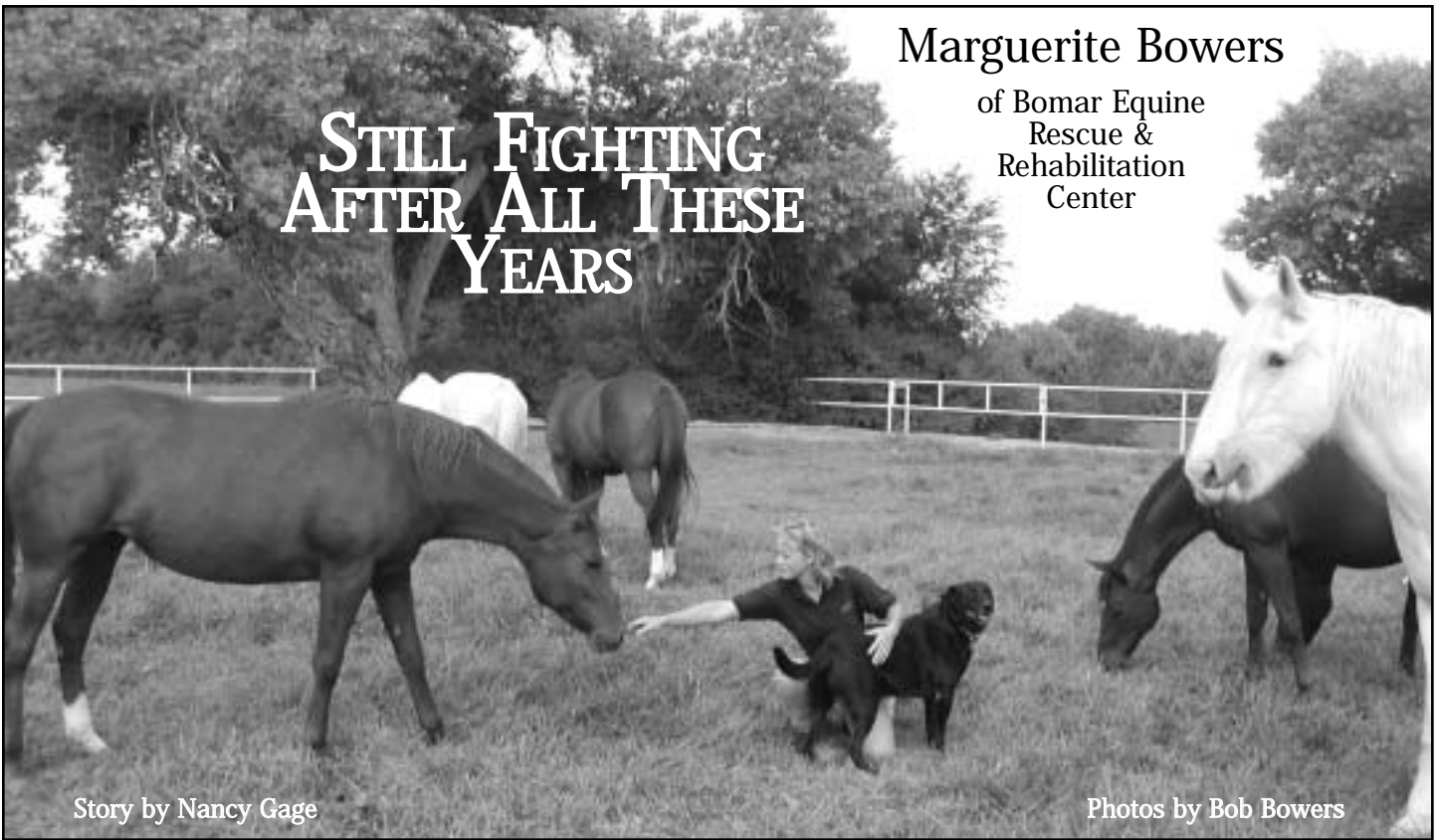




Marguerite Bowers

of Bomar Equine  
Rescue &  
Rehabilitation  
Center

# STILL FIGHTING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS



Story by Nancy Gage

Photos by Bob Bowers

**M**arguerite Bowers is also known as “the Bulldog” for her tenacity in the pursuit of justice for animals. Her fight on behalf of neglected, starved and abused horses began well over a decade ago, and sometimes put her at odds with the New Mexico Livestock Board and other law enforcement agencies. For years, in what she calls the Dark Ages, the authorities ignored animal cruelty cases. She documented case after case of starvation and abuse, and no one seemed to care. Few animals were confiscated, few if any citations were given, and rarely were charges filed. In those days, the media would not cover animal stories—unless they had a happy ending. They felt the public didn’t want to see the horror of sick and dying animals. The public was not aware of the sheer numbers of animals in trouble, especially in rural areas. “I wasn’t pestering the authorities with pictures of animals that were a little bit skinny,” she says. “These animals were dying—and many, many of them did die.”

What she didn’t realize at the

time was that there was no funding to care for confiscated animals. So the few animals that were seized were held at the livestock auction, where they often died. The authorities had few options, and none of them good. There was also a built-in animosity between livestock people and animal welfare groups, often perceived as animal-rights extremists. “So we offered to cover the cost of rehabilitating an animal, whether we win or lose in court. We started to get to know the Livestock Board a little better, and they got to know us, and we started growing some trust.”

That was when Bomar Equine Rescue and Rehabilitation came the first non-profit that took in livestock seized under the cruelty statutes by the New Mexico Livestock Board—a point of significant pride for Bowers.

Since those days the Livestock Board has become active in pursuing and prosecuting abuse and cruelty cases, especially since Daniel Manzanares has taken the reins there. The television and newspaper media have begun publicizing animal cruelty cases. Prosecutors have

become more and more willing to take on the cases. Marguerite Bowers’ work has been instrumental in bringing about many of these changes.

For her work, she is being honored by Animal Protection of New Mexico. Later this month she will be presented with their Milagro Award for Humane Education. The citation honors Bomar Equine Rescue “for their effective outreach training and education of the public, law enforcement and other agencies about animal cruelty and natural disaster preparation.” (In June Bomar hosted a weekend disaster preparedness workshop put on by Noah’s Wish.)

**B**owers often speaks at humane education events, testifies in court and goes on camera for television stories.

She also points out that until a case is settled in court or by the owner’s surrender of ownership, the animal is in “protective custody” and does not belong to Bomar. Bowers explains, “There have been times when we’ve had animals in custody for almost a year that were not ours. They are my responsibility, and I take

that very seriously.”

That responsibility to the horses means that Bomar provides exceptional veterinary care—care that is comprehensive and focused on the complete rehabilitation of the animal. “When you have an animal in protective custody, you’d better have every test known to man done on them, not only for the safety of the other horses that you have—and they always go into quarantine—but also to win a court case,” she says. “This is to rule out and identify disease for the integrity of the case. When you lose a case, the animal goes back to its abusive owner.” It clearly troubles her to think about it. “It is the most horrible thing in the world to bring them in half-dead, fix them up, and have to return them to the people who starved them almost to death.”

In all of the cases Bomar has been involved in, this has happened only once. It is a case that haunts her, involving two Arabian mares. In this case, they lost on a technicality—the seizure warrant had been signed by a visiting judge from Cibola County and was deemed not a legal seizure by Judge Marie Baca. “It wasn’t that the horses weren’t starved and near death—they were. But Judge Baca decided and ruled that the horses be returned to the owners,” she says.

Because she never wants to have to return an abused horse to the situation it came from, making the case stick is of paramount importance. “You have to document everything from the minute you see the animal until it goes to court—from excellent photos, witnesses who can attest to how long the horses have been there, how they were fed, how much food was on the property, complete vet work, every square inch of the animal is checked out. Trying to get a DA to take the case, which is still a misdemeanor, and they are somewhat reluctant to do because of their heavy caseloads. Making sure it doesn’t get dismissed because someone doesn’t show up, making sure

the subpoenas get out on time,” she says.

Part of the educating that Bomar has done has been working with District Attorneys about the extent of cruelty, consulting with veterinarians about what details need to be included in a vet report, and in assisting livestock inspectors in putting together a good case. “In the past, the inspectors were not necessarily educated in this process. But now there are more inspectors, like Bea Bell and Kevin Lucero, who go through the New Mexico Law



Marguerite Bowers with Jack, Legends and Marigold.

Enforcement Academy, so they are much better equipped to handle cruelty cases, even prosecuting them themselves.”

**B**omar is a green and inviting sanctuary with two large barns, 25 acres of pasture, quarantine pens tucked back away under large shade trees, and animals everywhere. In addition to equines (donkeys and mules as well as horses), the Center is home to rescued cats, dogs, potbellied pigs, llamas, goats, sheep, rabbits, turkeys, chickens, geese and peacocks. Many times when Bomar is called to help with a horse confiscation, these other animals will be on the property too. “Abandoned chickens,

turkeys—they’re left in a pen with no food, no water,” Bowers says. “It just goes along with the horse stuff—you look around and everything’s dying. And we bring them all here if we can.”

Oftentimes, the only help Bowers can offer is an end to suffering. When asked about the horses that she has rescued only to have them euthanized, Bowers pauses for a long moment as she remembers. “Goldie,” she says. “And the little black-and-white pony. We’re talking a lot, we’re talking a ton. I picked up five in one month. The people said ‘we know they’re dying but we can’t afford to put them down, we can’t afford to call the rendering company.’ So they gave them up voluntarily and we took them straight to the vet and had the blood work done and determined they were in renal failure. There have been dozens and dozens. Years ago it seemed like all we were doing was paying to euthanize.”

The memories clearly are haunting. “It’s gotten somewhat easier over the years,” she says. “But there’s something about putting a horse down that’s very disturbing. Each and every one of them, it’s such a sad thing when you have to put them down. It’s all gut-wrenching. But over the years you get hardened to it a little bit, and it doesn’t hurt as much.”

Yet the most recent case was one of the most painful for Bowers. Jerry was an extremely emaciated Thoroughbred when she and Livestock Inspector Bea Bell picked him up. Bowers did not expect him to survive, but they took him straight to the vet, where he survived for almost three days before succumbing to a stroke. In those three days Bowers became quite attached to him. “I’ve seen carcasses in better shape than Jerry. It was the worst of the worst. But I’ve never had a horse with that strong of a will to live. He really, really wanted to live. Any other horse would have given up a month ago, but he just wanted to live. That’s a Thoroughbred for you—that heart.

My God, they're something." By the time Jerry died, Bowers had become convinced that he was going to make it.

Bomar, in accordance with their agreement with the Livestock Board, was responsible for Jerry's vet bill, which came to almost \$700.

She will continue assisting with the case against Jerry's owner, who has been charged with a misdemeanor, 30-18-1, Bowers says, "failure to provide necessary sustenance." But her heart isn't fully into it. Because there's no horse left to save.

**B**owers' first official rehabilitation case was a Thoroughbred named Hank in 1996. He was rescued by Barbara Tellier of the Alliance Against Animal Abuse. According to Tellier, a Livestock Inspector refused to pick Hank up, and it was the Bernalillo County Animal Control that seized him. Bomar got him from there. That



The Thoroughbred that Bowers named Jerry. He was a living skeleton. In spite of veterinary intervention, Jerry died three days later. (Photo by Marguerite Bowers)

case went to court, where his owner maintained that he was "starving him for training purposes because he was supposedly a 'mankiller,'" Bowers says. That argument didn't wash, and the owner lost and was ordered to "donate" Hank to the Alliance.

*The Horsemen's Voice* did a story on Hank, and somehow James Towle of Rio Vista Products in California saw it. He and his employees were shocked at Hank's condition and were motivated to make a \$1000 donation to the

Alliance. As a consequence of his involvement with Hank, Towle started the Rio Vista Fund, which now gives awards, and money, to rescue groups every year for abused horses and dogs. The award is known as the Hank Award. Hank, unaware of what he started, still lives comfortably and happily at Bomar.

**B**owers' first *actual* rescue was a Quarter Horse mare she took on in her late teens. But she started planning to have an animal rescue as far back as fourth grade, a plan that she shared with her friend Laura Cline. "We made a pact that when we grew up we would help animals. It seemed like it was just a kid's dream, but Laura ended up moving to Fort Davis, Texas, and starting the

Fort Davis Humane Society. That's what we said we were going to do, and we actually did it, which is pretty cool."

A kid's dream is one thing; reality is another. And Bowers had to set limits on what horses she would take in. "At first, we'd take in people's unwanted horses, and then it became a dumping ground for people who didn't want to, or weren't able to take responsibility for their horses, either having them put down or taking care of a severely lame horse, or a horse with a lot of medical problems," Bowers says. But she soon found she had to draw the line and take on only cruelty/neglect cases. "I'd love it if we had the money to be a retirement home and take these horses and just let them be horses, but it's not economically

feasible. We can't do that. There's an unending supply, it's overwhelming."

Part of the problem is that many of the horses Bomar rescues are either "physically or mentally broken down," as Bowers puts it, and it is not easy, or sometimes even possible, to find good adoptive homes for them. The horses that are not sound or sane enough for adoption stay at Bomar forever.

One unadoptable resident of Bomar is Brownie, a beautiful mare that was abandoned by her owner in Meadowlake, along with another



James Towle of Rio Vista Products visited Bowers and the rehabilitated Hank to announce the establishment of the Rio Vista Fund, aka The Hank Award. The picture below (courtesy of AAAA) shows Hank's condition in 1996.



horse that died before the situation came to anyone's attention. Brownie was clearly once a wild horse, as she has a BLM freeze brand down the crest of her neck. Neighbor boys, who knew nothing about horses, took pity on her. They didn't know to call the authorities, but they blocked off the road with their vehicles and ran her into

a pen on their property. It was there that Livestock Inspector Bea Bell saw her. According to the boys in Meadowlake, her owner beat her with chains, and she has several areas on her face where bones appear to have been broken. After months of gentleness and careful handling, Brownie will now allow herself to be haltered, but she remains a mentally damaged animal that can never be handled safely except with the utmost vigilance. She is safe now, however, and she lives in peace with other horses, usually free on pasture.

Horses like Brownie give Bowers her greatest reward. "The best thing about this business is when you have an animal come in so defeated, malnourished, literally at the end of their rope, dull eye, and a few months later they're running through the pasture and enjoying life. That first gallop is for me the biggest thrill. That is what it's all about, that's when I lose it. It's worth everything you go through when you see that animal, who's come in so dejected, to see them come back to life."

**T**here are 30-some equines at Bomar right now. Some of them are Bowers' own, private horses, some of them are Thoroughbreds off the track, and some are cruelty victims.

She is scrupulous about the use of donations, which go only for feed, farrier and vet care for the rescue cases. She is deeply grateful for donations. "The support of our members and the public allow us to continue our work."

But, like most animal rescues, the majority of the funding comes from the people who started it and run it. And Bowers is also appreciative of her husband's support. "Bob has a huge heart," she says. "He loves the animals. He has yet to refuse one. He'll say, 'Oh, we can't take in any more,' but all he has to do is see a suffering animal, and it's 'Let's get him home, let's give him a chance.'"

Bowers is grateful for everyone




Marguerite at 12 on Golden Girl, already planning to make life better for animals (photo from family collection)

she's seen contribute to the improving situation for abused animals. "We have other rescue groups; private individuals, the authorities and the media are paying attention; it's so much better than it was. Not that it's great by any means, it's not. But the

public's awareness is there. But it's not the Dark Ages any more. Compared to what it was, there's a big difference."

She is thrilled and honored with the upcoming Milagro Award and another award she received this year from the Homeless Animal Rescue Team (HART). "It's nice to be recognized, because in this business it's almost all negative. It's been a tough long road, and I'm thrilled with the changes the authorities have made, under the direction of Livestock Board Director Daniel Manzanares. The years of little being done about cruelty, I think, are over."

But then, right in the middle of being so optimistic, she says, "But you know, I feel so badly about the ones we don't know about the ones that are right now stuck in somebody's backyard pens, the ones that are being starved and mistreated." And it's clear that, as much as she has accomplished, her work is not over. The job is not yet done. 

**To contribute to the good work of Bomar Equine Rescue, you may send donations to PO Box 1038, Belen, NM 87002. Bomar's phone number is 861-0659.**

### What To Do

If you suspect cruelty or abuse:

- CALL the NM Livestock Board at 841-6161
- TAKE PHOTOGRAPHS *without going onto the property.*
- WRITE DOWN everything you know or remember about the situation in case you are called to testify in court.
- DO NOT offer food or water to the animal; this can cause great harm
- DO NOT trespass or get into an altercation with anyone



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