

A LESSON FROM THE "GRAY"
By Pete Dillingham

A cold January wind swept across the barren Wyoming landscape. Huddled together, in a large corral, were a hundred mustang mares. Each stoically stood with its tail to the wind and head lowered in an effort to fend off the winter assault. The horses that stood before us were the remains of a large fall round up by the Bureau of Land Management. Their only human contact occurred when each was aged, vaccinated and given a "freeze brand" (identification mark). The horses we culled out all had the looks and instincts of animals that successfully survived years of pursuit.

All went well, until the three wranglers tried to single out the speckle gray. Several times she had successfully side stepped the long shoots leading to our trailer. Her anxiety seemed to grow with each escape. Finally the skill of the cowboys prevailed and she was forced to travel down a slender corridor. When the frenzied mare approached the trailer entrance, she suddenly reared and wheeled around. In that instant her front right leg got snared in one of the high panels gates that made up the narrow passageway. For minutes the mustang fought furiously against her entrapment.... then froze. The strain to the large mare's leg was taking its toll as she tried to sink closer to the ground. The gray uttered a pleading cry of distress. In that moment my mentor /partner sent me racing to the trailer for ropes and a girth strap (cinch). Quickly, five of us built a sling and wench that lifted the mare high enough to release the hoof and leg from the panels. During the rescue the speckle gray was completely passive as ropes and hands worked around her entire frame.

"Adversity" can be a good thing. "What the heck!" you say "How can a horse getting into a "near death" argument with gate panels be good?". For the first time in the speckle gray's life, the mare could see "man and beast" working together for her benefit. In those tense moments, her first steps toward domestication, respect, and love were being made. She eventually became a good horse.

Now I'm not advocating putting our horse into a "wreck" to build a good bond. However, make the best out of a bad situation. I have cultivated a great kinship with horses during their days of ailments and isolation. Taking the time to remedy their problems has turned out to be a recipe for communication. Good communication is the foundation for a good friendship.

It's the same with people. Misfortune can happen to anyone. If our neighbor gets tangled up in tough times, we need to help. If we choose to become a passive observer, their lives can become a "wreck" and we miss an opportunity to make a friend.