

The Story Of Bill

Just to explain, Happy Trails has a special program created to address the issue of retiring buggy horses and plow horses in Ohio's ever-growing Amish Communities. When these Standardbreds or draft horses can no longer serve their family due to old age, an injury, or cannot carry out their job for any reason, they are often sent to the local auctions where an extremely high percentage of them are picked up by the meat-buyers and shipped on a long journey to equine slaughter houses in either Mexico or Canada — not a very pleasant end for any horse, let alone one who's worked extremely hard their entire life to serve their owners.

Through this program Happy Trails will accept the Amish buggy or plow horse that needs to retire, give them as much help medically as we possibly can, and then find them permanent adoptive homes where they can retire in peace and comfort.

So with that said, let's meet Bill...





Nine year old Bill was a hard worker on a farm in Fredericksburg in the heart of Amish County. Along with his team-mates, he plowed the fields and hauled hay wagons and did his fair share of work on the farm. We were told that Bill was a good horse and a good worker.

Many Amish farms use tie stalls instead of box stalls. A box stall is a big square stall where the horse can move around as he feels like it and can lay down comfortably. A tie stall is more confining with walls just wide enough for the horse to stand between them, and the horse is tied with a rope from his halter to the wall in front of him. Sometimes there isn't quite enough room for them to lay down, and they also have be careful of how long or short the rope is that ties their head to the wall.

Apparently Bill decided to lay down one night in his tie stall, and when struggling to get back to his feet became cast upside in his stall! To be cast in a stall is to be stuck or wedged in such a way that struggle as he might, the horse

couldn't physically stand back up. He thrashed around in panic. To be cast upside down could cause significant injury and trauma to the spinal cord, legs, withers, neck and head.

As soon as he discovered Bill that morning, his owner took measures to get him freed and to treat Bill's many wounds and injuries. Bill nearly died. His owner stated that just when he thought Bill had completely given up, Bill decided to live, and though he became more alert, his body was not healing and he continued to lose weight. Two months had gone by.

Bill health issues were many. Back at Happy Trails we assessed his wounds and his condition. He was about 500 lbs. underweight and his body was covered with abrasions and skin in various stages of healing from wounds where he struggled in the stall. His front left leg was nearly three times the size it should be and was swollen with infection. Open sores surrounded this ankle. His left hip had a tremendous amount of granulated tissue oozing out of a massive open sore, and he had to be in a great deal of pain, standing with his head hanging down instead of holding it up tall and proud like a draft horse should.



To sum it up, Bill was a mess.



Our vet took blood tests and examined the massive but quiet gelding. Things didn't look good, and radiographs showed that his ankle was messed up to the point of needing surgery. His bones now needed to be able to fuse. We wanted to be realistic and not put the horse through unnecessary trauma if his prognosis would not be favorable. There is always the concern of draft horses and anesthesia, the fact that he was already so much underweight, and could we manage his pain during recovery. We had many long talks with our



field service vet, our board members, our volunteers, and finally decided to check in with our friends at OSU in Columbus where the surgery would be performed. Dr. Mudge talked us through how the procedures would go, and felt that Bill was actually a very good candidate for surgery and would make a successful recovery. Happy Trails Board Member, Barb Bakaletz, felt very strongly about Bill getting a chance to recover, and offered to become his sponsor for his surgery and vet expenses — a tremendous relief to us and with such a generous offer, we gratefully accepted on Bill's behalf.

So bright and early on Wednesday morning, August 3rd, we loaded a very cooperative Bill onto the Happy Trails trailer and left at 6am to



Happy Trails volunteer, Ilona Urban, explains to Bill that the medicated bath he is about to receive at Happy Trails will make his wounds heal faster and make him feel better!

avoid any heat of the day. We wanted to make him as comfortable as possible during his two hours trip, and he received his fair share of Bute (basically a horse aspirin) and anti-inflammatories earlier that morning during his breakfast. Happy Trails Volunteer Coordinator, Jennifer Weber, also joined us for the journey, a journey which went very smoothly and calmly — not much traffic, no sudden stops, cool air — all was good!

On Thursday, the following day, Bill underwent an assortment of procedures while he was under anesthesia, including surgery on his ankle (they drilled through the bones and took out the remaining cartilage to allow the ankle bones to fuse) and a cast was put on his leg; he had his teeth floated to address an ulcer inside his mouth and also had his wolf teeth pulled; he had the granulated issue debrided and the massive wound on his hip was



Jennifer Weber, Happy Trails Volunteer Coordinator, gives Bill one last hug and reassures him that all will be well before we leave to head home from OSU in Columbus.

cleaned up, and he had his hooves trimmed. Bill came out of the anesthesia with flying colors and even put weight on his leg when it was time to walk back to his stall from the recovery room. He was eating and drinking normally and was receiving pain killers for any discomfort. Bill was finally on the road to recovery! His medical crew monitored his heart rate for several days (a high heart rate indicates pain) and several days after surgery his heart rate dropped to normal levels. At this time, all is going well in Bill's world, though it may take a bit of convincing to him to explain how all these procedures are going to help him in the long run.

The next step in his recovery will be to bring him "home" one day this week. Bill will be resting at the sanctuary for a period of time before going back to OSU to have his cast removed or replaced as needed.

We anticipate that he will now be able to gain weight and recover normally. We are asking for everyone to keep Bill in our thoughts and prayers as he begins his road to good health, happiness, and hopefully a kind and loving retirement home will be in his future too!

We will provide updates on Bill's progress on the website at www.happytrailsfarm.org, and we are also working on a new name for Bill, a name with great meaning and a name that fits this handsome fellow that is determined to live. If you know of a special name that we should consider, email me at annette@happytrailsfarm.org!



Don't worry Bill — we'll be back to pick you up soon!