

HCCHS Student News

Buttercup, Chief, Midnight and Sugar!

[Amy](#), Watauga Horse Helpers Contributor

Please help Buttercup, Chief, Midnight, and Sugar!

In October, a Horse Helper supporter called me about two horses over the Tennessee line who were starving. She asked that we go and look at them. We did, and she in no way exaggerated the condition of these two poor horses who were skin and bones trying to forage in a swampy trash dump. There was no grass, no hay, no fresh water and they were picking between pieces of lawn mowers and washing machines, barbed wire and old cars. It really couldn't have been much worse in our wildest dreams.

Thus began our latest rescue, the seizure of four horses for the Johnson County, Tennessee Sheriff's Department. Having never dealt with Johnson County officials I began trying to track down who was responsible for handling animal cruelty cases. My search led me to Sheriff Mike Reese who told me that they had received numerous calls about these two horses and had been out on at least two occasions. They were ready to do something and as they had no way to pick up the horses or board them they were pleased that we could work with them. But, as the sheriff's office was getting the paperwork ready, first one new horse and then another appeared on the property, still with no hay being offered. To my surprise, Sheriff Reese declared that he was seizing all four horses since he knew the shape the two newer ones would end up in if they stayed. Way to go Sheriff Reese!



for a while.

November 2 was the day determined by the sheriff to go and seize these four horses. I fixed four big nets of hay for the trailer and threw in another bale to give them while we were getting them ready and headed to the sheriff's office in Mountain City. Then, together we turned out of the sheriff's dept. and became a parade of deputy cars, the sheriff's car, and my truck and trailer headed to a little holler on the outskirts of Mountain City. They either were expecting trouble or were really bored, I wasn't sure which and didn't want to ask. When we arrived at the property I parked my trailer on the narrow mountain road and walked around to the passenger side door, as I did so a truck was slowly weaving its way through the deputies and cars, they saw our rescue sign on the side of the truck and gave me a huge thumbs up! I guess the plight of these horses had been bothering people



With the deputies' help we took the necessary photographs, haltered each horse and led them onto the trailer. Amazingly they each went on willingly, happy to see more hay to eat. They were so hungry!! About thirty minutes later we were back at the farm and I could really begin the evaluation of each of these horses. For the two new arrivals evaluation was relatively easy. Midnight, a black quarter horse was beginning to lose some muscle mass from starvation and had I had to cut his too tight halter off since it was cutting into his face. But these problems would be easy to remedy. The last horse to arrive was a little bay named Sugar and she was in good weight. But then we discovered they all had LICE! Our quarantine barn was going to be very full for a while until we got the lice under control. As we were evaluating each horse clear evidence arrived to show just how desperately hungry these horses had been. They pooped and their poop was a rich brown color composed of sticks, leaves, and dirt. No hay, no grass, no grain, nothing that would give the correct consistency of horse poo. Just sticks and leaves and dirt!!



We next began to evaluate the two worst horses. Chief appears to be a Tennessee Walker paint cross; he was suffering from starvation and a pretty bad case of lice. He had open sores on his back that looked as if they were from being ridden without a saddle pad and the saddle rubbed his spine raw since he had no fat to protect it. Chief is the leader of the four and he is a good soul and a friendly sweet horse that it was hard to imagine anyone could neglect.



But the horse in the worst shape was a little white pony, Buttercup, in her twenties, who was skin and bones and had open sores and bald spots all over her body. She had a growth on the inside of her lower eyelid, protruding out past the eye socket. She was infested with lice and was desperately scratching herself on anything she could find: me, a tree, a barn wall, anything! It was like she was on

fire. At least we knew the source of the sores and bald spots. These are classic signs of lice, and lice are classic signs of neglect and stress. According to Bill Clymer, a parasitologist in Texas, "lice occur most often in horses that are stressed by inadequate nutrition, a severe winter, illness, injury, etc. . . Well fed, well-groomed horses seldom get lice." Not only did poor little Buttercup have a louse infestation, no one had attended to her feet and she was walking on what are called slippers, her hooves were so long that they came way out in front of what would be her normal hoof wall. It was going to take a while to get her back in shape.

Since their arrival all of the horses have put on weight. The vet came out and evaluated everyone, they received their vaccinations and wormings, no one has lice anymore, and the farrier has worked on everyone's feet. Chief's sores are healed and the open sores from Midnight's too tight halter are gone also. It took Sugar, Midnight and Chief one month to get rid of those pesky lice, leaving poor Buttercup all by herself. She could only talk to the horses across two fence lines. On Christmas eve she got to move into the barn with everyone else and she is now much happier. She no longer has any bald spots and is getting less and less emaciated by the day. Who says being old means you have to look like a bag of bones?

On January 6 the owners of the horses go to trial, having pled not guilty to animal cruelty charges. A Horse Helpers' representative will be there testify on behalf of the horses. Let's hope that the outcome will be bright and these horses can begin lives free of fear and hunger.

Rescues like this are incredibly costly. The vet bill alone was over \$600, the farrier \$300 and then there is the high quality hay that we need to feed them still to keep building their immune systems, the powder for lice, wormer, and sweet feed. We are waiting to address Buttercup's eye until we know she is in our custody permanently and fund raise for the treatment. Winter has hardly begun and are funds are depleted. Caring for this many new horses was not an expense we were able to plan for this year and we are now down to 50 bales of hay for 9 horses and no money to buy more. We desperately need help to continue functioning through the winter. Any amount is more than what we had before from \$1.00 to \$500, it will all help.

Donations can be mailed to
Horse Helpers
1199 Odes Wilson Rd.
Zionville, NC 28698

You will receive a nonprofit tax statement

Horse Helpers of the High Country is a nonprofit organization serving the northwestern corner of North Carolina, including Avery, Ashe and Watauga Counties. In fact, we are only official equine rescue in the region. We have been incorporated since 2003. Our mission is “to help sick, hurt, abused, and unwanted horses and other equine”—providing them an opportunity for a second chance.

[Learn more by visiting Watauga Horse Helpers Website.](#)

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