

The Gruella Died.



The Gruella had been rapidly losing weight for six weeks or so. He was extremely thin but he was not wobbly weak. He was at my daughter Sarah's farm. He was there keeping grandson Saul's new pony company. I took him there a week or so ago. The pony needed company until Sarah got a second horse. Besides, I thought it would be easier for Gruella to be away from the main herd for a while. I had the veterinarian out Tuesday. Gruella walked right over when I called him for the vet. He did not have a fever, moved well, was not stiff, ate well, had good teeth and was not physically depressed. That ruled out many things like infection or Lyme's disease. The vet guessed either cancer or organ failure. We took blood samples. The results, which I got today, did not indicate anything in particular. My son-in-law, Jordan, found him dead Wednesday afternoon. I think he died Tuesday night or early Wednesday morning. His eyes were closed. That is unusual. It is nice to think he died while resting. Dave Tucker and his son helped me dig the grave. We buried Gruella on the hill where the other horses are buried, except not too close to them. About the distance he would have preferred. He was a leader and had a strong sense of dignity and place.

The Gruella showed that in many ways. For example, when the horses were called, he would not walk up until all the others were tied and fed. Then, on his own time, he would make an entrance and allow us to feed and tie him.

He is buried on the south side, between two beautiful savanna oaks.

Gail took his name board from the hitching rail and placed it as a temporary headstone.

In time, I will make a concrete marker for him like Nevada's.

There are many good horses buried in that hill.

Nevada was my boyhood horse. He is buried at the north slope.

My Pa bought Nevada for me when we were both twelve. Nevada was 34 when he died.

Gruella was 25.

I had figured on him living ten years longer.

Life is short. Shorter for some than for others.

Gail, Sarah, Jeannette and I traveled to Windom in the fall of 1993 to get two wild mustangs and two wild burros.

Sarah was a high school senior. Jeannette was a foreign exchange student from Venezuela.

It was a chilly, raw day.

Jeannette experienced a cold, drippy nose for the first time in her life.

She kept saying, "Dad, there is something wrong with my nose".

Jeannette is still part of our family. An American now. Married to a linguistics expert and living in Indiana.

That was also the day Sarah, coined the "damn fine" phrase.

She was referring to wild burros at the time but the expression works for horses too.

I use that phrase on the entrance sign to the farm, on my business cards and on the farm letterhead.

Gruella was a five-year-old stallion.



He was a fighter and covered with wounds. Many healed, some fresh.

He handled himself as if he had won most of those fights.

When the wranglers were loading him into my trailer The Gruella tried to escape over a seven-foot fence

There were 125 wild horses there that day. Gruella was the only one to attempt a breakout.

He was almost over the top before they were able to beat him down.
Jeannette named him. "Gruella "is her spelling of a Spanish word for grey buckskin.
He was classic Mustang. Stocky and muscular with a proud, arched nose.
I tamed him that winter. Wild horses that are one or two years old are easy to tame.
This Gruella was already too old to tame easily.
He was awful willful. He would have preferred to kill me.
We settled that issue one day in a struggle that exhausted us both. My lasso held.
Horses live by their rules. After that he did just about anything I ever asked of him.
The Gruella was still a mustang stallion, though.
In 1995, he broke my pelvis. He wanted to buck me off for a mare in heat.
We were doing fine until he got downwind of that mare, then the wild stallion returned.
When Gail got home, she drove me to the hospital. They kept me for a few days.
Eleven months later the quarter horse mare gave birth to a red buckskin colt.
The Gruella was smooth and steady to ride. Strong and willing to drive.
He was a great helper when I trained new horses to harness.
He would hold a green horse back if he moved too fast, drag him along if he refused to go, look at him as if he was an idiot if he misbehaved.
If the horses needed fresh pasture or feed, he would nicker to me from a distance. He did not beg. He was aloof about it. Just reminding me of my responsibilities.
The Gruella was a damn fine horse.
Tom

