



JUSTICE FOR BUNNY

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 was charged, and pled 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.

According to the police affidavit, Clayton stole the bow and arrows from a vehicle at the Highgate Apartments located just up the hill from the Lozier property. A witness reported seeing Clayton and another man on Prospect Street, where Bunny was shot, on the day of the incident, and they were going to “shoot a house or a horse.” Through another tip the police retrieved the bow from a closet at the residence where Clayton was staying.

Earlier this month 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.

Clayton has been in and out of Washington County Criminal Court five times since his arraignment for violating conditions of release. The most recent occurred on Wednesday of this week. Clayton was to appear again in front of Judge John Pacht to answer to violations of conditions of release however, he failed to appear and there is now an arrest warrant for his arrest.

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

~Benjamin Franklin

The fact of the matter now is that Clayton faces 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.

Bunny’s story has garnered a lot of attention – after it first appeared in the Burlington Free Press in October a friend from New Orleans contacted me via Facebook to let me know she had read about my mare in her local paper. It aired on local TV stations, as well as New England Cable News. NECN picked up the story again in late October when Clayton was arraigned, and today as I write this, in response to Clayton’s arrest warrant.

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. In December animal activists organized a rally in Barre demanding jail time for Clayton. More than two dozen people attended – some I knew, some I didn’t. People I don’t even know have offered to contribute to reward monies leading to the prosecution and conviction of the persons responsible for her death. One such offer was from a young man in South Barre, an avid hunter who also keeps horses in his back yard.

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.

