

Alberta Donkey and Mule Club News, March, 2011

Sunday, March 6, 1:30 p.m., Annual General Meeting, 5015 – 46 Ave. Ponoka Drop in Center. Potluck Lunch. Everyone Welcome!

The following is a story from one our members Crys White and her adventures in training her mammoth donkey Victoria – OR as Crys stated, Victoria training Crys!

Victoria came into my life in January of 2006 as a four-year-old mammoth jenny from Windy Ridge Donkey Farm in Leslieville, AB. I am not a rider. I am over 60 years of age. I have a back problem. At the time, I was looking for a quiet, older horse to pack me around on the beautiful trails around Tumbler Ridge, B.C. so I could ride out with my husband. Our friend Hank was given two miniature donkeys and asked me to google donkeys and get some information about their care. Well, the more I read, the more intrigued I became. I found the Windy Ridge website and phoned the Sewells to make an appointment to see their donkeys. We arrived at the farm and were immediately surrounded by these long eared equines.. It was donkey heaven, and love at first sight. Victoria stood a little back from the rest, but caught my eye because she was timid and her colouring was unusual. However, she was the only one for me, and I have never looked back! I bought her and returned home to make arrangements to have her brought up in March. When we started to drive home, my husband said” Why did you pick HER?”



We have had many many training adventures. I was ignorant and Victoria was green. Within three months of her arrival, we were evacuated because of a forest fire. The next month Victoria appeared at the Mane Event in Red Deer, AB. and was given some training and her first ride courtesy of trainer Steve Edwards of Arizona, U.S.A. We continued groundwork all summer and I rode her a little, but in August, she bucked me off and I broke three ribs and my wrist. We think that maybe a wasp stung her, as she was in tall grass at

the time. At any rate, training for the season was finished. The next spring I took Victoria to a bomb-proofing clinic. She did well and we came back to Tumbler full of great ideas for training. The problem now though, was that I was afraid to get on her again. Thanks to the support of my husband and friends (who lead me around the arena), I did get back in the saddle.

We met John Lyons in Edmonton at FarmFair, and I told him about Victoria and about my fear of riding. He thought that I was halfway there because I could at least admit I was afraid to get on her! We decided to 'go on the road' and take both the donkey and our Canadian gelding, Lockstar to Colorado for the adventure, and for the training. It was a dream trip all the way. The animals traveled extremely well and we met many wonderful people at the bed and bale accommodations.



John and his wife have a beautiful set up. We stayed in the guesthouse and the equines had stalls at the training center. There were about 16 horses and riders from all over the States. But only one donkey! Each rider was asked to list three things he/she was hoping to accomplish with the clinic. Everyone had a training goal. I just wanted to get on and stay on without fear. I told John that Victoria seemed to spook at nearly everything, but especially plastic—including tarps. I had totally covered our paddock rails in tarps for about two months, but Victoria just stayed away from the rail while the horse on the other hand played with the tarps. John demonstrated how to get your animal to “spook in place”. He also demonstrated how to encourage them to walk into water, saying the best way is to pick a wide pool so they cannot jump across. I wasn't sure we were ready for that! At any rate, John took Victoria in hand and tried to get her to move out. He used all the skills he had which work well with horses who are flight animals, but do not necessarily work with the longears. Victoria was a lady. She did everything asked of her, but at a walk! She simply would not trot or even move quickly. She could not be encouraged to “join up” as she is always willing to do just that. What she was not willing to do was trot! I'm sure she just didn't see the sense in trotting in a circle and not going anywhere.

John finally gave me the best advice I have ever had. Get on, do serpentines, and enjoy her. Try to get her to soften and bend easily. If she is spooked enough to run away she will, so you must get that neck softened

and practice those one rein stops and bends. Personally, I don't think John thought Victoria COULD run! So, for four days we did serpentines, figure 8's, backed up, walked on and 'whoaed'. The repetition did boost my confidence though, and I felt I was in a safe environment. We did all of this with Charlie, John's horse, following along. Charlie was fully tacked every morning and just roamed in the arena waiting for John to whistle him for a demo. Charlie fell in love with Victoria and would not leave her alone. He followed her everywhere and would lick her constantly. John could not get him to stop. I hoped that if we spent enough time with Charlie maybe his training would rub off on Victoria. At any rate, John and his wife enjoyed the donkey immensely. However, I do not think a donkey is in John's future.

Back home we continued with lots of groundwork, and I rode often in the arena. In 2009, The Alberta Donkey and Mule Club brought in horse/mule and donkey trainer and teacher, Jerry Tindell from California, for a series of clinics. We chose to do a private session and worked with Jerry one on one for a day. Victoria had decided not to stand at the mounting block and would walk off or move her hips out whenever I tried to mount. One lesson with Jerry had that all under control. Victoria has never moved off since that lesson. I can mount her from anywhere. Mind you, Jerry had a laugh when he asked me to climb to the top rail of the round pen preparing to mount. The first time we did this not so graceful exercise, I managed to perch on the top rail only to have Jerry ask me where my ride was. Victoria was standing on the opposite side of the round pen! We then took her to the bleachers to practice mounting. Jerry said to be careful, that she might try to climb up the bleachers—and that's exactly what she tried. Did Jerry get her trotting? You bet he did! But the long and the short of it is that the problem doesn't lay with the donkey—rather with the rider-me. Victoria now stands calmly while I mount. However, once I let her relax on a loose rein, she heads right back to the mounting block and positions herself so I can dismount! I am sure that if there were an ejector button on the saddle, Victoria would use it. One further example from our day with Jerry: We were moving off down the arena. Jerry said to track to the right. I asked, but Victoria went left. "Which way did you ask her to go?" said Jerry. "Right," said Crys. "WELL! Why didn't she go right?" Hmm.

April 2010 and we were back to Alberta for 4 days with Jerry. The goal was to cross a tarp with me riding the donkey. We walked many circles in hand around a tarp, then over the tarp. Finally, on the last day, Jerry said, "Go get a tarp for the donkey!" Jerry told me I would ride over the tarp. I said not likely! One of the riders in the clinic rode her for the first time over the tarp. She was calm and, she was willing. So, up I got, and over we went. What a moment! My husband has it on video. It is a small victory for Victoria, but the boost in confidence for me was astounding. Back home, I rode in some gymkhanas (almost won a barrel race because my competitor was walking "home" and did not hear us creeping up behind), pole bending, flags, etc. We also rode outside of the arena, which took me totally out of my comfort zone. To crown the summer, Victoria and I went on our first solo trail ride. It was magic. I must tell the whole story though. We reached a rather large deadfall across the trail, and rather than take the chance of Victoria jumping it, I turned her around to head back along the trail. There, trying to hide behind a tree was my husband. He had followed us on foot. Not only that, but friends at the saddle club stayed on site with their cell phones in case I got into trouble. With support like that, and with a trainer like Jerry, I see nothing but success in 2011. We are planning to attend the Jerry Tindell Clinics again this spring. The goal for this year is to learn to ride comfortably with others around us, and to venture out on the trails more often. Who knows? Maybe we can even trot!



Thanks Crys for your story! Whether you own a horse, mule or donkey, you don't want to miss our Jerry Tindell Clinics beginning next month! The dates are: April 25 – 27 OPEN, geared for young, green or troubled stock. May 2-4 DRIVING and May 6 –8, RIDING. All clinics are at the Lakedell Arena at Westeros, AB. Auditors are welcome at the door .For more information check out www.albertadonkeyandmule.com or call Marlene at 403 783-5210. See you there!
Marlene Quiring