he said that most people in rural communities will do what they can to help smooth the way for an owner who's dealing with a horse that's died.

"People are usually sympathetic," Brown said. "If you're having trouble finding a professional to help you move or bury a horse's body, try calling a local homebuilder or even a farmer with a front-end loader on a tractor. You'll be surprised who will step forward to help out, if they've got the right machinery."

"There's a lot of research that suggests if done properly, there's no question that the gun is the quickest and most humane way to put a horse down."

–Lt. Col. Dennis Foster

The Grieving Process: Taking Care Of Yourself

Paul T. Haefner Ph.D., of Leesburg, Va., is a clinical psychologist with numerous equestrian clients and is himself a horse owner and lifelong equestrian. In this article, Haefner offers advice on how to cope with the death of a horse.

Anne Lang

Q: What emotional preparations might an owner make ahead of time to help ease the pain of putting down a chronically ailing horse?

A: There's a lot of variance in terms of the way people respond emotionally to events like this and in terms of what will be helpful for them. Some of the commonly helpful ways to prepare are to spend extra time with the animal; also to gather mementoes and discuss with others the history you've shared with the horse. We recently had a family horse that died, and one of the things my kids did was to draw pictures and write stories about the things they'd done with her.

Q: What range of emotions can an owner expect to experience when a horse dies unexpectedly?

A: Often, they'll experience everything from disbelief to denial to anger to very deep sadness. Again, it's the type of thing that hits people very differently, but it can include all of the stages of human grief–because people tend to develop very intimate and powerful relationships with their horses.

Q: On the day an owner's horse is scheduled for planned euthanasia, should she take the day off from work?

A: Some people definitely will want to set aside time for themselves so they won't have to face the regular demands of their day. They may want to spend that day with close friends, or at least to give themselves the flexibility to take that time off if they feel they need it. But some people find it helpful to have something they can throw themselves into. They might welcome having work to provide a distraction [from their sorrow] and something to focus on.

(Pam Haefner Photo)

Paul T. Haefner Ph.D.

Q: Should an owner save a lock of mane or tail, a set of pulled horseshoes or that sort of thing?

A: A lot of people benefit from having some kind of ritualized remembrance of their horse, and that type of thing can be very helpful. Other people might want to put together a small scrapbook.

Q: Is it better for an owner to be present at the time of euthanasia, or to have someone stand in for her?

A: That truly is a matter of personal choice–I don't think there's a right way or wrong way to proceed in this circumstance. For some people, it's important to them to be with their horse through the very end. For other people, it's very difficult, so they might want to entrust a good friend to go through the process for them. But the important thing is to avoid feeling that you have to do something because someone tells you that's the right way to do it. People need to appreciate that they can make their own choices.

Q: At what age should a child be allowed to witness the euthanasia, and/or view the post-mortem body of the horse?

A: A lot of that has to do with the child's life experience and their developmental stage, which doesn't necessarily track evenly for everyone. Children who grow up on farms tend to see life and death all of the time, so they might view the death of a pet as more of a natural rhythm of life. Younger children who've had that experience might not see the event as quite so traumatizing. And in general, very young children [under 6 or 7] don't have an understanding of death as being permanent; they don't have the intellectual and emotional maturity to process it as an adult does. As children evolve into their teens, they become more mature at processing things like death, and you can feel safer in trusting them to make a judgment for themselves. When our mare died, it happened

overnight in the field next to our house, so there was no way our children wouldn't see her on the drive to elementary school the next morning. Obviously, it would have been better if they had been older before they had that type of experience. But it just shows you that you can't always protect children from these kinds of things.

Q: Does it help for closure or peace of mind to conduct a ceremony for the deceased horse, such as a funeral or memorial?

A: Rituals are very important for many people in creating a sense of closure, so a simple ceremony that might reflect something like a memorial service is often wonderful. Other people might plant a tree, or display a memento that they've saved, such as framing a lock of mane. Getting together with people to whom that animal was important can be terrific.

Q: If the horse has been cremated and the owner is in possession of an urn full of ashes, do you recommend the owner keep the urn in her home or try to find a local pet columbarium?

A: I think it's totally personal choice. Often, with an urn or ashes, it becomes an easier proposition for people who own property in that they can set up a memorial area where they live. Some people might want to scatter ashes in an area where they spent a lot of time with the horse, such as a ring or trails. Other people may want to retain an urn in the event that they might someday have to move, which allows them to take the urn with them.

Q: Do you recommend burial of a horse on the owner's property, if her county allows burial?

A: I think for many people, it's really helpful to process through something that's concrete. It can actually be comforting to be involved in the act of the grave being dug and the remains transferred there. Afterward, those people have a tangible gravesite that they can attach their memories to. If they feel this process is helpful to them, then I recommend it.

In Their Own Words

Two owners reveal the experiences and emotions they've had when letting go of favorite horses.

As Told To Anne Lang

Susan "Tutti" Skaar,
of Bozeman, Mont.

This isn't necessarily your typical story of a horse's death, but it truly is indicative of remote ranch living and figuring out solutions when help isn't readily available.

The accident with Sporty, a 16-year-old Quarter Horse we used for mountain trail riding, occurred in October 2002. That night, my husband Gary and I had just gone to bed, having been driven inside earlier in the evening by extremely strong winds, which continued to howl.

Suddenly we heard a very unusual noise in the pasture. Gary looked out the window and noticed our horses galloping around in frightful chaos. When Gary looked more closely, he realized one of the large lean-tos had blown over and was on its roof. He ran outside to investigate. I got dressed and headed out, but Gary yelled: "Stay inside! Sporty is hurt."

I didn't follow instructions and went closer, only to find that the lean-to had landed on Sporty's head, which was trapped underneath this large, very heavy wooden structure. Sporty's legs were moving as if he was trying to get up, but he was hopelessly pinned.

Gary made the difficult but appropriate decision to put Sporty down. He told me to go inside and get his gun. There wasn't time to call for help; it would have taken at least an hour for a vet to get out to our place, and the horse would have suffered. I delivered the gun, and Gary insisted I go inside–which I willingly did. He shot Sporty in the head, killing him with one bullet. I was crying the whole time.

The wind was still blowing, and Gary needed help. He used a jack to lift the lean-to off Sporty, got a rope and dragged him out of the pasture–using the truck to pull him. We had to get Sporty away from the other two horses. The wind was still blowing fiercely during all of this.

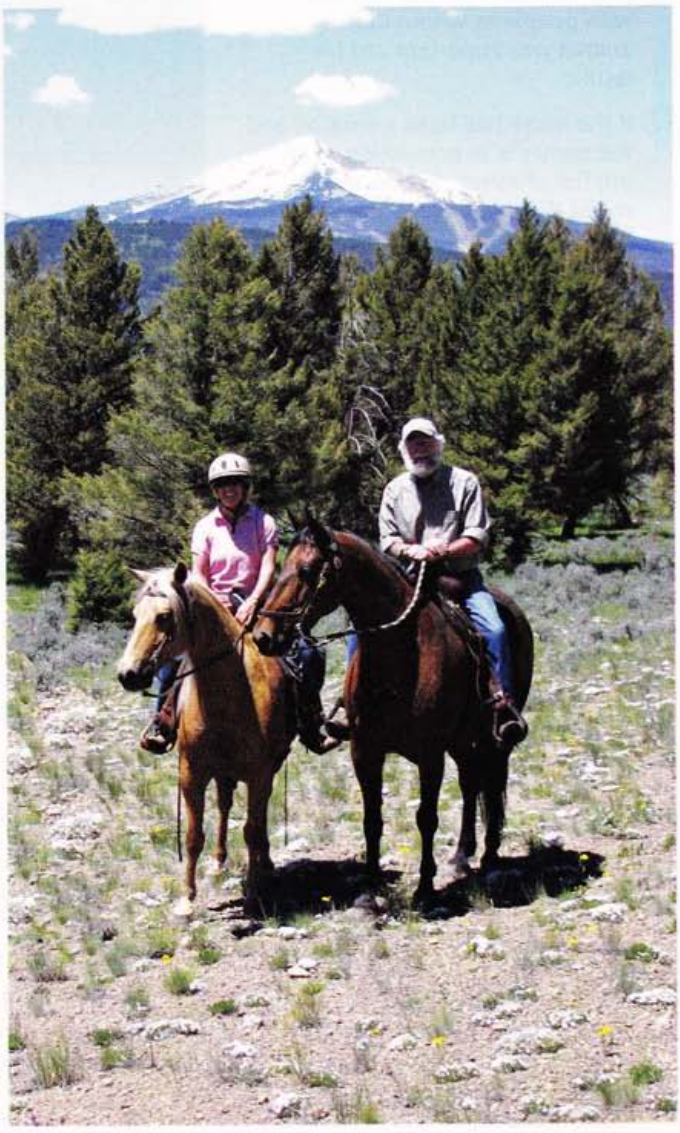
When dawn broke and we went out to look at the situation in daylight, we could see that the lean-to had hit Sporty in the back first, then pinned him down on his head. I'm sure he had a broken spine. We contacted a neighbor who is an excavator and he dug a hole to bury him on our property. We spent the next two days breaking down the lean-to piece by piece, salvaging what parts we could.

We went through a whole range of emotions–shock, fear, panic, disbelief and sadness. It helped that we received lots of sympathy cards. I didn't take time off from work when Sporty died, but I took time off when my other horse Willy died of colic and when our dog died last summer.

I kept a lock of Sporty's mane. We didn't mark his grave, but we know where it is. We have three dogs, one cat and one horse buried on our property.

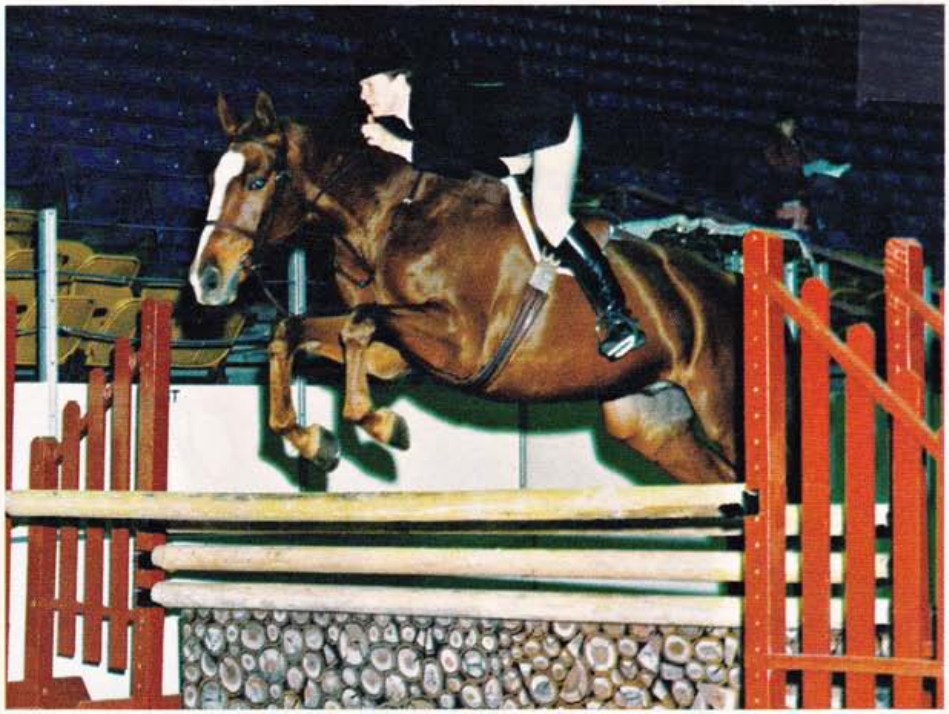
Looking back, I'm glad that we were able to immediately put Sporty out of his misery. And now I always tell people that their lean-tos must be well secured in the ground, with posts dug at least six feet down. The manufacturers don't suggest this, but we've seen too many flip over. The chances of a lean-to blowing over and injuring a horse are probably one in a million, but it happened to us.

What I learned from this experience is that I need to know how to put a horse down. When we do mountain trail rides, there are many instances where we might have to put a horse down. This summer I'm going on a pack trip in a wilderness area with six women friends. We've already discussed who was going to bring a gun, and why it is so important to have one available.



Tutti and Gary Skaar learned many valuable lessons when they lost a horse in a freak accident on their farm.

Nancy Sutherland,
of Olathe, Kan.



(Horse And Rider Photo)

Nancy Sutherland and Pantano.

My family has lived on a horse farm near Kansas City for many years, and in that time I've had to deal with the death of three retired Thoroughbreds, all under different circumstances. [Eliza, 25, and Pantano, 22, both former show hunters; and Hot Jaws, 18, a former race horse.]

I've never really had an arrangement worked out with my veterinarian for when my horses might be dying or dead, but I've always tried to have a general knowledge of all the options available, since I own horses and know that dealing with death is pretty much a certainty.

With Eliza, I decided it was time to put her down in 1994 because of quality-of-life issues. Her age was making her life difficult, and she had started losing weight pretty rapidly. I think it's a positive thing that we can end an animal's suffering, so it doesn't experience undue pain and stress.

First, I called the rendering company to see when they could schedule a pick-up, then I made the vet appointment for the same day. You don't want the animal lying on your property for an extended period of time, because of decay–and the body will attract predator animals.

I was so sad; Eliza was such a wonderful horse. It's such a long process when they're old and you evaluate them on a day-to-day basis. Knowing and deciding when the time is right is torture. There's probably more emotion leading up to the decision when it is pending. Then, of course, it's extremely sad to finalize the plans and proceed. It makes me sad to think of Eliza, even to this day. But she had lived a nice long life.

Pantano died in the pasture in 2001, during the night. I went out for morning chores and saw him lying down, but I immediately knew that he didn't look right; in fact, I sensed right away that he was probably dead. The night before, he had been happily eating at a round bale.

I called my trainer, Mike McCormick, to share the bad news. Pantano was the first horse I had when I started riding with Mike. My kids had also ridden him after he retired as a show horse, so the whole family was quite sad.

But like Eliza, Pantano had lived a nice long life and had a great retirement on the farm. I reminisced about what a great horse he had been, but I was satisfied that his life had been a good one. We buried him on the farm, in an unmarked grave.

In the case of Hot Jaws, last year I took him to the vet with an impaction and stayed for the initial examination. Hot Jaws wasn't in distress at that point, and the vet and I discussed options–including possible surgery. I left the clinic thinking I had about 24 hours to decide what path to take, depending on the horse's progress or lack thereof.

Within an hour of my leaving the clinic, the vet called and said that Hot Jaws needed to be euthanized now because of the immediate onset of sepsis from a tear in his colon. I thought: "This cannot be happening! How can we save him?" It was horrible, and it all happened so fast. I was in complete shock. I wanted time to say my goodbyes, and to absorb what was going to happen.

My family and friends knew Hot Jaws was sick and at the vet, but he had to be euthanized so fast that there was no time to think about the decision to put him down, or to talk to anyone about it before it happened. Fortunately, I had lots of support from everyone. Horse people are always sympathetic!

I didn't choose to have Hot Jaws put down at my farm and buried there. Since he was at the vet clinic, the logistics of getting him back to the farm would have been difficult. I didn't want to load him in the trailer one more time just to have him put down at home. I thought that would have been too cruel to do to him solely for my own satisfaction. I didn't ask the vet what they did with Hot Jaws' body; I was too upset. But it probably went to the renderers.

I'm comfortable with the decisions I made for all three horses. I've kept all of their halter plates, which hang on a wall in my barn. During these experiences, I learned that each animal's death is unique and equally hard to deal with. If you have horses at home, hopefully you've given this subject some thought. There are some pretty standard ways of dealing with animal removal, and there are more options available now than ever before that involve individual cremation, or burial in a pet cemetery.

Your veterinarian can be a great resource for options. If you learn about the various processes ahead of time, it might be a tad less stressful. Owning horses involves many responsibilities. Unfortunately, dealing with their death is one of them.

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The Chronicle Earns AHP General Excellence Award And Many More

By *Laura Ratliff*
Created *2010-06-21 14:51*

The Chronicle of the Horse took home the overall General Excellence award in its category at this year's American Horse Publications seminar, held June 17-19 in Lexington, Ky.

"Solid publication, true to its mission. Great articles–good use of photography," stated the judges.

In addition, the magazine took home 12 other awards in various categories.

Complete award winners include:

1st, Service To The Reader: Mollie Bailey for "Confused About Amateur Rules? [1]"
1st, Service To The Reader Series: Anne Lang for "When Someday Becomes Today [2]"
1st, Event Coverage: Tricia Booker for "Early Applause Lives Up To His Name In AHJF Hunter Classic Spectacular [3]"
1st, Open Editorial Action Photograph: Tod Marks for "Mixed Up"
1st, Online News Reporting, Breaking Story: Pippa Cuckson for "Shocking Vote Legalizes Bute in FEI Competition [4]"

2nd, Equine-Related Website
2nd, Event Coverage: Tricia Booker for "Sapphire Finds Her Just Reward In The CN [5]"
2nd, Personal Column: Tricia Booker for "No Fingernails Required [6]"

3rd, Personal Column: Beth Rasin for "A New Appreciation"
3rd, Online Equine-Related Blog: Lauren Sprieser [7]

Honorable Mention, Personality Profile: Kat Netzler for "Doug Hannum Keeps Horses And Humans Happy [8]"
Honorable Mention, Personality Profile: Coree Reuter for "Judgement ISF Has Raised The Standard Of American Breeding [9]"
Honorable Mention, Event Coverage: Mollie Bailey and Tricia Booker for "Rumba Reigns Supreme At The $100,000 ASG Software Solutions/USHJA International Hunter Derby [10]"

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