

## IN THE CITY

### “Good Bye, Hello, Hee Haw”

Its not news around Fitchburg that my mini-donkey gives me fits. The police log can verify this, or just ask my neighbors. Travel up our road around 1 am and you may see a short squat shadow of a long eared varmint peacefully grazing along the roadside, while Shaggy, his sensible sidekick is behind the fence, braying. Winston is an escape artist, the best electric fencer tester known to man. No fence but a fully charged bull strength fence can keep him in, and he spends his days waiting for a short, or the tiniest breech in the electric current to prove that. Most times he doesn't go very far, but lately his travels have gotten more adventuresome.

This past month has been an especially busy Winston chasing one. If I don't feed early enough to round my equines up into the night-time pen, they are off to the fields grazing all night, and they won't come back to the barn for anything. I sleep with one eye open, watching the motion sensor lights go on around the house as Winston eats wherever and whatever he wants. At day break, he stands waiting at the hay barn, as if I will feed him first, and to be let back in the pen via the gate. I'll never understand why he doesn't go back in the way he came out, scooting under the lowest strand of electric tape anywhere he pleases.

Recently a neighbor's barn went up in flames. I was out to dinner nearby. I rushed back to see if there was anything I could do. On my way, another neighbor called. I could hear the sirens blaring over the phone. The commotion spooked the horses. Everyone charged back up to the barn, everyone, that is, except Winston. Perhaps he's always dreamed of being a Dalmatian, I don't know, but Lynn said Winston was doing what I call The Donkey 500, racing to the fire, right in front of the fire trucks. Charming!

I was on vacation a few weeks ago, gone exactly 12 hours when the phone rang...my neighbor Steve said that Winston and Shaggy and Tansy were in the orchard down the street, running wild. Strangers stopped to round them up but to no avail. This was my filly's first escape, and she can run like the wind, a breathtaking site to behold. I imagine the wide paths covered with lush grass were heavenly to run on. Finally, my neighbor got smart and decided to capture the ring leader, Winston. The others followed along as they lead him home. Apparently some mischievous equine had unscrewed the latch to the paddock gate. I think I know which one though; Winston is never innocent until proven guilty, trust me!

Some years ago, when we lived in Westminster, I came home from the hairdresser to find Winston closed in a paddock I never used, alone. The gate to that paddock, which had been broken for years, was now fixed. On my phone were calls from the police department. I patched the story together from there. Apparently, Winston got out of the main paddock, went down the road and into my neighbor's garage. They shut the door and called the police. A rookie, on the force only 2 weeks, arrived. He proceeded to walk Winston home, which was no easy task as Winston dug in his hooves, refusing to go. Finally they arrived at my house, found no one home, noticed the broken gate and assumed that was how he got out. Oops. While the neighbors stood there and held onto Winston, this nice rookie policeman went to the hardware store to get what he needed, and repaired the gate. I couldn't believe my eyes when I got home. I heard, this being his first big caper, the young officer was the brunt of many donkey jokes for weeks to come!

Another time in Westminster, I got a call from the Police again...they had reports, calls coming in about a "wild donkey, huge and ugly" that came running out of the woods, headed toward Wyman Pond. I looked out in the paddock and there Winston stood. "Nope," I replied, "it's not my donkey," though fully aware I was the only idiot in the area to have one! About an hour later, a man and his little girl came to my door, out of breath. "Your Donkey is in our yard," he said. "Nope, he's right here" I said, as I pointed to him in the paddock. "Oh no," he said, "we followed him here. He came to our house and while I was making my daughter a sandwich, she said 'Daddy, there's a donkey looking in the window.' I said 'Oh, ok honey, uh huh' figuring it was her imagination. But when I walked in the room with her sandwich, there he was, staring at me thru the picture window! Scared the daylights out of me so much I dropped the sandwich!"

I spend the rest of that day finding his escape route, and fixed it.

Back from vacation last week, I found my screen porch door wide open and the porch totally trashed, bird seed spilled everywhere, firewood and plants knocked over, chairs tipped over. At first I thought I'd been broken into, until I found the culprit's calling card...donkey doo in the corner. Grrrrr, Winston!!!!

That was it, the last straw. I text messaged my horse friends. Does anyone want a mini-donkey? And I heard back. A friend of a friend had a lonely Thoroughbred. They were considering getting a donkey for him and lived only a mile away. Perfect! Winston and Moon could be friends, and I'd get to see him from time to time, when I choose, not in the wee hours wearing my PJ's chasing him all over Timbuktu.

This is nothing new, I've said goodbye to Winston more than once in the 12 years I've owned him. The longest he stayed away was 3 years, 3 blissfully peaceful years of no Winston shenanigans. But there was always a soft spot in my heart, and from time to time I'd pine for

Winston, I'd miss the little bugger. So he always came home to me, when the foster home couldn't keep him anymore, when his antics were no longer cute. It was an understanding we'd have before I placed him, which is just what I did last Saturday when this lovely couple who own the Thoroughbred happily came over to get him. As I watched Old Saddlebags walk away, a tear came to my eye. I wondered just what I'd write about now, with no Winston at my house stirring up trouble. I wondered if my herd would be the same, if Shaggy would miss him, if Blue would miss chasing him back into the paddock. Although I hoped it would work out at his new home, part of me regretted my "hasty" decision.

That was Saturday morning. I stopped by to see how it was going. Moon loved his new pasture mate, and even their dog Clyde did. Bruce was busy putting up a few more strands of fence. Angela and I talked donkeys, how they differ than horses, how endearing they are, their funny ways and habits. Despite a few escapes before Bruce ran the extra fencing wire, when I left, the scene in the paddock was idyllic.

Shaggy brayed a lot that night, looking for his bratty sidekick. I felt sorry for him to be honest. Yet, I slept well, knowing all was secure at Stone Gait Farm.

But Sunday morning I heard the familiar pitter patter of little hooves on the driveway..it was Winston, with Bruce walking him home. Yes, he was back. There was no way they could keep him in, try as they might, he'd been cruising their neighborhood, and even pulled the porch stunt. So back in my paddock he went. I can't really say whether his herd mates were happy about that, but I've resolved myself to the fact that I'm stuck with him, forever. I'm putting up a wooden corral, with woven wire fence lining it and a donkey proof latch on the gate. Yes, Winston may be a pain in my "donkey", but he'll be staying home, in more ways than one.