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Best of Friends

Sue Tregidgo

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Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Sue's passion for donkeys started at a very early age, when she was taken to Blackpool for the day by her grandparents to have a ride on a beach donkey. She fell in love with the look, smell and feel of these lovely animals, with their furry coats, enormous ears and silky soft muzzles. Sue enjoyed a country upbringing with horses, dogs and cats, but always wanted donkeys of her own.

Her first opportunity to own a donkey came when she lived in Snowdonia, North Wales and the donkey family has since continued to grow.

A combined love of rural France and the need for more land, resulted in a move to the Charente in South West France, where the donkey heritage is still particularly strong.

Two donkeys, Precious and Mari accompanied the family's move and one of these has since had a foal.

Two more rescue donkeys have also joined the herd. They are all involved in activities and are groomed and handled on a daily basis. One of them in particular likes to pull a cart and all of them enjoy being taken for walks. Each of the donkeys has its own story to tell, so there is never a dull moment for Sue, her husband and all their animal family.

I dedicate this book to my darling grandson Sam, and look forward to happy days spent together on our "Little French Donkey Farm".

Best of Friends

The Second Story in The Precious Series



Written and illustrated by

Sue Tregidgo

Chapter 1

Mari and I became the best of friends. We lived happily together in a field where there was plenty of space to run around if we felt like it. We had plenty to eat and a warm, cosy stable. Bonnie brushed us each day, taught us to wear a bridle and saddle and best of all took us for long walks



along country lanes where we saw horses, cows and sheep.

.... we saw horses, cows and sheep

Occasionally we took children for rides. They felt very small and fragile on our backs and we knew that we had to be on our best behaviour.



.... we knew we had to be on our best behaviour

Everything in our world was perfect until the day when Bobby, the old horse who lived in the adjoining field, told us that Bonnie had bought a farm in France and that we were all going to go and live there. My heart sank. I remembered only too well the nightmare journey across the Channel that I'd made previously with my mother and the other frightened donkeys.

I tried not to show Mari that I was scared and apprehensive, but inwardly I dreaded what might lie in store.

A couple of days later, just as the sun was rising, Bonnie drove into the yard towing a double horse trailer.



.... my heart sank ...

She put our halters on and led Mari up the ramp first. Mari is braver than I am and up she walked without a qualm. Not wishing to appear a coward, I followed, and was pleasantly surprised to find how luxurious the inside of the trailer was, with its two separate padded compartments.

All of our gear was stacked in front and I felt reassured when I saw nets full of hay, containers of water, buckets of feed, saddles, bridles, halters and rugs. In fact, we were beginning to feel quite excited. Bonnie kept patting and talking to us, explaining that we were going on a long journey and that we mustn't worry.

When she felt we were settled and relaxed, she gave us one last pat on the rump, lifted up the ramp and slammed it shut. Several minutes later we were off down the lane and Mari and I brayed goodbye as loud as we could to Bobby in his field. It was sad to leave him. He had been a good friend.

Looking back, I don't know why I was so worried about the journey.

Frequent stops were made to let us have a drink and a walk around and the Channel crossing on the ferry was smooth and uneventful. After two days travelling, we arrived at our destination and there was Bonnie, so happy to see us and when she lowered the ramp and led us out, we couldn't believe our eyes. A completely different world unfolded before us.

There was a patchwork of fields bordered by high hedges and trees, a row of stone stables and a house and barn covered in climbing roses. The sun was shining and it felt as if we had landed in paradise. We couldn't wait to have a good gallop and a roll in the long grass.



.... it felt as if we had landed in paradise ...

Word soon went round our small village that two new donkeys had arrived and we had lots of visitors those first few weeks. After a settling in period, we shared our field with a neighbour's donkey called Milou. He was rather handsome, almost black in colour, with fine long ears and soft brown eyes.

He stayed until the end of summer and then his owner took him to another neighbour's field. He told us that he was happy doing this, and preferred moving around rather than staying in one place.



.... our handsome neighbour Milou

As the weeks passed, Mari and I noticed that we were getting fatter and fatter and lazier and lazier and we were at a loss as to understand why, until Bonnie explained that we were going to have foals and that it was important to have plenty of rest.



.... under the shade of the lime tree

We spent the afternoons sleeping under the shade of a lime tree and seldom felt like galloping or rolling. Bonnie gave us extra food and attention and checked on us during the night by torchlight. We enjoyed these nocturnal visits which made us feel very special. One bright, moonlit evening towards the end of June my foal was born, a beautiful boy donkey.

Bonnie stood quietly at a distance, ready to give help if needed, but I remembered all the things that my mother had done for me, and made sure that I licked him all over, then nudged him to his

feet so that he could suckle and have a drink of milk, so important for a newborn donkey foal.



.... a beautiful boy donkey was born

He quickly found his feet and it was obvious that he was a strong little chap. Bonnie came over and said “Oh boy, isn’t he beautiful and aren’t you clever?” The name stuck and thereafter he was forever known as “Boy”.

I was so happy and I couldn’t wait for Mari to have her foal.

She took a great deal of interest in Boy during those first few days, frequently coming over to nuzzle him, fascinated by his baby soft coat and his playful antics. I knew that she was eagerly awaiting the birth of her own foal.

Unfortunately, things did not go well for Mari. This is HER story in her own words.

Chapter 2

Precious and I had settled down for the night under our favourite lime tree, Boy fast asleep between us. I felt restless and uncomfortable. After standing up then lying back down several times, I decided to go down to the far corner of the field, realising that it wouldn't be long before my foal was born.

An hour or so later, Bonnie appeared with her torch, checked me over, then knelt down beside me whispering words of encouragement. Eventually my foal was born, a tiny scrap of a girl foal. Bonnie rubbed her vigorously with a towel and when she was sure that she was breathing properly, placed her gently by my head.



.... a tiny scrap of a girl foal

The surge of love that I felt for this tiny creature was overwhelming and I licked and nuzzled her all over. She lay completely still and some deep animal instinct told me that something was wrong. Bonnie too appeared anxious and suddenly sprang into action. She wrapped the foal in a towel, picked her up and headed towards the stables, calling to me softly to follow.

She lay the foal down on a bed of straw then left us for several minutes. I realised later that she had gone to the house to phone the vet. It wasn't long before he arrived. Anxiety welled up inside me as he examined the foal.

He told Bonnie that a deformity of the mouth and throat meant that it was impossible for the foal to survive; she would never be able to drink or swallow.

I felt totally devastated and very tired, so lay down next to my foal watching over her until the morning. She never moved again and went peacefully to sleep.

A tearful, wretched looking Bonnie took her away murmuring "Come on my little flower" and from that moment on she was forever known as "Fleur" which is French for flower. She was buried under the lime tree and each spring masses of snowdrops, daffodils and bluebells spring up, a constant reminder of her.

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