

The Group that Cried Wolf

by Vicki Tobin

If there is one thing you learn as an equine welfare advocate, it is perseverance. You learn that change never happens overnight. You learn to accept change with little victories. You learn that weeks turn into months and months into years. You learn that for change to occur, you must stay steady on your path. You learn that you cannot do it alone and that you must work with and engage people that may have differing opinions on the road to a mutual goal. You learn which battles to fight and which battles will draw you closer to your goal.

Over the years, I have met remarkable individuals too numerous to name. Before the Pryor round-up, there were the advocates fighting slaughter and the advocates fighting for the protection of wild horses & burros. Two splintered groups with little knowledge of each other's activities. Until Cloud.

The BLM really stepped in it with the round-up of the Pryor Herds. They had no idea they would awaken a sleeping giant. Not only was Cloud well known amongst the advocates but by people across America and the world that have never been around horses. Cloud did something we have been unable to do for years – unite the splintered groups. Little by little, all of our groups started working together.

Today, we are one voice and one group advocating for the horses & burros. Although there are many well versed, knowledgeable individuals on the respective issues, for the most part, I believe it would be a challenge for anyone to determine which groups the individuals came from. Cloud opened our eyes to the numerous ties and allowed us to see the same roads we are traveling that lead back to the cattle ranchers and special interest groups.

The many years of research and exposing the horse slaughter industry and the government's plan to exterminate the wild horses have finally come full circle and are up front, in your face.

America's dirty little secret wasn't only horse slaughter, it was also the BLM round-ups. While we have had successes on the wild horse and burro issues, 2010 is proving to be a most devastating year for the horse slaughter industry.

We have often said that slaughter isn't going to end by passing the perpetual pending federal legislation. I view the legislation as the final door that **must** be closed. We have learned that most legislators care little about the legislation in front of them if it doesn't come with benefits for them. Slaughter is going to end by chipping away at the wall of lies.

We have learned that if you don't have deep pockets like the beef industry, AQHA and farm bureaus [the big three], you can lobby until you drop and will get nowhere. We have learned

that when the president says he will not allow lobbyists to run the country it is nothing more than a sound bite. The government should remove the dome on the capitol building and replace it with a cow. The farm bureau can insure it.

So what do you do? You work for years and years and keep chipping away at the wall of lies our opponents built. Little by little you expose the truth.

We proved that slaughter is not a necessary evil. It is only necessary to those that don't want to be held accountable for their horses. We proved with confirmation from Temple Grandin and the USDA, that it is not the old, infirm and useless horses that are sent to slaughter. We proved the drug issue is real. We have proven tenfold the cruelty and abuse inherent with slaughter. We learned that with money, you can change nouns like slaughter or horse to monikers such as processing/harvesting and unwanted horse.

The wall started losing structural soundness when our opponents jumped the gun with their abandoned horse stories. They were ready to go to print the day the two plants in Texas shut down. It didn't matter that the same number of horses were being slaughtered and the stories didn't make sense. Jeff McMurray was primed and ready and let loose with the mother of all stories that started the tsunami. It was the story of the horses abandoned at the Kentucky strip mine. John Holland, with a small group, started investigating the articles and proved them all to be false.

Timing is everything but it wasn't our time, yet. We still weren't able to reach the masses with the truth because the media was still buying the lies from the big three. Investigation after investigation broke but the media was still printing the disinformation from the big three.

EWA issued their first press release on February 25, 2009. On October 28, we issued a press release with AHDF calling for a moratorium on wild horse and burro round-ups. After 8 months of trying to get the truth out, we finally broke free. Three weeks after the release was issued, John Holland received a call from an AP reporter and the tables started turning. One week later, we teamed up with The Cloud Foundation and the following month, issued the Joint Moratorium letter to the president.

When you are up against the big three, you better have your facts straight. Unlike the big three, we are all under a microscope. As a result, we are forced to research and make certain we have credible, verifiable data and information.

If we had said that closing the slaughter plants brought down the horse industry, we would have been laughed out of the country. The media would have researched the claim and discovered that horse slaughter represents only 3 cents on every \$100 in the horse industry. But the big three pulled the wool over the media's eyes and they bought it. The big three

were able to get the media to repeat their ridiculous mantra of processing the unwanted horses to save the horse industry and explain away the numerous investigations as isolated incidents.

Our message has been the same for years – food safety and the abuse and cruelty inherent with horse slaughter. When you have the facts and the truth, you don't have to invent new lies and scare tactics every year. The lies and scare tactics have come back to haunt the slaughter proponents with a vengeance.

Thanks to the hard work of Drs. Marini, Dodman and Blondeau, we have a published scientific paper proving our drug warnings were not the rantings of *emotional, tree hugging, radical vegan activists*. Research in California of Thoroughbreds and a survey of horse owners in *The Horse*, have also confirmed this. This explains why our opponents ignore the food safety issue in their propaganda. They have known for years that the medications they give their horses are banned by the FDA and the EU. There is no argument to explain it away.

The investigations of what has been exposed in Canada, Mexico and South America are reminiscent of the FOIAs from the former US plants. The consumers of North American horse meat are outraged. The CHDC and Animals' Angels investigations from 2010 have them reeling. No longer can they claim the abuse and cruelty are all isolated incidents.

In the face of all the damaging evidence, the AQHA came out bragging about spending \$1M lobbying against legislation that would protect the breed they represent from a brutal end of life. The AVMA wrote another article repeating all the lies of the past. Not one figure quoted was accurate and to date, they have not responded to our May 17 letter.

Equine welfare advocates have accomplished more in the first 5 months of this year than in past years combined and we've done it without any funding – just the pennies in our pockets. We have proven, with hard evidence and scientific facts that our opponents have been lying and covering up the atrocities.

The *unwanted* horses must be *processed* to control the population and save the horse industry!

US horses are not food animals. Slaughter proponents can call them livestock, farm animals, domestic livestock – whatever they want – but they can't change the fact that they are bred and raised for purposes other than food. Other than their size, they are no different than dogs in the functions they perform in our society. Both race, perform, serve law enforcement and are used for therapy, sport, work, service, pleasure and as companions. We don't slaughter dogs for foreign markets when their work life has ended so why horses? The horse population

is much easier to control than dogs. Horses are purposely bred and with rare exception, have one foal. Dogs have litters.

Since the majority of our opponents are in the Ag industry, many of us have often wondered if their involvement in trying to justify horse slaughter is nothing more than an attempt to take the focus away from the numerous investigations that have exposed what is occurring with food safety and cruelty with our acceptable food sources. They can't keep their own backyards clean but want to take on a non-food animal that has no regulations.

There is no concern for the welfare of the horses or humans. Just slaughter. Doesn't it make you wonder why they are fighting so hard for a few hundred dollars per horse? What else haven't we uncovered?

Patience and perseverance. There is light at the end of the tunnel and this time, it's not a train!