

## Wild Tansy

Often, as I look out my office window, I observe an intriguing site...Winston, my mini-donkey, charging across the field, with the rest of the herd chasing him. Since I can't see their starting point from where I sit, I can only guess what precipitated the event. But I assume it wasn't good.

Sure enough, within 5 minutes of sitting down to write today, here comes Winston, his movement reminding me of an Irish step dancer, upper half motionless, with lively feet. And hot on his donkey heels was Shaggy, the big donkey, and Tansy, our new filly. After an incident I witnessed last week, which I'll share with you at the end, I no longer assume about the cause; I KNOW it wasn't good!

Paddock antics are usually harmless but over the winter a situation developed. For some reason Amber hated Bob, though she loved everyone else. Her disdain for him grew and grew, and despite my efforts, Bob was in danger. She bit him, she kicked him with every ounce of strength her 2000 pounds could muster. Eventually she isolated him from the herd, the ultimate punishment to an equine, yet he'd done nothing wrong except simply exist, quiet, and unobtrusive, half blind from cataracts.

I've never known a smarter horse than Amber. She and I had a bond, a mutual respect; it was as if she could read my mind. She was amazing to drive and log with, amazing to ride, no bit, no saddle. She took care of her rider, making sure branches didn't hit me when we rode through the woods. And as you know, she took care of my herd the night of the ice storm.

We lost Sheila, a beautiful Morgan mare, years ago, when a well-placed kick from another horse ended her life. I knew I had to pick one or the other, Amber or Bob, or Amber would pick for me.

I made a promise to Bob five years ago, that this was his forever home, and as abused and fearful as he was back then, Bob put his trust in me. I kept that promise when on Easter day, I tearfully packed up Amber and drove her back to the farm I got her from. If this paper could be wet with those tears right now, it would be soaked.

Sometimes from bad comes good. While at the farm, I spied a filly, a pretty draft pony. Barely a year old, she seemed sweet and sensible, but there was something intriguing about her I couldn't quite put my finger on.

Perhaps this was the solution, a youngster to raise with Bob while he taught her his gentle, quiet, good horse ways. She in turn would be his friend and an extra pair of eyes to help him find his way when he needed help.

So, into the trailer she walked, then into our paddock to join my motley herd, as if she already lived here. Later on, my daughter remarked that she looked and acted exactly like Sheila. She hit the nail on the head, and it gave me peculiar pause.

I named her Stone Gait's Wild Tansy, in honor of Tansy cakes eaten on Easter, the day that we got her. And for the plant's subtle flowers and ferny foliage that are planted to help other flowers stand stronger and look more beautiful. But mostly because Tansy, when applied on the outside of the body, is used to soothe bruises and aches and pains, much like this little Filly has soothed Bob's. And when I see them

grazing side by side, Bob's eyes soft as she follows him like he's her favorite being on earth, Tansy soothes my pain too.

Speaking of "pain", that leads me to the rest of the Winston story...

It was a warm sunny day. We were spreading topsoil and the sun felt good on our backs. Shaggy was enjoying the sun too. He stood there, head hanging down, lower lip quivering, asleep. From the corner of my eye, I spied Winston leaving the barn with an old rubber feed pan in his mouth. Quietly, he walked up to snoozing Shaggy, took the pan and WACK, smacked him right upside the head with it! Poor Shaggy nearly fell over! Winston stood there, I swear grinning.

Totally awake and totally ticked off, Shaggy wrenched the feed pan from Winston's mouth, then proceeded to slap him silly with it, from one end of the paddock to the other. Winston kicked up his heels, running and braying over and over but to no avail. Winston got what was coming to him, BUT GOOD!

After the lesson in humility, Winston and Shaggy stopped, head to head, breathing hard. Shaggy dropped the pan between them as if to say, Go ahead, hit me again! But to this day, the rubber pan gauntlet has not been taken up.

THE END