

A Note From Allyson March 2016

This past month, one of our veterinarians was out on a farm call, and I mentioned that the horse he was examining had been rescued from a kill pen. He looked at me and said, "What's a kill pen?" It was a stark reminder that many people in the horse industry and many who love horses dearly do not realize what is going on in the ugly world of horse slaughter.

In a nutshell, a kill pen is a holding facility where horses are temporarily housed prior to being shipped to Mexico or Canada to slaughter. The conditions are often abysmal, with horses packed into dirty, unsanitary, muddy pens for days or weeks on end. Terrified horses that do not know each other are forced together into small spaces, often resulting in fights and injuries.

Many of these horses are picked up by "kill buyers" at horse auctions. When you take your horse to a sale, or sell your horse on Craig's List, unless your horse sells for a price exceeding meat prices, chances are a kill buyer is bidding. He purchases horses cheaply, houses them en masse at a kill pen, and then crams as many as he can fit into a semi for the long, horrific and inhumane haul to the border.

(continued from eNewsletter)

Kill pens are full of horses, donkeys and mules of all kinds. Trained, untrained, registered, unregistered, sick, healthy, fat, skinny . . . you name it. No horse is safe. Last year, a former Budweiser Clydesdale was rescued from a kill pen. If you think it can't happen to your horse, you better think again. Every horse is truly at risk of being one owner away from a trip through the slaughter pipeline.

Kill pens are controversial in the horse rescue world. An industry has developed where kill buyers and kill pen brokers cash in on the sympathy of people wishing to save these horses. Prior to shipping, they promote the animals for sale, mostly through social media, allowing people to purchase them and save them from slaughter. It's a very lucrative business. Many animal advocates object to the purchase of these horses because it puts money in the pockets of the kill buyers and brokers and keeps the wheels of the profitable slaughter industry turning. Other horse advocates support the purchase of these horses because regardless of who is profiting, lives are being saved.

Kill pen purchases are also controversial because it's difficult to know what you are getting. There are MANY horses at kill pens that are safe, well-trained animals. Story after story is told about the perfect kid's horse or the former show champion ending up at the kill pen. But kill pens also contain horses that have never been handled and may not be suitable for the inexperienced horse owner. People often find themselves in a jam when they purchase a horse with the best of intentions, but end up with a horse that may endanger their safety.

I raise the issue of kill pens not because I have all the answers. Solutions are hard to come by in this complicated and horrifying scenario. I raise the issue because I want to raise awareness. I want kill pens to become as notorious as puppy mills. I want the general public to know about the fate of far too many of our precious equine friends because knowledge is power, and power can lead to action.

Over the course of the next few months, I will address some of the issues that allow kill pens to exist. Over breeding and irresponsible horse management being among the most obvious. My hope is that by talking about the plight of the slaughter-bound horse, I can affect the thoughts and actions of people who may unknowingly be contributing to the problem.

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions for topics of discussion, I welcome you to contact me at allyson@mypegasusproject.org.

Allyson DeCanio

President, The Pegasus Project