

## **Helena's Story**

### **Holsteiner mare \* March, 1993-May, 2005**

There are always those special moments in life that we cherish and those that we would like to soon forget. And sometimes you find both in one memory. Reading this story you will summon every emotion, so be prepared.

It was early morning on Saturday when our Holsteiner mare, Helena, chose to bless us with her foal. Without too much difficulty, she began to push and offered us the view of two extra-large feet. Our first thought was, "This isn't a foal, it's a small horse!" The hooves were so oversized that we became concerned, wondering what was left to come. As the foal was slowly pushed from his mother, we continued to see nothing but legs, then more leg. After his complete body was exposed, we all took a deep sigh of relief. He was a gorgeous, elegant, long-legged colt, an exact replica of his mother in color, size, markings and sweet character. He was the first Caletino offspring not to resemble the sire.

Due to the length of his legs, it was obvious that standing would be a more difficult task for him than our other foals. We gave him time, and soon he attempted to stand, but his fight to elevate himself was lost. Repeatedly, he made the effort without success. As critical time passed, it became obvious that he would need continued assistance. For the next 24 hours, it would be up to me to help him up to nurse so he could keep up his strength.

24, then 48 hours passed and Aris still needed our help. The alarm clock would ring and off I would go to the stall, only to hear this joyful nicker from the sweetest boy of all. He began relating the opening of the stall door to help. And food. Dear Helena would stand eagerly waiting for me to show up, knowing he needed to be fed. Her face showed such desperation while Aris would work on organizing those legs. Every time the foal would finally connect with his mother's faucet, the mare would show such signs of contentment and pride of product! Her face would read, "Look at my handsome boy." Not being a mother of a two-legged creature myself, I can only imagine her feelings of accomplishment and joy.

During the 48-hour period of hourly feedings, my own body began to show signs of fatigue, not noticeable to me but to those surrounding me. My neighbor offered to split the night shift and let me get a few extra hours of sleep, so I could continue through the next day.

As I entered the stall for my shift on Day 3, the foal didn't whinny. My heart sank as I entered into hell. Helena was soaked in sweat and showing symptoms of colic. The baby was panicked but couldn't get up. He was trying to scoot across the stall floor to get closer to his ailing mother. As Helena thrashed and groaned in pain, I tried to check her vitals and immediately phoned the emergency vet. When her intermittent cramping was on the calm side, I helped the foal up and quickly taught him to nurse while the mare was lying down. When she became uncomfortable, I moved the foal away and he quietly fell into a deep sleep.

The vet arrived and Helena was examined for colic, but we both agreed that it was most likely her uterus contracting back down to size; a logical thought considering the size of the foal. After medication, she was comfortable, back on her feet and nursing. We were back to our routine, or so I thought. But later that afternoon, following another bout of pain, we elected to transport them to the vet hospital. Time was critical, and as we arrived and the horses settled in, we realized they were in the very best place possible.

After a week of care, a blood transfusion and fluids, all under the watchful eyes of the hospital staff, we were all becoming optimistic that the pair would soon return to the farm. The same day that we discussed the possibility of them coming home, Helena had another episode of pain and discomfort. Then again, while I was visiting later that afternoon, it became clear that her health was not improving as we thought, and all of her original symptoms returned. Together, the doctor and I made the decision to put her on the table. As I held the foal back and looked on as my mare underwent anesthesia, she turned her head around and soaked me with her eyes as if to say, "Take care of my boy, I won't be coming back." It was a haunting feeling I didn't share. I tried to shake it off and keep only positive thoughts in my head.

During surgery, I lay down in the stall with Aris and we waited together for the outcome. This gentle giant of a baby slept with his head on my chest, periodically nickering for his mother. It wasn't long before the operating room doors opened and the doctor revealed her findings. It was the worst possibility: Helena's artery to her uterus had burst and she was bleeding to death. The decision was obvious. I went inside and waded through the blood to say good-bye. She was peaceful, and I felt I had already said goodbye earlier. I leaned down and kissed her on the cheek and thanked her for the beautiful boy.

I walked away strong, but knew the real challenge was yet to come. As I approached the stall and heard the sound of Aris screaming for his mother, I was overwhelmed with grief and the complete picture.

An hour had passed since my mare entered the OR and Aris was beginning to show signs of hunger. We tried formula and grain. He picked at both. He wanted and needed a mother. As I spoke with one of the vet techs on the staff, she mentioned a possible option.

A 23-year-old Tennessee Walking Horse mare had arrived at the clinic a couple of days earlier, in foal with twins. She lost them both. Sad, old and plagued with chronic suspensory problems, her owners said to either find her a retirement home or euthanize her. Neither were to be her destiny.

The vet techs walked me over to this new mare and while standing in front of her stall, still in disbelief of the loss, I said, "Let's go for it." After giving the mare a bit of tranquilizer, we slowly walked her over to see what might potentially be the baby she thought she had lost. As Aris heard her approaching he began to scream, thinking it was his mother returning. When he saw her, he squealed as if he knew that this was the plan and that he would never see his mother again. He walked directly up to her and began nursing as if nothing had changed. We held the mare and she spoke softly to him as if she, too, knew all along.

Hours passed, and it was apparent that this was a match made in heaven; only God can provide such an opportunity. Aris had a mother and Lady Di had her beautiful foal. By the next morning, she was taking the role of mother: disciplining, nursing and letting him sleep by her side.

Lady Di's days were no longer numbered. She was proud to play angel and become a part of this miracle. Today, she and Aris gallop over the rolling hills at Quailhurst, and we know Helena looks down still in awe of her handsome boy.