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April 22, 2011

A haunting case of abuse, neglect

This story is the first of a two-day series about a Glidden man whose neglected horses were twice removed from his pasture by court order.

By **JARED STRONG**
 Times Herald Staff Writer

Thursday, March 10, 2011

The young horse lay alone, on its side, motionless in a pasture south of Glidden.

Genea Stoops went to it.

She stepped across a field that had been gnawed to dirt by hungry horses. She hoped to rescue about 40 neglected horses on that blustery November day.

She was too late for some.

Stoops has rescued hundreds of abused and neglected animals, but this scene was among the worst:

Gaping wounds. Infections. Ears bitten off.

Some horses were thin and thirsty and showed ribs. Some were dead.

There, in a shallow creek bed, Stoops knelt near the lonely foal. Its white hair was falling out.

She reached down and scooped the foal's head into her arms. The animal broke apart.

It may have died of hunger or thirst. Or maybe one of the older male horses trampled it.

Either way, Stoops can't shake that memory. It stays with her on her acreage near Glenwood, where she cares for a handful of the Glidden horses that were in the worst shape.

Stoops gets daily phone calls about the others, which are scattered across Iowa, Kansas and Nebraska with foster and adoptive families.

At least three more have died since that November weekend when Stoops and about 50 volunteers corralled the animals in the bare pasture near Glidden.

As they ushered the animals into trailers, Tom Hall, their former owner, drove by in his Cadillac sedan, Stoops said.

That was the second time in two years that a judge ordered a horse rescue on the property, but Hall faces no criminal charges for the incidents.

Hall stared at the rescue volunteers as he slowly rolled by, Stoops recalled.

He shook his fist and sped off.

Tom Hall is a spry 64-year-old with wild, curly hair and eyes to match.

He wore a red jacket and coveralls to the Iowa Capitol in January on the first day of this year's legislative session.

Hall chatted on his cell phone in the cafeteria, where he sat next to an empty food tray and pop bottle.

In this chance meeting with the Times Herald — which had tried unsuccessfully for weeks to reach him by phone to comment for this story — Hall took off his glasses and leaned forward:

"My lawyer has advised me not to talk about it."

But with his next breath, he spun some of the same stories that he told in district court last year:

That the Carroll County Sheriff had led his horses away from a creek that cuts through the pasture — their sole source of water. That the sheriff poisoned the horses.

That the sheriff was out to get him, too.

"Hall has no grasp of reality," District Judge Joel Swanson wrote in 2008 after 28 neglected horses were removed from the Glidden pasture.



Genea Stoops, who runs the Hooves & Paws Rescue near Glenwood, helped rescue 39 neglected horses from a Glidden pasture last year. She said the horses' former owner, Tom Hall, should go to jail for the neglect.



About 50 volunteers went to this pasture south of Glidden in November and December to rescue 39 neglected horses. It was the second time in about two years that horses were removed from the property.

'The sheriff poisoned my horses.'

Tom Hall, in an interview at the Iowa Capitol, said he did in January not neglect his horses before a judge ordered them removed from his 40-acre pasture south of Glidden in October. Hall claimed the horses merely appeared to be malnourished because they hadn't drank enough water.

Carroll County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Ken Pingrey lives down the road from the Glidden pasture and drove by it most days on his way to and from Carroll.

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Reader Poll

Should Carroll County permit employees to use sick leave on bad-weather days when departments are open but employees are unable to make it in?

Please select one:

- Yes
- No

Reader Poll

Which city do you most frequently visit for recreation, shopping, services or other activities that you cannot find in the Carroll-area -- or don't believe are sufficient here?

Please select one:

- Des Moines
- Omaha, Nebraska
- Sioux City
- Fort Dodge
- Ames
- Storm Lake

Reader Poll

Which of the following businesses or facilities would you LEAST like to see in Carroll?

Please select one:

- Pawn Shop
- Casino
- Strip Club

"His rambling and disjointed testimony reveals a thought process not connected with reality."

Also in 2008, the Cherokee Mental Health Institute, which treated Hall by court order for an unspecified amount of time, concluded that Hall suffered from an "adjustment disorder" and showed signs of paranoia, narcissism and psychosis, according to court documents.

Hall rebutted that diagnosis in a handwritten appeal to the Iowa Supreme Court. Despite his alleged disconnect from reality, Hall knew how to navigate the court system.

Hall scrawled in cursive on a bare white piece of paper all of the traits that show he is "successfully mentally incisive:"

Brainpower. Temperament. Charisma. Integrity.

"I am honest and trustworthy, engendering respect even among my foes," he wrote.

Hall had lived in a semi-truck on the Glidden pasture and bathed in the creek where the horses drank, the court documents said.

But at first glance, some of Hall's peculiarities are hidden.

"He seemed sociable enough to me," said Kenneth Storm, a Lucas County hay farmer who gave Hall \$2,000 worth of hay in 2009 on Hall's promise that he'd return with the money.

"There wasn't any red flags when I met him, you know?"

Hall never paid, according to court records. He stole hay from another farmer in northern Missouri that year.

"He was very congenial, very easy to talk to," said Jerry Coffelt, who farms near Ravenwood, Mo., "but he'll lie right to your face."

In the Capitol cafeteria in January, Hall said he had just brokered a hay deal for that afternoon.

Hall was elusive about why he was at the Statehouse that day.

Then the Carroll County sheriff got a phone call from the Capitol's security staff — Hall had demanded to talk to a federal judge about a land tax sale in 2006.

Hall has said that the land — 65 acres and a homestead where his horses lived for years south of Glidden near the 40-acre pasture — was wrongly taken from him.

The Carroll County treasurer sold the land after Hall neglected to pay property taxes for five years, according to county records.

Hall inherited the 105 acres in 2001 after his father, Gerald, died.

By 2006, he owed the county more than \$3,000, and the land was sold to an area farmer, according to tax-sale deeds and county records.

The sale forced Hall to move his 28 horses — which he bred and were of various breeds — to the 40-acre pasture, which was ill-equipped for the animals.

The sale netted Hall more than \$200,000, but he refused to deposit the money at first — he wanted the land, not the cash.

On the small pasture, there was no fence or shelter, so Hall used rope to tether the animals to trucks and tractors.

Some were tied too close together, and the horses kicked and bit each other.

Some cut themselves on the machinery. Some got loose.

Complaints from nearby residents and passersby swelled to the Carroll County sheriff's office, and in November 2008, a Carroll veterinarian and an Iowa State University associate professor of animal welfare went to the pasture to check on the horses.

They found that Hall was an unconventional caretaker but that he hadn't neglected the animals enough to warrant criminal charges and a court-ordered rescue.

But the situation quickly deteriorated.

A month later, the Carroll veterinarian found that at least seven of the horses required immediate medical care for infected wounds, wire cuts and shrunken muscles.

The horses' only water source — the creek — would have likely frozen within weeks, and three horses were nearly ready to give birth.

The associate professor, Suzanne Millman, wrote to a district judge that Hall had committed criminal animal neglect.

"The horses viewed were experiencing pain and suffering," she wrote.

District Judge Swanson ordered an emergency rescue of the animals.

But six months later, despite objections from the sheriff's office and county attorney, Swanson — the same judge who said Hall was disconnected from reality — ordered that the horses should be returned to Hall's pasture.

"Deep down, I knew we were going to go through this again," said Sheriff's Deputy Ken Pingrey, who lives down the road from the pasture.

"Everybody thought that."

Reader Comments

Posted: Sunday, March 20, 2011

Article comment by: **amy taylor**

wow. this is so sad ad heartbreaking. the worst part to me is that if a person abused, or neglected a human this was there would be serious consequences and the justice system has failed here, this man needs to have serious repercussions. this is far from acceptable and i do not know how this individual sleeps at night.

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Please select one:

- Yes
- No
- Yes, but not in my backyard
- No, renewable energy instead
- Just burn more coal
- Look at Japan, fools!

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