

I can't remember a time in my life when I wasn't obsessed with horses. My mom put me on a horse for the first time when I was two years old, but I like to think horses are in my blood. However, by the end of my junior year of high school I didn't have a horse to ride and lessons were too expensive with college so near.

Then one hot Tuesday in July I was scrolling through volunteer opportunities near me and I stumbled across Saving Horses, Inc., run by Audrey Reynolds. It turns out that behind the big black gate I walk my dog past every afternoon was a horse sanctuary dedicated to rehabilitating rescue horses. After my first day volunteering there I knew I'd discovered something that would change my entire summer. While most of my friends were on vacation all over the world I was suddenly so excited about being at home because of the ranch.

For the first time I was surrounded by people who genuinely cared about the welfare of the horses, not just the number of ribbons hanging on the door like many of the show barns around us. Some of the volunteers I met there had never been around horses, but they were learning slowly about the responsibility and dedication required to care for them. There were no age limits on who could volunteer or strict schedules making it impossible to find a time to work. I went from volunteering one morning a week to four over the course of the month.

The first thing new volunteers always ask is "how do you remember all the horses names?" This question always makes me laugh because their personalities are so different most people know the names by the end of the first day. Out of the twelve horses currently residing at the sanctuary, four of them are off the track Thoroughbreds. Nuki is a seventeen year old Thoroughbred gelding who raced sixteen times before his

career ended. While he may not be a professional racehorse anymore, he still likes to pretend he is when he is turned out with his “girlfriend” Gracie. Twenty year old, bay mare Lucky, was the first official OTTB rescue acquired by Saving Horses, Inc. in 2007 and now has a permanent home at the center.

The first horse volunteers are introduced to is Beau, “Beyond All Limits”, a twenty three year old gelding with one of the kindest personalities you will ever encounter. He’s a volunteer favorite, and before he arrived at SHI he had a total of eighty four starts on the track. Now he spends his days at the front of the barn greeting everyone who enters. However, it’s at the back of the barn where I found a surprising favorite. AJ, “As You Like It”, or the “big horse” as I’ve heard the younger volunteers refer to him as, is a fifteen year old chestnut gelding with the personality of an overgrown puppy. Not only is he the biggest horse at the barn, he is also the silliest. One of my favorite parts of my shift is when I work AJ in the round pen and he follows me around like a dog.

It’s volunteering at the ranch that helped foster my passion for nonprofit work and taught me about the patience and dedication required to work with these incredible animals. I feel so blessed to have this opportunity to learn from the people and the horses there, and every time I go home it’s always with a smile on my face.