Phone-a-Friend

When a beloved filly becomes critically ill, an owner’s support network helps see her through

By Heather Petersen

Most horse owners know that it takes a village to keep our horses happy and healthy. There are times in life, though, when we are reminded of just how much we need that village.

It was early February of this year when my husband went out to feed my herd of four their breakfast. The horses were playing in their paddocks but happily came in to eat. Meanwhile I roused the kids, took everyone to school, and returned home to ride.

I grabbed my cell phone and called my dear friend Shannon, who was in Florida that week apprenticing for her FEI veterinarian’s license. When I told her what was going on, she walked me through some options. We decided to rule out the abscess possibility first.

My next call was to my farrier and friend, Ron. He examined Ruby with hoof testers and poked and prodded her leg.

“Heather, did you notice this tiny bit of swelling at the base of the tendon?” Ron asked. Yes, I had, but she wasn’t really sensitive to it and there wasn’t any heat, so I had hoped…but Ron calmly informed me he didn’t think it was the hoof and it was time to call the vet.

My vet, Dr. Clint Unruh, recommended a thorough diagnostic workup. After radiographs and ultrasounds revealed nothing, we decided to tap the tendon sheath. The fluid was above normal in protein counts, and the white blood-cell count was way above normal.

Dr. Unruh and I talked. I talked to Shannon. I talked to my husband. I talked to Jenn, my best friend and a local dressage trainer. Together we decided to take Ruby to Littleton Equine Medical Center, a premier veterinary facility in Colorado. By late that evening, Ruby was at Littleton and the surgeon on call was starting a regional limb profusion and a flush and scheduling endoscopic surgery for the next day. The diagnosis: Despite the lack of any visible trauma, the tendon sheath had become infected with E. coli. A cause was never found.

All through Ruby’s ordeal, my friends and colleagues offered support. At one point, Shannon drove the ninety minutes to my house so that together we could make the ninety-minute drive to Littleton to sit down with the wonderful surgeon, Dr. Dustin Devine, and help me better understand the lab results and the various treatment options. My farrier called weekly. Dr. Unruh checked in every few days. Dr. Devine called every three to four days. And through it all my husband, Shannon, and Jenn were there for me.

One month and countless procedures and rounds of antibiotics later, Ruby came home. The vets gave her only a small chance of recovering enough for a performance career—but in late October my friend Petra Warlimont started her under saddle. As of this writing, Ruby is sound and happy. I’m so thankful for my outstanding support network. Without their help, I don’t know if Ruby would have made it home.

Heather Petersen is the USDF Region 5 director, a USEF dressage technical delegate, an FEI steward, and a longtime show manager and secretary. She lives in Peyton, CO.

BETTER DAYS: The Hanoverian Worthy Aspirations (Worthy Opponent x Don Frederico), owned by Heather Petersen (center), won the 2012 Great American/USDF Rocky Mountain Breeders’ Championship Series filly championship.

Phone-a-Friend

When a beloved filly becomes critically ill, an owner’s support network helps see her through

By Heather Petersen

Most horse owners know that it takes a village to keep our horses happy and healthy. There are times in life, though, when we are reminded of just how much we need that village.

It was early February of this year when my husband went out to feed my herd of four their breakfast. The horses were playing in their paddocks but happily came in to eat. Meanwhile I roused the kids, took everyone to school, and returned home to ride.

I grabbed my cell phone and called my dear friend Shannon, who was in Florida that week apprenticing for her FEI veterinarian’s license. When I told her what was going on, she walked me through some options. We decided to rule out the abscess possibility first.

My next call was to my farrier and friend, Ron. He examined Ruby with hoof testers and poked and prodded her leg.

“Heather, did you notice this tiny bit of swelling at the base of the tendon?” Ron asked. Yes, I had, but she wasn’t really sensitive to it and there wasn’t any heat, so I had hoped…but Ron calmly informed me he didn’t think it was the hoof and it was time to call the vet.

My vet, Dr. Clint Unruh, recommended a thorough diagnostic workup. After radiographs and ultrasounds revealed nothing, we decided to tap the tendon sheath. The fluid was above normal in protein counts, and the white blood-cell count was way above normal.

Dr. Unruh and I talked. I talked to Shannon. I talked to my husband. I talked to Jenn, my best friend and a local dressage trainer. Together we decided to take Ruby to Littleton Equine Medical Center, a premier veterinary facility in Colorado. By late that evening, Ruby was at Littleton and the surgeon on call was starting a regional limb profusion and a flush and scheduling endoscopic surgery for the next day. The diagnosis: Despite the lack of any visible trauma, the tendon sheath had become infected with E. coli. A cause was never found.

All through Ruby’s ordeal, my friends and colleagues offered support. At one point, Shannon drove the ninety minutes to my house so that together we could make the ninety-minute drive to Littleton to sit down with the wonderful surgeon, Dr. Dustin Devine, and help me better understand the lab results and the various treatment options. My farrier called weekly. Dr. Unruh checked in every few days. Dr. Devine called every three to four days. And through it all my husband, Shannon, and Jenn were there for me.

One month and countless procedures and rounds of antibiotics later, Ruby came home. The vets gave her only a small chance of recovering enough for a performance career—but in late October my friend Petra Warlimont started her under saddle. As of this writing, Ruby is sound and happy. I’m so thankful for my outstanding support network. Without their help, I don’t know if Ruby would have made it home.

Heather Petersen is the USDF Region 5 director, a USEF dressage technical delegate, an FEI steward, and a longtime show manager and secretary. She lives in Peyton, CO.