

THE HORSES OF PROUD SPIRIT

Book Review by Elizabeth Chandler

I used to be the kind of person who asks “what does this mean?” when events, visions, or little voices inside me seemed to be pointing to something, guiding, nudging, inspiring. But I soon learned that the “what’s” or “why’s” do not matter; what matters is following your inner guidance and not looking for a big “pay-off” in so doing. Because life is a series of stepping stones and it is the experiential aspect of stepping on those stones that is what matters, not the destination of where the stones are taking us.

So, when I started hearing that gentle inner nudging, a calling of sorts, with regard to horses, I didn’t ask why – I just let it be and waited for whatever was to come next, all the while just being me. As it turned out, on two separate occasions I was presented with the opportunity to read “The Horses of Proud Spirit,” by Melanie Sue Bowles. And so I purchased it and read it. Actually, I consumed it, I languished in it, and I experienced not only the stories that are told in this marvelous book, but so much more.

Melanie Sue Bowles’ book is about the establishment of her horse sanctuary where over 70 horses have been rescued over the years to, as she puts it, “be horses” and retire with dignity, proper care, wide open spaces, and love. But the book is about so much more than her own experience as she followed her own stepping stones in establishing this sanctuary. Each story in this book is about a select group of horses that have retired to Proud Spirit – their situations prior to being rescued, their rescue, and how their story ended (the current number of rescue residents is 29). And in each story is another story, an underlying spiritual message that I am not sure Melanie even intended, but it is there nonetheless.

I will never forget the stories in this book. I will never forget the story that tore at my heart the most: Sugar and the Fireflies. I’m not ashamed to say that I cried audibly during that chapter and in other parts of this book. I also chuckled at Melanie’s attempts to learn about horses early on, laughed at some of the lighter moments when the horses were showing their unique and beautiful personalities, and gritted my teeth and popped a few head veins in anger at human inhumanity, as well.

This wonderful, delightful, deeply moving book has also educated me about the plight of horses in this country. Little did I know that most horses are sold off for slaughter, even life-long, presumably loved “family” horses, when they no longer serve their humans’ interests. What an unacceptable resolution for the mighty, intelligent, beautiful creature that is the horse. As an animal advocate, I often find myself immersed in anger at the callousness of many humans toward animals. But Melanie has taught me a valuable lesson in this book. In one especially poignant chapter, Melanie grapples with this thought as well as she attempts to rescue an emaciated horse: “How could this happen? I was outraged and infuriated, but I quickly told myself what a waste of time that was. ... the reality of life here on earth is that from time to time we will encounter horrors such as this starving mare and things that are much, much worse. ... I told myself, it is a waste of energy to ask how this could happen. *The focus of our energy should go towards changing the fate of those who suffer as a consequence.*” Yes, Melanie, you are so right.

Melanie ends that chapter with a quote: “To be loved by a horse should fill us with awe, for we do not deserve it.” Well, Melanie, maybe many of us do not deserve it, but you certainly do.

“The Horses of Proud Spirit” can be purchased at any book store and Holistic Direct on Cattlemen Road (in the Pro-Lawn building). A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book go to support the Proud Spirit Horse Sanctuary.

For more information, please visit their website:

<http://www.horsesofproudsprit.com>