

Justice for Bunny

Testimony in Support of S.12 submitted by Regan Howard

April 6, 2017



JUSTICE FOR BUNNY

Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.

~Benjamin Franklin

My daughter and I bought our first horse on July 16, 2002, a registered Quarter Horse officially named "A Speedy Seven Grand," but we called her by her barn name, Bunny. Both Bunny and Jenna were 10 when we bought her. I was 40.



I grew up on a third generation dairy farm in Barre Town, the 7th of 8 children. I was the horse crazy one in the family.



I begged and pleaded with my Dad for a horse throughout my adolescence, but he always insisted that the last stall in the barn would be filled by a dairy cow, not a horse. I resigned myself that it wasn't meant to be....well almost....

30 years later, with my daughter in tow, and on a whim, I enrolled in riding lessons at Cedar Ridge Farm in Barre Town, and a year later fell in love with the little mare who patiently taught me how to ride.

Bunny was used as a lesson horse at Cedar Ridge, and was also a show horse on the local AQHA circuit. She was small, full-figured, and had a soft, slow western pleasure lope that was the envy of the show ring! She was well behaved in the arena, and carried a lot of riders – boys or girls, young or old, English or Western! She had a kind disposition and her trainer often suggested I should consider having her bred – I wished I had.



My daughter showed Bunny locally until her High School years. We still have a few of her blue ribbons hanging in the barn, and one of her trophies now sits upon Bunny's gravesite.



Thereafter, Bunny became my horse, and I discovered that she was a mindful, disciplined, faithful mount on the trails and in the woods. I spent the next several years riding her with my girlfriends – sometimes at the family farm in Barre Town, and at other times in Island Pond, or Washington or Tunbridge. I could take her anywhere – and those riding excursions were some of the happiest times of my life!



While I have two other horses at home, Bunny kept pasture with my best friend's horse, Tommie. They were trail buddies, and we always rode them together, and we found it easiest to board them together at one house or the other, so we might sneak out of work early on a nice summer day for a jaunt through the trails between the properties.



So, this past summer and fall, Bunny and Tommie moved back and forth between the Lozier property on Prospect Street in Barre, and my family farm in Barre Town, depending on who had the most pasture.



The Loziers have kept horses in their Barre City back yard for 15 years and were set up with a small paddock and two horse stalls. In October, with the winter hay supply tucked away in the barn and the fences checked and double checked, we moved them back to the Lozier property to settle in for the season.



On the morning of October 5th I received an urgent phone call from Sylvia Lozier. She was calling to let me know that she had found Bunny dead in the pasture. She was extremely upset, and very confused, as Bunny had shown no signs of sickness or duress in the days leading up to this morning. At the age of 23, we both expected that I had another 10 good years with this little mare. While she was speaking with me from the pasture, her husband Larry discovered the broken shaft of an arrow in the pasture, not far from where Bunny lay. I told her to hang up and call the cops.

With help from responding police officers from Barre City, and two State Game Wardens who were also called to the scene, it became apparent that Bunny had been shot in the stomach with an arrow from a bow. She likely broke the shaft from the arrowhead in an attempt to dislodge it. We found blood splatters throughout the pasture, some hoof drag marks in the dirt not far from where she succumbed to her wounds, and when we were able to turn her over, we found a large blood pool and the puncture wound that ultimately caused her to bleed out.



With my permission, and as I watched, the game wardens were able to extract the arrowhead as evidence. Given the location of the pasture, it was obvious that this was not a hunting accident, and her death had been intentional. It was also evident that her death had not come swiftly.





When the investigation was complete, we were faced with the task of burying poor Bunny. Larry Lozier used his tractor to load her into the back of a one-ton dump truck. My partner owns a small excavator which he transported from Calais to Barre Town in order to dig a hole deep enough to keep the predators away. We buried her at the top of the trailhead between the family farm and the Lozier property, at the edge of a hayfield where my Memere buried her own horse two generations before me.



Through tireless investigation on the part of the Barre City police department, an arrest was made in Bunny's slaying. On October 27th Quinton Clayton, 20, was charged with and entered a plea of not guilty to the following:

- Misdemeanor Cruelty to Animals – Fatal. Penalty: Imprisoned not more than 1 year or fined not more than \$1,000 or both.
- Felony Unlawful Mischief > \$1,000. Penalty: Imprisoned not more than 5 years or fined not more than \$5,000 or both.
- Misdemeanor Petit Larceny \$900 or Less. Penalty: Imprisoned not more than 1 year or fined not more than \$1,000 or both.

From October to February Clayton was in and out of Washington County Criminal Court for violating conditions of release, and an arrest warrant was issued when he failed to appear, ultimately resulting in his being held at Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility.

On February 23rd Clayton changed his plea to guilty to the animal cruelty and unlawful mischief charges under an agreement that results in his serving six months in jail, 120 hours of community service in lieu of restitution, and three years of furlough. Several other pending charges were also dropped as part of this plea agreement. Clayton has apologized for his actions, admitted to having used drugs on the night of the shooting, and claims he doesn't remember what happened.

In January police also arrested Christopher Goslant on charges alleging he helped in the killing of Bunny. Goslant has admitted to being with Clayton the night Bunny was killed. He is scheduled to be in court again on April 10th.

Vt. Police: Horse Shot and Killed with Arrow (WCAX.com 10/6/16)

Popular Local Horse Killed by Arrow (NECN 10/6/16)

Police: Horse in Vermont Shot to Death by Bow and Arrow (The Seattle Times 10/6/16)

Horse was Peacefully Grazing when a Monster Killed her with a Bow and Arrow (HeroViral 10/7/16)

Sweet, Loving Horse Killed in the Middle of the Night in Vermont by a Bow and Arrow (Bill Marcus, Journalist, Fox News 10/7/16)

Horse Killed by Bow and Arrow while Grazing in Pasture (Pet Rescue 10/7/16)

Horse in Vermont Shot to Death by Bow and Arrow (NewsOK.com 10/7/16)

Man Charged with killing Barre Horse (Burlington Free Press 10/27/16)

Vermont: Quinton Clayton, 21, Accused of Killing Horse with Bow, Arrow (fourleggedfriendsandenemies.blogspot.com 11/8/16)

Protesters Seek Stiffer Animal Cruelty Penalties after Horse Killing (VT Digger 12/13/16)

Horse's killer Sentenced to 6 Months in Jail (The Times Argus, 2/24/17)

Vermont Man Gets 6 Months for Shooting Horse with Arrow (U.S.News & Miami Herald 2/24/17)

Bunny's story has garnered a lot of attention – locally and nationally. There has been significant public outcry in response to Bunny's story, for harsher penalties for crimes against our domestic animals, our trained companions, our beloved pets, regardless of their size. Those of us who bring animals into our lives, who feed them before we are fed, who stand vigil over them when they are sick, who love them and nurture them as we would our children and grandchildren, believe that what happened to Bunny is akin to murder, and the current laws do not provide sufficient protection for them, nor adequate penalties to those who bring them harm.

The fact of the matter is that Clayton faced more jail time for “damaging my property” under the Unlawful Mischief charge than for his cruel slaying of a horse who, through her rearing and training, did not recognize the danger she was in that night, and who had no place to run or hide even if she had. In the words of Bunny's vet, Alison Cornwall, “...she suffered, significantly and for a long period of time. Someone went out to hurt a living thing and did so at his whim to provide himself with a few minutes of entertainment. This was not a painless execution.”

Given his drug-induced state, and likely claim of diminished capacity, the best we could hope for was six months of jail with credit for time served (including time served in unsuccessful, court-mandated drug treatment programs.) Clayton was originally facing up to 8 years of jail time if convicted on all charges. This plea agreement, I'm told, is actually a win for animal activist, as there is very little record of time served for past offenders in Vermont.

I applaud Senator Starr for introducing this important piece of legislation, and the Senate and House Judiciary Committees for listening to our story. The law as introduced looks to increase maximum prison sentence for first, second, and subsequent offenses of aggravated animal cruelty, and better reflects Vermont's values and expectations for the humane treatment of its companion animals. But I also beseech the Committee to consider all prospects to enable better prosecution of those especially heinous crimes, like that which Bunny endured. Specifically, as is currently the law in Maine, aggravated cruelty to animals should be defined as intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly causing extreme pain, death, or torture, so that all those who inflict inhumane pain and suffering to the innocent and voiceless are held fully and criminally liable for doing so.

On behalf of all of us who knew and loved Bunny, thank you for supporting S.12.

