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The Wounded Healing the Wounded

How do innocent, loving children become “troubled teens?” Once troubled, how can we help them? Maybe WE can’t but sometimes they can find help in places that are least expected.

Jenny is 14 years old. She has been in the Young Offender Centre twice, has lived in several group homes and has attempted suicide three times. You’d never know it upon first meeting her. Jenny appears warm, kind and shy. She is pretty and is always smiling. Her large doe eyes are deep but something behind them tells her dark secret. Jenny tries to act like nothing bad has ever happened to her, but it has. She has been the victim of many abuses at the hands of her father. Her mother is living on the street somewhere in Edmonton. Jenny is living in group care for her safety and her father has been incarcerated many times over the years. Jenny wants to forgive him and so when he is out of jail, she seeks him out, only to be abused again and again.

When you first meet Jenny, it seems like none of this has had any effect on her. Who Jenny has really become is only clear when you start to get close to her. Jenny doesn’t trust anyone and when people begin to show her love, she sabotages it by stealing from them, saying hurtful things, damaging property, running away, and ultimately hurting herself. Some think that Jenny will never be reached. I’ve heard some say that she will be a long-term criminal and that she will always only be a burden to society. I heard those kinds of things about Jenny up until she met Echo.

Echo is a 6 year-old thoroughbred race horse. He was a winner at age 3 and was worth \$20,000. While racing one day, he injured his right knee, requiring major surgery. He was in recovery for 6 months and would not run when he was placed back on the track. In an attempt to make him run, his trainer beat him. Echo refused to race no matter what they did to him. In frustration, he was sold to a young woman for a dollar. She rescued Echo and took him to her home. I met Echo on this day and he was about 400 pounds underweight with crumbling hooves and haunted eyes. He wouldn’t allow anyone near him (not even the other horses) and wandered aimlessly around his new property. When his new caretakers approached him, he fled with horror-filled eyes and tail almost straight up in the air.

The two lost souls were about to meet. As part of her group-home recreation program, Jenny was brought to the ranch where Echo lived. The kind lady who now owned Echo told Jenny his story and warned her that she probably wouldn’t be able to get near him. She encouraged Jenny to meet her other horses who were much more friendly and accepting. Jenny walked straight over to Echo. As she got closer, Echo’s head shot straight up and he poised himself, ready to bolt. Jenny cast her eyes to the ground and put her arms behind her back. She had never been with a horse before but somehow she knew how to make him feel safe. With curiosity, he put his head way up, looking down his long nose at the tiny child before him. He didn’t run away. He cocked his ears forward with interest. It was the first spark I saw in his eye since I met him. Jenny leaned into him and looked way up into his face. She smiled a sad smile and gently reached out to touch Echo on the neck. His huge nostrils took in the fragrance of her hair only to forcefully snort it back out again right on top of her head. Jenny let out a startled laugh and the two souls connected. Astoundingly, Jenny walked to the shelter with Echo in tow. She brushed him, gave him treats and with assistance, took care of his feet. Echo didn’t budge except to look back at her every now and then to see what she was doing. Echo’s owner was completely amazed.

Jenny has been taking care of Echo for six months now. He is beginning to warm up to other people and he even snorted in MY hair for the very first time the other day. It was scary! Jenny’s dark secret no longer lives behind her beautiful eyes. According to her staff, Jenny has been talking openly about her pain and trauma. She is healing. When she is with Echo, they both seem genuinely at peace. Echo has started frolicking with his herd and greeting people who come to see him. He is finally healing too.

