

Man's

*Or could your family dog become
your barn's worst nightmare?*

By Jody Reynolds

LORI AND BERT HORNBACK MADE A FINAL STROLL THROUGH their barn on May 10, 2002, checking their maiden mare, Miss Leo Tucker, before rounding up their three dogs and walking home for the night.

Owners of Runaway Creek Quarter Horses in Homeland, California, the Hornbacks couldn't wait for their favorite mare, "Tanya," to foal. Tanya was bred to their stallion, Dual Smoking, and they were looking forward to a stellar working cow horse prospect.

Maybe tomorrow would be the day, they thought as they secured the dogs – two Queensland Heelers and an Australian Shepherd – in their kennels and went to bed.

May 11 began suddenly and frighteningly at 6 a.m. The Hornbacks were jerked from their sleep by Debbie Mauss, who'd driven by the open-air, shed-row barn and noticed something wrong.

"There's a baby in your barn aisle, and a pack of dogs has attacked it!" Mauss screamed.

Their panic soared as they reached the barn. Tanya had gone into labor near the stall door, and the three family dogs, sensing the excitement, escaped their kennels under the fence. Working as a vicious team, the dogs pulled the foal from the mother and dragged it under the stall door into the barn aisle.

"When we got out there, the filly was standing up," Lori remembered grimly. "She was standing there like nothing had ever happened. There was blood everywhere. The dogs were laying quietly nearby with blood all over their coats."

Bert took the dogs back to the kennel while Lori assessed the deplorable state of the tiny chestnut filly and waited for the veterinarian to arrive.

Parts of her upper body were shredded or chewed away, and the right side of her neck was missing most of its skin. Her hooves, elbows, ears and face had been chewed.

"The scene was so overwhelming, but I knew we needed to

focus on helping this filly, not on what had happened," Lori said.

She remembered the importance of colostrum and that the filly needed to be united with Tanya quickly.

"There were so many gaping wounds that we couldn't figure out how to hold her so she could be moved into Tanya's stall," Lori said. "We just scooped her up in our arms and carried her to her mother."

Tanya remained quiet and cooperative, but the filly's neck muscles were so severely damaged that she couldn't hold her head up to suckle.

Mark Secor, D.V.M., arrived on the scene.

"From the look on his face, I knew saving this filly was going to be a big challenge," Lori said. "He asked us what we wanted to do, and my response was, 'If she fights, we fight.' This filly had more heart than any horse I'd ever seen before, and we knew she deserved every possible chance." They joined in her fight for life, even if the chance for survival seemed depressingly low.

They gave the filly colostrum and did their best to bandage and protect the wounds.

Alongside her mother, she survived the first night. They decided to call her "Katie," and they began the long road ahead.

With help from family and friends, including Christa Bruns, D.V.M., Lori took turns every two hours feeding, bandaging and treating wounds. They dressed Katie in turtlenecks and sweatshirts, and they kept her on fluids, antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and everything else they could do to support her body.

"The first week was the worst," Bruns said. "Katie didn't have an immune system. Even though we could get the colostrum into her, her body was so stressed over all the infection and injuries that it was touch and go. We'd pull blood, and she'd have no white cells. Most animals would have just given up. I don't think she ever knew that wasn't what life was about. She's

B.E.S.T. Friend?



COURTESY OF THE HORNBACKS

Katie was lucky to survive an attack by family dogs as she was being birthed by her dam.



Because her wounds were so extensive, Katie was clothed in turtlenecks and sweatshirts to protect her.

one of the strongest personalities I've ever been around. She fought every day."

Air inevitably crept under her skin through the bite wounds causing subcutaneous emphysema.

"It would crackle when you pet her," Bruns said. "We massaged it out every day. Subcutaneous emphysema is very painful, and there's not a whole lot you can do except try to get the gas out of there. We tried to keep her up and moving around because that helped moved things out of the skin. She acted like that was normal life to her."

Despite Katie's pain, within a few days she was running, playing and kicking like a healthy foal.

"She appeared sharp and happy – almost normal, except for the eye-catching outfits Dr. Bruns fashioned to protect her wounds," Lori said. "She didn't show any signs of suffering. Katie had never known anything else, and she thought everything happening to her was normal."

After several long weeks, the Hornbacks knew Katie was out of the woods. Her wounds were healing, and she was nursing on her own.

"At three weeks, we finally took a deep breath and said, 'My gosh, this shouldn't have worked,' " Lori said. "We knew she was going to be fine."

But they worried about her attachment to humans after being handled multiple times a day.

"She was quite small compared to her siblings, so we

weaned her pretty late, at 5 months," Lori said. "We kicked her out with all the other babies. We needed to kind of ignore her and let her be a horse. She went out and ruled the roost!"

Katie's wounds have healed, and she receives therascope treatments to soften and break down the scar tissue and preserve range of motion.

"She's never going to be as flexible as she would have been without the scars," Bruns said, "but she can compensate for them for sure."

Katie received an appropriate AQHA registered name – A Smoking Miracle – and she is in training with Jimmy Flores.

"She was always bred to be my first (National Reined Cow Horse Association) Snaffle Bit Futurity non-pro horse," Lori said. "We're still on track for that unless Jimmy tells me she's too good for me to show her, and he's going to show her! I wouldn't put it past her to be an open-level horse with the gritty guts that she has. That's what it takes to contend with the big boys. You need a horse that's got a lot of heart."

Why Do Dogs Turn Vicious?

KATIE'S STORY HAS A HAPPY ENDING, BUT DOG ATTACKS CAN occur at any barn with devastating effects.

"The dog is instinctively a predator," said Paul DeMars, D.V.M., Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners and a canine and feline specialist and assistant adjunct professor at Oklahoma State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. "In nature, this is exactly what they would have done. The Hornbacks' dogs had the prime opportunity for predation and, most likely, that's what they were acting on."

Pack mentality was also involved, DeMars presumed.

"Any time there's a group of animals with group involvement, there's more likelihood for this type of activity. They had trigger after trigger.

"Even the best-behaved dog that you'd never think would do this, if nature calls, it's going to answer," he continued. "I'd never put it past any dog. They were large enough to realistically do it. They had the sense, smell and opportunity."

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- www.hsus.org/ace/11843

Stay out of the Dog House

"YOU'RE NOT GOING TO CHANGE A DOG'S INSTINCT," DEMARS SAID.

So prevention is key in keeping your horses safe.

"Never fail to keep the dogs out of the barn, especially during foaling time and when young ones are around," he suggested.

The Hornbacks moved to a new facility and built a better barn without gaps under the stalls in hopes that their horrific experience wouldn't be repeated.

They took drastic measures concerning their three dogs.

"We felt that, once they'd done it, we could never trust them again around any small animal or small person," Bert said. "It was a positive experience for them, and they didn't get punished directly for it.

"It was a hard decision for everybody, but we had the vet put the dogs down for us. They went without any pain."

DeMars agreed that euthanasia is the only 100-percent assurance that it won't happen again, but it's not necessarily the only choice for dog owners.

"The dogs successfully did something and got a reward, so it could happen again," DeMars said. "But they didn't do anything they considered wrong. They were responding instinctively. We humanize dog behavior and say, 'They should have known not to do that. I can't trust this dog to never do this again.' It's a cut-and-dry situation - predator versus prey."

He conceded that the dogs might never have caused trouble again, especially if kept in an escape-proof environment during foaling time and not given the opportunity for predatory behavior.

"The owners had to make a hard decision, and you can't second guess a decision like that," he said. 🐾

COURTESY OF THE HORNBACKS



Katie's scars are faint and her range of motion almost normal as she successfully trains for reined cow horse competition as a 2-year-old.

A DOG-AND-HORSE-SAFE COMMUNITY

The memories of Katie's attack leave the Hornbacks uneasy about all dogs that they haven't raised around horses and grown to trust.

"People in the area get dogs and let them run loose, and they don't understand the dangers," Lori said. "Our dogs wanted to get out of their kennels because our neighbor dogs were allowed to run free. So many people living close to farms don't understand that they shouldn't let their dogs run loose."

Bruns shares their concern at her own horse facility. "Dogs like to chase things that are their size or a little bit bigger," she said. "It's natural for them. Many dogs are bred to herd livestock. To my dogs, a foal is another dog because of the way they were trained." But the neighbor dogs haven't been trained to coexist with horses, and Bruns doesn't tolerate them wandering around her horses.

"They all have teeth, and they all have the ability to attack a foal if they want to," she said. "It happens."

Bruns researched the issue and found many angry horse communities with similar concerns. "People move out to the country with dogs of all breeds and let them run around and herd the farm animals," she said.

The solution? Bruns and the Hornbacks have several suggestions:

- "The trick is to keep our dogs on and other dogs off," Lori said. To control their dogs, the Hornbacks purchased an invisible underground fencing system with transmitters that send signals to their dogs' collars when they get too close to property boundaries.
- To keep other dogs out, they've installed 6-foot-high welded pipe fencing with V-mesh on most of their ranch's 20 acres. "We're investing a tremendous amount of money in fencing," Lori said. "We run 50 horses on our property, so it's worth the investment. I don't have to worry about patrolling my property and running off animals."
- Their new, custom stalls have closely spaced rails and welded wire around the bottom of the adjoining turnouts.
- They also bought a donkey that, by nature, doesn't like coyotes or dogs.
"When we turn babies out, we put the donkey out with them," Lori said. "They won't tolerate any kind of dog in their area. They'll herd with whomever they're with. She's tolerant of the babies and keeps other animals away from the babies. She'll go after the dogs and chase them off. She's vocal if something's out there."
- Finally, the Hornbacks have instituted a steadfast rule: "No dog out on the ranch loose when a horse is being handled," Lori said. "They have to be locked up. I have my own horses and other people's there, and that's our rule."