

## The Making of a Therapy Horse

By Rebecca Thompson  
Barn manager and riding instructor



“Camelot Therapeutic Horsemanship, this is Rebecca may I help you?”

“Hello, I’d like to donate a horse to your program.”

“Thank you so much for thinking of Camelot! Tell me a little bit about him.”

“His name is Buddy, and he is a 26-year-old quarter horse. I’ve had him since he was born. He hasn’t been ridden in quite awhile and has some arthritis, but he loves to be brushed and is awesome with kids. I think he’d be just perfect for your program!”

“Buddy sounds really sweet, but unfortunately he is over our age limit. We have pretty strict criteria for horses coming into our barn because they are starting a new career. I always recommend retirement for a horse in their mid twenties. There are some great places where they can enjoy living on pasture in the company of other retirees. But I really appreciate you thinking of Camelot, thanks for calling!”

The horse’s age may change, the breed may differ, but this same story repeats itself a couple of times a month. In the past three years, I have talked to well over 50 people wanting to donate or sell their horse to the Camelot program. Of that number I have physically gone out to evaluate fifteen, of those fifteen, three have actually made it into the program.

We have strict criteria outlining horse candidates qualifications because bringing a horse into the barn is a big and costly decision, one that we do not take lightly. A horse joining the program must be physically and mentally fit, pass a pre-purchase veterinarian exam, and most importantly, demonstrate the willingness to do the job.

### THE SCREENING PROCESS

It starts with a phone call. I begin by conducting an interview with the horse’s owner and asking lots of questions! If that goes well, I’ll meet the horse and do a hands-on evaluation at the owner’s barn. The next step for a promising candidate is a trial period at Camelot, typically lasting four to six weeks. We don’t expect horses to be ready to carry students after the evaluation, but we should know if the horse is suitable for the job. During the trial, Camelot staff handles

**Happy 40th Anniversary!**  
This edition of the *Camelot Chronicles* is dedicated to the hard working therapy horses in our program.



*Barbara aligned at the mounting ramp waiting for Halie to mount. Felicia is heading with Evelyn on the offside. Left to right on the ramp are Rebecca, Halie and Hannah.*

and rides the horse. We start with basic schooling exercises in our covered arena and ride on the property trails. Next, we bring in qualified volunteers to begin working with the horse. They’ll also assist with mock lessons, one playing the role of a student, while the others participate as a header (horse leader) and side walkers. If all goes well, we’ll have a conversation with the horse’s owner and offer placement in the Camelot barn. Once accepted into the program, the real work begins!

Most of Camelot’s new students are beginner riders and it takes years to develop a balanced seat that can follow the motion of the horse, regardless of ability.

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## Merlin's Muse

By Mary Hadsall  
Executive Director

When people I meet learn of the work I do they immediately take me down memory lane, sharing their experiences of childhood ponies, horse camps and first horse shows. Without a doubt, there is one thing all horse owners

have in common, and that is the deeply rooted belief that their horse is or was the best!

Why do horses elicit this strong emotional response in humans? What is it about riding a horse that is so magical? Honestly, there are more answers to that question than I have space to write! For some it could be the experience of sitting on a broad back and moving effortlessly through space. For another it might be the silky feel of the horse's coat under their hand, or the rich smell of well oiled bridle leather. Perhaps it is simply enough being in their company.

I start my day taking care of all the Camelot animals. My first order of business is to tend to Jax, our therapy bunny. Next, I head to the barn where I throw scratch and lay pellets to the chickens. Camelot roosters Michael and Sarah Catherine compete to see who has the strongest pipes by crowing at the top of their lungs, my personal favorite morning sound. Then I prepare the horse's breakfast.

The sun's first rays break the horizon as I drive the Gator to the paddocks. It's divine. The horses, having heard the purr of the engine, greet me with eager nickers and happy dance steps. They're ready for their supplement enriched grain and hay. As I make my rounds, I sing a little good morning song while pouring grain into their feeders. I also take the time to do a good head-to-tail search for any indication that something might be off. I'm a morning person and I love this routine and having one-on-one time with each horse before the day gets busy.

I cannot emphasize enough how important the daily management of our therapy horses is in order to provide quality services to our families. The horse's physical and mental well-being is always at the forefront. The high caliber care is the leading reason we do not experience equine burn out at Camelot. Our veterinarians work diligently providing professional medical care, and staff and volunteers tend to them daily, 24/7, 365 days a year. Horses in our program work hard and live grandly!

In time, their role will change. They transition from teacher to mentor and begin their retirement as they enter their golden years. It's comforting to know that after their years of service, they earn this special time at the ranch. Once this place becomes their home, it remains their home. Our commitment to the horses is a big one. Not all pass our review, but for those that do, we are blessed and will continue to honor their service to Camelot for the rest of their days. ∞



**Ashley**  
Joined the Program:  
July 2013



**Barbara**  
Joined the Program:  
May 2011



**Nutmeg**  
Joined the Program:  
Nov. 2020



**Rooster**  
Joined the Program:  
Oct. 2021



**Frisco**  
Joined the Program:  
Oct. 2014



**JoJo**  
Joined the  
Program: Feb. 2022



**Rose**  
Currently Under  
Evaluation

## Horse Sponsorships Available

Barbara, JoJo and Rose are seeking sponsors for the 2023 calendar year! Your \$2000 donation is 100% tax deductible. All funding is applied directly towards the purchase of feed, supplements, hay and shavings for one of our therapy horses. Sponsors receive special recognition at their horse's paddock gate and the warm fuzzies that comes along with doing something great for the program they love and support!



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The Camelot horses have to respond to a wide variety of cues that “mean the same thing”. Someone with compromised mobility in their hands will ask the horse to turn differently than someone with compromised mobility in their legs. A student who is a quadriplegic will cue differently than a hemiplegic, and so forth. It is the job of the therapy horse to interpret similar cues from all the students and perform as asked. This is not an easy task.

Horses joining our herd need to become comfortable with and fully accepting of a variety of different types of equipment that our students use, such as power wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, canes, and communication boards. They make a variety of unusual sounds, beeping, buzzing, and ringing.

We have a very long mounting ramp and accompanying offside block for volunteers to stand on while helping students get on their horses. The “*Piece De La Résistance*” is our Our SureHands lift. It’s a mechanical device located above the mounting ramp that lifts a rider from his wheelchair high into the air, moving them over the horse’s back on an overhead track, before slowly lowering him down onto the saddle. This is not something you will see in your typical barn! But all of the things that make our barn unique, becomes ordinary to our crew.

## THE ELITE

The Camelot horses all begin with something special inside that makes them ideal for their career as a therapeutic mount. But it can take months or years to develop the skills to interpret their rider’s movements properly. Experience teaches them to understand what’s a signal to walk, trot, stop or turn, or an unintentional squeeze of the leg or pull of the ring. Their manners are impeccable whether their student is beside them or on their back.

Our horses’ job is both mental and physical, but like they say, if you find a job you love, you’ll never work another day in your life. And the Camelot horses love their job. The next time you find yourself next to a Camelot horse, give them a kind word and a pat, because you are in the presence of an elite. ☺



*Jim is hitched to the wheelchair accessible carriage as Katie is lifted into the passenger’s seat. Mary W. is heading. Felicia is stabilizing Katie, and Hannah is using the remote while assisting. Evelyn is waiting in the carriage to help Katie and Rebecca is seated in the driver’s seat.*

*Memorial gifts in any amount are a beautiful way to honor a beloved friend or family member, be they human or otherwise. We also welcome gifts in honor of birthdays or other special occasions. All such donations are acknowledged with a special card or email and a mention in our newsletter.*

*When sending in your gift, please include a brief note designating whom it is memorializing, and in which category you are submitting it. If you would like an acknowledgment card sent, please include the recipient’s address.*

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**Editor:** Michelle Guerrero

K2 also lovingly known as Jim  
1/2007 - 1/5/2023



Saying goodbye is never easy, especially when it is to a dear friend who has left us far too soon. I am heartbroken to share the news that we lost our beautiful K2, a.k.a. Jim, in January. While he may be gone, I promise you he will never, ever be forgotten.

I will remember the unmistakable sound of his hooves in our barn. He had a habit of “knocking on the door” to get our attention when we passed by his stall. His indignation when other horses were taken out for lessons and it wasn’t his turn. I loved leading him to his paddock when he was feeling full of himself. He would bring his chin towards his chest, puff his body just so, making himself big and impressive - as if his commanding 16.2 hands high height wasn’t enough.

He was big of heart and so full of goodness, truly a favorite and honestly our barn clown. I am celebrating you and your glorious life, my friend. Camelot was fortunate to have you in our lives. I was your steward. It was my honor to serve you, and in turn, you captured my heart.

When thunder rolls overhead I will know in my heart that it is really you my friend, and the deep rumbling sound of your hooves as you run across the heavenly pastures. Run free my friend, my love, run free!

## Memorial Gifts

### In Honor of:

The Strickstein Family  
 Lou Evers  
 Roslyn Tayne  
 Camelot staff & volunteers  
 Jim Howard  
 Karen Bishop  
 Lynne LoCascio  
 Rebecca Thompson  
 Michelle Harwin  
 Lynn Wright  
 Ben and Lauren Erlich  
 All Therapy Animals

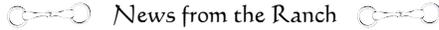
Kelly Knodel  
 Eileen Szychowski  
 Robin Erlich  
 Chuck Johnson

### In Memory of:

All my loved ones lost  
 Dorothy Flood  
 Peggy Karla  
 Bob Karla  
 Cliff Dweller aka Sir Carramore the Bold  
 Col. Buck Francisco  
 Marge Milliman

Jessie Scout  
 Natalie Arak  
 Mary Lou Hadsall  
 Jim Hadsall  
 Great Grandma Blount  
 Jose de Jesus Flores  
 Cliffy  
 K2 aka Jim  
 Yennick  
 Cecil Evans  
 Joan Hickey  
 Dusty  
 Robert Rapp  
 Josef Rivers

### Nifty Bits



### News from the Ranch

Three cheers to the **Scottsdale Police Mounted Unit** for another wonderful desensitizing clinic! Our participants had a wonderful time. As always, we appreciate this collaboration and financial gift!

Thank you, **Ava Estin**, for working with the Camelot students and horses. We are grateful for your TTouch & Heart Math clinic. We're all benefiting from your expertise and work!

Special appreciation to **Taryl O'Shea** for the tickets to The Arabian Horse Show

**Holly Tate**, your organizational skills leave me breathless! Thank you for organizing our storage and feed rooms!

Camelot welcomes new Dragon Slayers **Win C., Amanda H., Christine M., and Janey S.** to our rider schedule.

Hello new volunteers **Annette M., Diane R., and Lisa McGruff**

## Our Heroes' Hero

### Felicia Jackson

Felicia began volunteering as a morning ranch hand volunteer at in August of 2017. Then at the beginning of the 2018 lesson season, she became an afternoon volunteer instructor assistant. It wasn't long after that she began helping with Camelot's therapeutic driving program, accruing the necessary 70+ hours to become an "able-bodied whip" volunteer. This distinction will allow Felicia to assist a student with a disability in the carriage while the instructor teaches from the ground. Felicia continues to assist with exercising the driving horses on a weekly basis in addition to working with students during the afternoon classes. While she has since moved across town and acquired equines of her own, Felicia continues to be reliable and willing to help with anything extra that is needed at Camelot. You are truly appreciated Felicia!



*Felicia driving Nutmeg with Alicia in the covered arena.*

Raise your sword against the most formidable enemy of all... the voice within that says "I can't" ~ Eileen Szychowski, Camelot Founder

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