

The Rescued Pony.

By Minalsh Uggs

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1995 Acknowledgements:

Michelle Hansen (Mitch);

- Owner/operator of Stonyhurst Horsemastership college – affiliated to British riding schools.
- BHS (all levels).
- Sanef (all levels) instructor.
- Chairlady of Kwa-Zulu Natal Pony club.
- Chairlady of National Thoroughbred Trust.
- Chair of Kwa-Zulu Natal riding for the disabled.
- Owner of Emerald Hill racing stables.
- Owner and Trainer of racehorses.
- Owner of competitive show jumpers and dressage horses. Mitch was a brilliant showjumper, and competed in many shows, especially A-grade and international A-grade show jumping events. Unfortunately, her competitive career ended prematurely, due to a pretty serious neck injury.

Bryce McCall;

- Springbok showjumper (International – South African Olympic team).

Peter Gotz;

- Springbok Showjumper (International – South African Olympic team).

Russell;

- Springbok event team (International – South African Olympic team).

Vickie Rowlands;

- Owner/operator Equitrailing.
- BHS Level one.

Edwina Davidson;

- Competitive horsewomen for over 23 years.
- Owner/operator of the George tack shop.
- Influential Representative of Equifeeds.
- Sanef instructor.

Both amazing Debbies at Knysna Horse Rescue

- Rescuing horses and ponies for over twenty years.

My qualifications (Author): Stonyhurst Horsemastership -- Equitation, Lunging, Instruction and Stable management.

Chapter 1: The first lesson.

My life truly started when I became Andrea's flashy pony. As you are unable to see how gorgeous I really am, my description will just have to do. My soft coat, glittering mane

and tail is an amazing toffee brown. I also have a fancy blaze, and four white socks. Are you able to picture me, now? Great stuff!

I have never been ridden before, actually... I have never even worn a saddle. I know... Almost all the ponies you know have already been ridden, but not to worry, my turn will soon be here. Let me start at the beginning and tell you all about it.

Before I became Andrea's fantastic pony, her Mum did the sensible thing and spoke to someone who knew all about looking after us and backing me (getting me used to someone riding me).

But first... The lady told her I needed a soft, but firmly bristled body brush to keep my coat, mane and tail satin soft and a dandy brush for gently brushing away mucky mud and stubborn sweat marks. She also told her all about my yummy feed, a feed bin and clean water (which I should always be able to drink), and about the very, very important care of my hooves... I would need a certified farrier to trim my hooves every four weeks.

After all, he had been properly trained, and knows exactly how to prevent and fix problems, (before they turn into something pretty serious). Our hooves must be looked after well, after all no hoof, no horse – In my case, pony. I should also add, if they were not qualified, they could create a problem, so please make sure you get the right one. She also described the ticks, worms and all the other stuff that love to munch on us – and, well they make life pretty terrible.

So, please make sure you know how much to give us because if it is too little, it will not work, and if it is too much – it can make us very sick. Thank goodness Andrea's Mum regularly doses me to make sure I have none of those creepy crawlies inside or on me!

Andrea's Dad asked the veterinarian about my health.

He gladly helped and told him all about the care of my teeth, important injections and our medicines (yuck). Also, any signs to watch out for if I should get sick. (We cannot speak human and tell you when something is wrong, so we need you to know all about our general care. Please and thanks!)

Now, listen to me carefully boys and girls: Never ever keep a pony you cannot care for properly; we may have been given to you but usually your parents buy us. The cost of buying us is very low, compared to the cost of keeping us. That is always high, and we give you a ton of work! No matter what type or size, we are (by the way).

The sad part about that happens way too often! When everyone realises we cost far too much to keep, and/or take up too much of your time, or the worst thing... You grow bored of us. Despite us still loving you, we are usually tossed out into a bare paddock like a grubby bag of garbage. Most of the time, we do not even have shelter, and we are lucky if we get a little bit of food and clean water!

Also, we are often all alone. We always need a buddy! And as for those creepy-crawlies I mentioned... Well, they no longer have anything stopping them from making my life even more terrible. Those things make a home in my body and on my skin. Who could blame us when we become cold, thin and oh, so grumpy. Would you not feel the same way?

That was my horrid life before Andrea rescued me. I have heard some horses and ponies are not as lucky as me and spend their entire life that way!

Chapter 2: And now the fun starts.

Anyway, enough of me for a moment and let me tell you all about my amazing friends – by the way, they were all rescued from that terrible life.

I live on a farm with two other ponies (I must admit, they are not as cute as me), and four horses. Luckily, all the paddocks have no sharp objects lying around, we could hurt ourselves on. I live in one of these big paddocks with two other ponies.

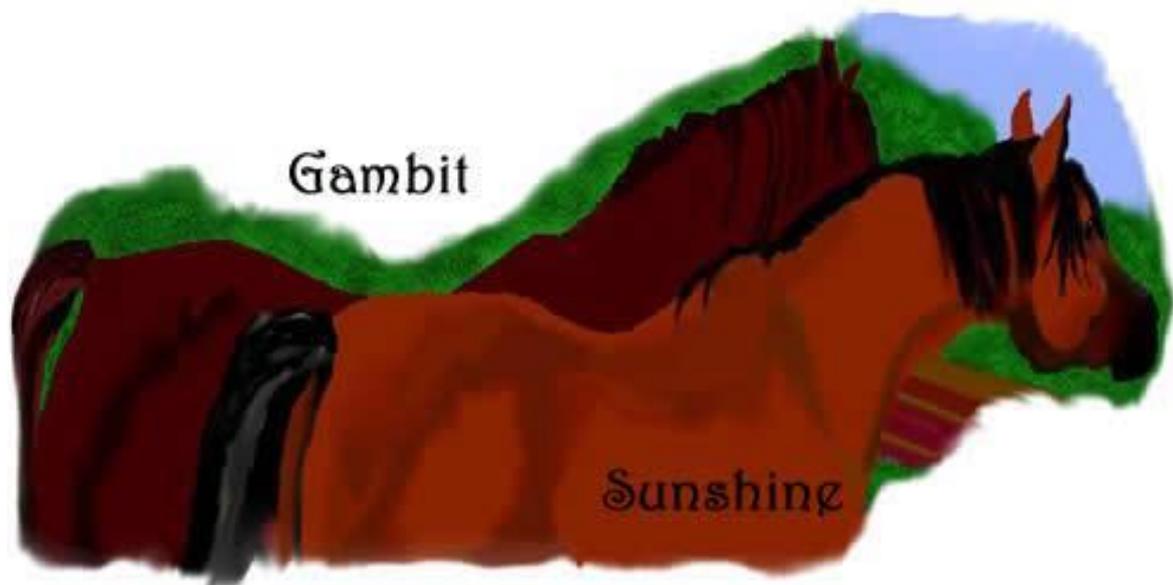
The well-mannered pony is called Dainty.



Dainty just loves children and allows them to do anything to her – apart from hurting her of course. No pony enjoys that! Even though she would never ever hurt a kid, accidents do happen. So, please remember, no matter how well behaved we may be, we all kick. It might just be for a fly bugging us and kick it away and do not see you. – we have ‘blind spots... Straight in front of us, so always stand a bit to the side, because then we will see you perfectly! And also, directly behind us.

I must not forget to tell you about the second pony in my paddock. His name is Jam, and he is Dainty's son, but unlike her, Jam is not at all well behaved! He is mischievous, and that playful and naughty pony is my best friend. Dainty and Jam are also chestnuts, but not as dark as me.

Two horses live in the paddock right next to ours. They are bigger than ponies and grownups ride them because they are way too big for kids to ride – (they are often not safe for you guys to ride, anyway). These horses are called Gambit and Sunshine. Gambit is a stern, dark brown horse. He is quite old and a serious chap, who is always telling us how we should eat; like not to gulp our food or play with it.



Jam and I only listen to him with one ear. I think Dainty is the only pony that hears what he has to say.

Also, Gambit needs extra care than any of us younger ones. His owner makes sure he is extra warm at night and has more super-duper horse food, stuffed full of vitamins and minerals. A veterinarian also checks his teeth every few months, just to make sure he can

chew his food properly and not get very skinny – I do not know why, but old horses either have super long teeth, which need to be filed down, or they have none at all (then they are really, really old and usually have a lot of hair growing out their ears.).

Sunshine is a pretty, brown horse with a glossy black mane and tail, called a 'bay'. She belongs to a young woman called Annie. Annie spends a lot of time grooming her and doing other stuff, that is how it should be, you know, instead of only riding us all the time. Sometimes, I guess I am a bit jealous of Sunshine, but then I remember the greatest thing – I am way cuter.

On the other side, in another paddock there are two more horses. There is a beautiful dappled, grey horse called Silverna...



...and a huge black horse called Sultan. He is a show jumper and his owner often takes him to the grandest shows (I also reckon I am a bit jealous of him). Dainty told me not to feel that way because, I will still have my turn in the show ring!



Chapter 3: Backing me.

Now, that you know all of us, I better tell you the most important and best part... The day I became a real pony, but before I tell you guys how they backed me, let me first tell you about the tack (saddle, bridle and other stuff) needed for this.

Gambit told us sometimes the bridle is homemade; if this is the case, please make sure the bridle does not pinch us, or the leather is not so broad that it rubs the corner of our eyes. The brow band (that is the piece of leather which goes around our forehead) must not be too tight or too small. That could hurt us, by the way.

The bit should only be bought from the pony shop, stainless steel and never ever homemade! The best type is a Vulcanite, Mullen-mouth egg-butt snaffle, they are a kind bit (a very hard plastic covers the metal – we just love them!). We prefer the Vulcanite, Mullen-mouth egg-butt snaffle – It tastes better and does not hurt us – unless you pull on our mouth!

That bit does not have a straight bar because the bar, (the part which lies over our tongue) is curved a bit. This type of bit is sometimes called, the Happy mouth bit.



Vulcanite, Mullen-mouth egg-butt snaffle.

Even better...



If you still choose a metal bit ☹️ please get a Mullen or straight bar snaffle because it

is kinder



is kinder (pictured),

and also, please ask the person in the pony shop about the care of your bit.



Jam. Wearing a simple/light bridle with a Vulcanite, Mullen-mouth egg-butt snaffle (kind and soft bit).

The reason is the metal along the bit rusts, flakes off and cuts our mouth. Ask them about the size of the bit, too, because if it is too small it will pinch us, but if it is too big it will slide right through our mouth. The saddle and girth (the broad strap that runs around our tummy and fastens to the saddle) should never be homemade either. It is especially designed to keep you and me safe, (a homemade girth, can hurt me and is terribly unsafe for you).

Ask someone who knows about the fitting of them to show you how to fit them the correct way. It is much better if you are shown how to do this (than only read about it).

The saddle and girth, as well as the bit and bridle, if not fitted properly make dreadful sores which take ages to heal. We lash out hoping to get rid of the pain, and whoops! Please check, because we might be naughty only because of that!

Andrea loves me a lot because she spends ages chatting to me and grooming me until my mane, tail and coat are gleaming in the summer's sunshine like a newly minted coin. She

is always bringing me a yummy titbit to eat, so when I hear her whistle, I gallop up to her because I know I will get a tasty treat and lots and lots of cuddles.



Once I had settled into my new environment, and old enough, the veterinarian gelded me (castrated me, so I am no longer a colt. Besides, a gelding is way calmer, and you can trust us to be good), and then after about one and a half, to two months when I was not so sore anymore, they got everything ready to back me.

Luckily, I am four years old and just the right age to back me; my mind was mature enough to accept my new role as a pony you could trust (so do not worry!). And my bones

and tendons were strong enough to carry weight, if you do not have patience or do not know that much – It is not a big deal, honestly because you could learn, but if you do not bother and go ahead with backing me too early... Well, that would be sad news for all of us!

You see, if we were backed too early, our tendons usually give in and we get loads of problems with our back, muscles and legs, and also, we get really naughty – just like Jam, he was only two-years-old when he was backed! Then or later, it does not really matter when, just realise it happens.

Gambit told me all about this when Dainty whispered to him that the humans were getting things ready to back me. For once I listened to him, even Jam stopped playing to hear him because he looked way more serious this time... But, let me return to my backing.

Two adults, who have done this before, work with me and then, a bit later, a light rider joined them who had also done this type of thing before.

At first, they led me out of my paddock and into a solid, round paddock, sometimes called a lunging arena. Luckily, I could not see anything which would give me a fright. As soon as I was calm and ready, they let me sniff and see the bridle and saddle. Once I was used to everything, they decided to get me used to a light bridle with a kind and soft bit, first.

One of the adults patted my neck and the other spoke to me in a really calm, soft and wonderful way, while she opened my mouth by pushing her thumb onto the broad space on my lower gum, (it is easy to find because it is between my sharp incisors and molars). She gently tickled the side of my tongue, which was quite ticklish, so I opened my mouth to stop it.

Before I knew what was going on, the bit was gently pushed into my mouth. Luckily, my bit was covered in Vulcanite, so I would not get a shock when cold metal was slipped into my mouth (so, she never had to warm it up in her hands first).

Next came the saddle, which was slowly brought to me from the front, so I could smell it all over, (it is rather scary when it is brought to you quickly, especially from behind). We do not know what it is! The Numnah was the first thing to be put on my back (this is the piece of fabric which goes between my back and the leather of the saddle, so it protected my back from the saddle).

This was held in place by a Roller (broad, leather strap), and I was led around a few times until I got totally used to the feeling of something on my back. Then, the saddle was very gently eased onto my back.

Lastly, the broad girth was tightened. It was tightened very gently at first, just like the Roller, only enough so the saddle could not slip. Gambit agreed with this because, he said, when I found that this strap around my tummy stopped me from breathing out properly, I would have panicked and probably kicked and gone all crazy!

After a while of leading me around a bit, they slowly tightened the girth. The people holding me, talked to me the whole time and the sound of their soft voices and gentle stroking helped a whole bunch! I felt calmer. I was not so afraid.

Chapter 4: Lucky me!

The stirrup irons were loose but tied to the girth with a piece of string, so they could not flap around and give me a fright when I moved around. This way was great because I got used to the strange, new feeling of something touching my sides. After I had been led around a few times, they untied the string.

After a few days of doing this I was ready for the big event. Someone was going to ride me! Before the girl mounted, she spoke to me in a soothing voice. Slowly, one of the adults eased her up on my back while the other held my bridle.

She was lying across the saddle on her stomach, her head was on one side and her feet were dangling on the other side. As the girl was lying across the saddle, she stroked, gently patted and spoke softly to me. I knew she was not going to hurt me.

When she slowly eased herself upright, it still gave me a bit of a fright, though, but the sound of her kind voice and the gentle touch of her soft hands made me feel much better!

When I was relaxed, she slowly slid off my back and stood beside me. The girl spoke and patted me again, then, she put her foot in the left, stirrup iron and hoisted herself up onto the saddle. She did this to me about four times until I was totally relaxed.

When I moved along with ease the girl rode me without any help whatsoever. I had done it! Yippee! I promised myself I was going to be the best pony Andrea ever rode.

On a serious note though, Gambit told me, kids should not get ponies who have never been backed before; we do not know how dangerous we could be and could hurt you guys – never on purpose, though! This is usually because the owner or their parents were impatient and rushed the backing of a pony. Therefore, we were too young and/or never trained properly.

I am glad everyone had loads of patience with me, so I will never ever hurt Andrea.

Finally, I was given the grand name of Mr. Doolittle.

Chapter 5: The great escape.

One bright day Dainty, Jam and I escaped from our paddock. Silverna and Sultan rushed over and called us.

“What are you doing out of your paddock?” Asked Sultan, as we trotted up to them.

“Someone left the gate open of our paddock.” I cheerfully replied.

Sultan and Silverna shook their heads, and Sultan stamped his shiny hoof. “Please do not go off the farm. It is very dangerous. Ask Sunshine about her friend who also ran out of his paddock”.

Actually... I did not feel like doing anything (I think I just stared at them).

After a short while, Jam nipped me, and I realised I was gawking, so we neighed our goodbyes and briskly trotted off to the other side of our paddock.

Gambit and Sunshine left the shade of the big tree and galloped up to greet us.

“Hello!”

“Hi!” I greeted them. “Sultan told me to ask you about your friend Sunshine, who also escaped from his paddock?”

Sunshine shook her pretty head and looked terribly sad as she answered me. “He ran onto the road. A truck hit him, and he was badly hurt.”

“We will never ever do that!” We promised them.

Gambit and Sunshine were also glossy and well fed; they were not stabled at night, but lived in their field with thick, tall hedges all around them, and at night Gambit had a warm, New Zealand rug put on (remember, he is an old horse).

Luckily, those high and dense hedges kept most of the chilly wind out.

Their human never brushed the dirt and oil from under their coats because they knew that was nature’s blanket and raincoat which would protect them against cold and rain. Every day, they were only groomed with a body brush, so they sparkled in the sunshine and their long manes and neat tails were free of any knots.

Andrea and her parents found us standing there, as we chatted away to our friends and led us back into our paddock, and this time, made sure it was properly shut – so, we could not escape again.

I am glad I chatted to Silverna, Sultan, Sunshine and Gambit and know I will speak to them again, when Andrea rides me.

THE END

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