

Memories of Mocha

Kay Lieberknecht

After three days of colic, my good mustang Mocha died today. I'd told him he could die if that's what he needed, and I'm grateful he was so peaceful through his illness. I want to share some memories of him.

At a ride, Mocha was appalled by the presence of a mounting block at the observed morning mount. He did okay while I got on and walked him away, but as soon as the vet began judging the next mount, Mocha started hopping up and down. He obeyed my cue to disengage his hindquarters by bucking in a very small circle. I actually got to see the next mount completed in a series of snapshot views!

I was ponying a green horse while riding Mocha and, at the same time as I was about to take a drink from my water bottle, the ponied horse got her rope under his tail. I dropped the bottle on Mocha's shoulder and he got wet. It took months before the sound of the water bottle didn't make Mocha tuck his tail and hop. He never developed an aversion to ponying another horse though.

Mocha always wanted to do what I wanted to do—never got balky or tried to go a different gait or direction than I asked, regardless of peer pressure. Of course, I put his needs first, because I really got it that his wild-horse orientation was about survival. We had such accord of our goals that, for instance, if I was ineffective in ponying a horse, I could tell Mocha to get 'em, and he'd give just the right threat, and the trainee would come along nicely.

I've often said Mocha was my favorite horse ever. In a way, letting go of him is as much of an honor and an accomplishment as having him in my life has been. He inspired these two poems over the years.

Me and My Mustang Mocha

Kindness and engagement

Horse and human

Puffs of pleasure

Questions like

"Will you pick that tick off my tail?"

"Can you sidle up to this gate here?"

"Could you deal with just this one little buck?"

Playfully tossed messages

Respect and challenge

Horse and human connected

Kindness and engagement

For Mocha

*With legs and eyes
I guide you across
The greenly swishing meadow.
Slow motion,
Your hooves drawing long
 bending lines,
You connect the dots
Of prickly delicacies:
Deep red thistle fruit.
I let you stop,
Meditatively,
Lips parted,
Incisors lightly wrapped,
A gentle twist:
You have it.*

*What part of your mouth
Is tough enough?
What taste could be
So irresistible?
These musings make me
Love you more.*

*Hills and meadows of many
 seasons' colors later,
I realize you regard
Me as another prickly delicacy.*

...and another poem by Kay—

*I ease your gallop
at the crest of the hill
To honor the descent of the moon.
A mountain, pregnant with pines,
 Rests belly-up in the fog.
The gifts of this ride, like morning dew,
Will steam from my soul in the sun.*

—Kay Lieberknecht