

# Arizona Daily Star

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## Our Pets

GETTING ALONG WITH THE CREATURES AROUND US



Lisa Otauski spends time with two of her rescued "pony skin foals" at her home in Catalina.

## They were almost wallets

### Ponies rescued from auction in North Dakota

By Kimberly Matas  
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

CATALINA — Tuff and #7, 3-year-old bay horses, live the easy life in Catalina.

"They spend their days grazing on Lisa Otauski's 1-acre property, munching on alfalfa and getting hugs from their human companions."

It not for some long-distance intervention 10 months ago, however, the horses' lives likely would have been much different. By now they could have been turned into high-end wallets and purses, shoes and belts or sofas and car seats as part of the cardboard leather industry.

Karen Penroy, operator of the Equine Voices Rescue & Sanctuary in Green Valley, has long been an opponent of the drug Premarin and the cruel and inhumane use of hormone replacement therapy for menopausal women. She regularly brings mares and foals down from Premarin factories in Canada for adoption at her nonprofit sanctuary.

Last October, she heard about another practice that horrified her: the use of foal skins to make cordovan leather products. Called "pony skin foals," they are the offspring of mares raised in the horse racing industry, Penroy said.

High-end race horses are continually bred by owners hoping for the next great race horse, Penroy said. For the mares to be kept pregnant, their foals are taken away soon after birth and given to nurse mares for feeding. For the nurse mares to keep producing milk, they are kept pregnant, too. Because the nurse mare's milk must be used to feed the offspring of the race horse, the nurse mare's foals

### How to help

Equine Voices Rescue & Sanctuary  
P.O. Box 1286  
Green Valley, AZ 85622  
888-555-4  
www.equinevoices.org

are taken away. These are the foals used to make many cordovan leather products, she said.

In October, Penroy learned of 40 pony skin foals that were going to be auctioned off in North Dakota. She sent out e-mails to her network of friends, volunteers and supporters. Within a week, she raised \$7,700, enough to buy and transport 10 of the foals to her sanctuary. "I could not sleep, I could not believe what I was reading about because I'd never heard of this before. My focus was on Premarin," Penroy said.

Because the foals were taken away from their mothers at a young age, they had never been properly nourished. All arrived at Penroy's sanctuary very sick. She recalls her veterinarian saying: "You have a hell of a mess on your hands."

Otauski, a schoolteacher, started volunteering at Equine Voices when she heard about the pony skin foals.

"When they came, they were so driven with separation anxiety they would try to stare on each other," Otauski said. "They're yanked from their mothers so young, they're thrown into a pack of baby horses, so they can't learn from their mothers. Their whole systems are compromised."

One foal died within months, and all but one of the remaining 14 had streptococcus equi. Also known as "strangles," it is a highly infectious and contagious bacterial disease, affecting the lymph nodes. As a result, Penroy's horses developed internal and external abscesses, Otauski said.

Otauski already had three miniature horses and two dogs on her Catalina acreage when she started working with the rescued foals, and she wasn't sure she wanted to adopt any of the horses. Then the foal she now calls #7 started warming up to her. The horse still had its auction sticker glued to his back when he arrived at Equine Voices. It was No. 115. Otauski added up the individual digits to name him.

"When I first started going down there, he was the only one to break away from the herd and come to see me," said Otauski, who decided to adopt #7 when he was well enough.

But Penroy insisted the horse go to homes in pairs so they had companionship.

While #7 warmed up to Otauski quickly, Tuff was terrified of people and would run away when Otauski approached to apply warm compresses to his abscesses.

"It was so horrid for him, he was so human shy," Otauski said. But as Tuff began recovering from the bacterial infection he began calming down and letting Otauski treat him. She decided Tuff would be a good companion for #7.

Though the horses are still much too young to be ridden, they should be at least 3 years old, Otauski and Penroy agree — Otauski is planning to take them back to Equine Voices in the summer for a natural behaviorism clinic.

"You need to create hundreds of positive associations for them not to be afraid," Otauski said. "These horses started out with bad experiences, but from now on they will only have good experiences."

"I know I can't change the world, but I can change one life at a time. If I can do it on my acre, I'll do it," she said.

**Send suggestions for pet stories to reporter Kimberly Matas at [amat@tucsonstar.com](mailto:amat@tucsonstar.com) or call 520-795-1212.**