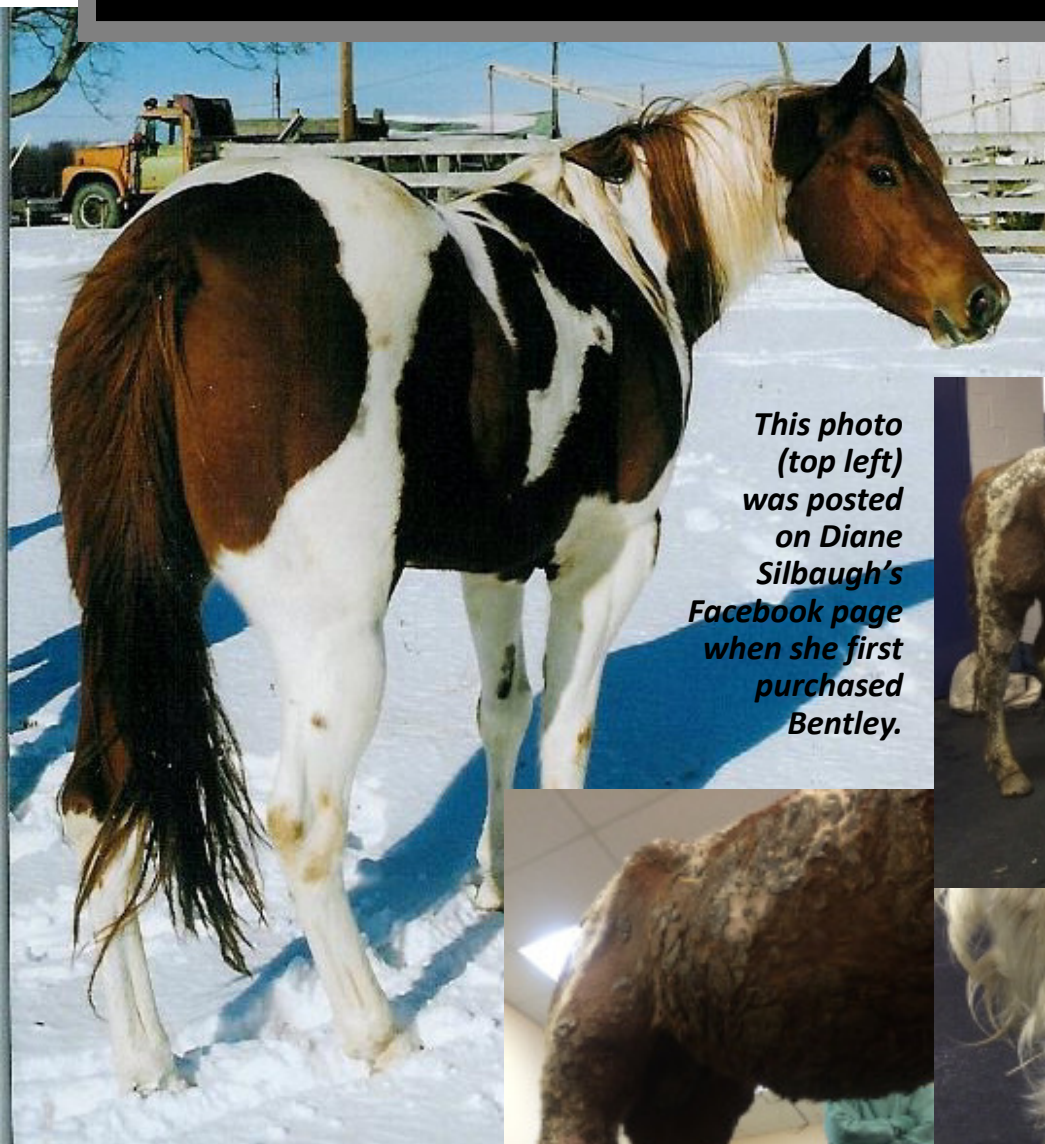


# Diane and Tom Silbaugh Plea Guilty to Animal Abuse in Summit County

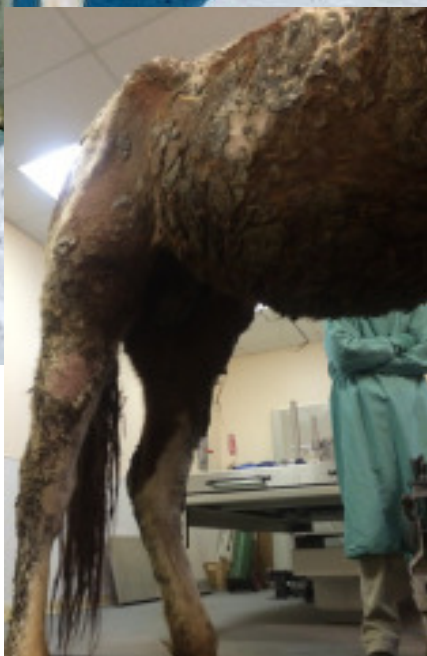


Details of the rescue of 14 neglected horses by Annette Fisher of Happy Trails Farm Animal Sanctuary.

*This photo (top left) was posted on Diane Silbaugh's Facebook page when she first purchased Bentley.*



*The photos on the right are of Bentley at the Equine Specialty Hospital after he was rescued from the Silbaugh's care on February 19th, 2015.*



*Bentley was underweight,*

*had cement-like manure caked on his fur, and radiographs showed incredible hoof neglect (mass infections resulting in bone deterioration and bone loss) so severe he had to be euthanized.*

*The old saying "No hoof, no horse" sadly applied to gentle, sweet Bentley. Here is the story...*



## The Court Case Concludes Regarding 14 Neglected Horses in Summit County

**On one of the coldest days of the year, Thursday, February 19th, Happy Trails was called out to assist Pawsibilities, the Greater Akron Humane Society, with the rescue and removal of 14 neglected horses from a property on Bath Road in Cuyahoga Falls.**



Three of the horses suffering the most from severe neglect had been kept in stalls in a garage-type structure, with two yearlings confined in a section of the garage as well. The other nine horses were living outside.

**Three of the fourteen horses removed from the care of owners Diane and Tom Silbaugh, sadly had to be euthanized due to health issues so severe that nothing could be done to save them.**

After a series of court proceedings throughout the year, a trial date was finally drawing near. The trial was set for Wednesday, August 26th, 2015.

In the last days leading up to the trial, the defense attorney indicated his clients would accept a plea agreement in lieu of the jury trial they originally requested. So instead of a trial taking place, a sentencing hearing took place on Wednesday, August 26th.

Judge Kim Hoover of the Stow Municipal Court sentenced Diane Silbaugh to:

- 90 days in jail (with no time served)
- a \$750 court fine
- a court-ordered mental health assessment and follow-up treatment (hopefully to help stop the vicious cycle of abuse)
- restitution to Happy Trails in the amount of \$12,296.82 (while this is a court order and much appreciated by the sanctuary, we are realistic that the chances of the sanctu-

ary recouping our expenses from a defendant are normally questionable at best)

- 12 months probation
- cannot own animals other than their current domestic pets during the term of their probation
- must submit to random inspections by the county humane officers regarding the care of their dogs

Tom Silbaugh received the same sentence, but instead of serving his time in jail, he was placed on house arrest due to his personal health issues.

Judge Hoover did indeed take this case very seriously, and asked some tough questions of the

defendants. It was evident through the answers that Mrs. Silbaugh had no idea what she did was wrong once again. Individuals with healthy reasoning capabilities and a sense of responsibility and empathy, would not inflict the amount of suffering on animals as did the Silbaughs.

With yet another guilty verdict regarding animal abuse, Diane Silbaugh is a 3-time offender as she was also prosecuted and found guilty in Medina and Portage Counties in addition to the case now in Summit County. There are always smug excuses and a lack of accepting ownership of any of the severe neglect inflicted on the horses.

With an admission under oath, it was documented that Diane Silbaugh owned horses against the court order during the time of her five-year probation in the Portage County case. While this was reported to authorities, nothing was done through the Portage County Probation Department to legally take action against her. I believe Summit County is taking this case very seriously and will make sure to monitor the situation so this does not happen again. It is also up to the public to take a strong stand against animal abuse in our communities, to not sell or give any horses to these individuals. It would be a crime to enable them to have horses in their possession ever again.

Prosecutor Jeff Holland dropped several of the animal abuse charges during the plea bargain, and one count of animal abuse remained. That count was for Bentley the horse, one of the most horrific cases of the group.

Once again, three beautiful,

precious horses lost their lives due to the severe neglect of Diane and Tom Silbaugh. *This cruelty has got to stop.*



## Details of This Case

Animal abuse charges and guilty verdicts along with an assortment of other crimes and time spent in jail seems to have followed Diane Silbaugh through several counties here in Ohio over the past decade or so.

**In 2008, Happy Trails assisted the Portage County Animal Protective League with the removal of 23 horses from the care of Diane Silbaugh in Brimfield.** By the time that case was over, there was a total of seven dead horses — five already dead on the property, and two



more died while waiting for the trial.

When we received the call in February to help with the removal of neglected horses from Diane Silbaugh's care yet again, it immediately brought back thoughts of the previous night-mare-ish situation.

Upon arriving at the Bath Road location in February, we discovered a gentle, once-hand-some, brown and white horse (who we named Bentley, after a member of the Happy Trails rescue crew) trying to find a position to stand comfortably on horrifically neglected hooves. The front of one hoof was broken open and infection seeped through the horizontal crack. The condition of these hooves didn't get this way overnight or even in a short amount of time. *This neglect had to be going on for quite a while.*

The veterinarian on the scene gave Bentley pain-relief medication to help him stand up so we could remove him from the property in order to assess his situation in a hospital environment.

Always wanting to give each animal a fighting chance at recovery, Bentley was taken to Equine Specialty Hospital in Burton, where radiographs showed the massive infection in his hooves had eaten away much of his coffin bone, the bone that supports the hoof, which enables the horse to stand. What was left of the bone had rotated and was dropping toward the bottom of the hoof, creating an un-imagin-

## The Punishment

**Judge Kim Hoover sentenced both Diane and Tom Silbaugh to:**

- 90 days in jail (Tom will serve his on house arrest due to his health issues)
- 1 year probation
- Cannot own horses or animals other than their dogs and birds during this time
- Mental health assessment and follow-up treatment
- \$750 court fines
- Restitution to Happy Trails in the amount of \$12,296.82
- Signed over all the horses removed from their care to the humane society (who in turn signs them over to Happy Trails)

able pain for the horse. There was nothing we could do to replace the bone mass that was lost or repair the hooves.

Bentley also suffered from a hidden neglect issue. His fur was caked with a cement-like mud and manure mixture that clung to his skin and fur when he would try to lay down in his nasty, manure laden stall. His painful skin condi-



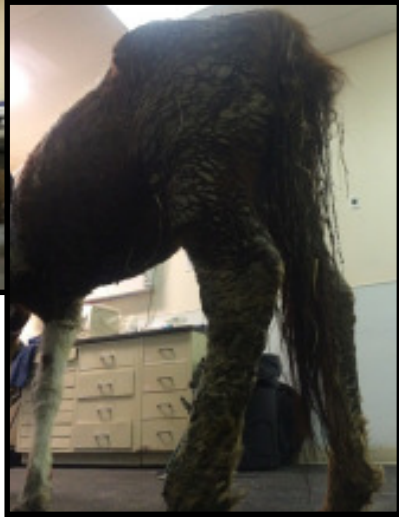


wetness, and other skin issues that could cause rain rot or mold under the blankets. When we removed the blanket from Bentley, we found all of the above — rain rot and wet fur that started to mold,

and when the chunks of frozen manure started to come off, there were pink, open sores visible.

We found photos of this once-magnificent animal. He was quite the handsome creature. His life had been

tion was hidden under a blanket that could give neighbors and friends the false impression that the horse was being kept warm and cared for. This was often the case in Diane Silbaugh's other horse abuse cases as well. **While blanketing a horse is something that many horse owners do during the coldest months of the year, the horses need to be checked daily for blanket rubs,**



decimated and degraded in a way that only someone incapable of empathy and with great disdain for animals was capable of. **It wasn't an accident that he was in such hideous condition.** To not call a blacksmith in for such an incredible length of time that the hooves got to their exaggerated length and current condition was a choice made consciously. *That wasn't an accident.* To place a blanket over a wet horse causing rain rot, mold and clumps of manure to pull hair off tender skin, *was a conscious choice.* You can't accidentally put a blanket on a 1,000 lb animal. To deny the horse vet care for hoof infections so severe that he was rocking backwards as he stood to take the pain away from his feet was a *conscious choice.* It's not like the cracks and oozing infections were not visible to the naked eye.

**Another horse who had to be euthanized due to her extreme**

**SOPHIA**

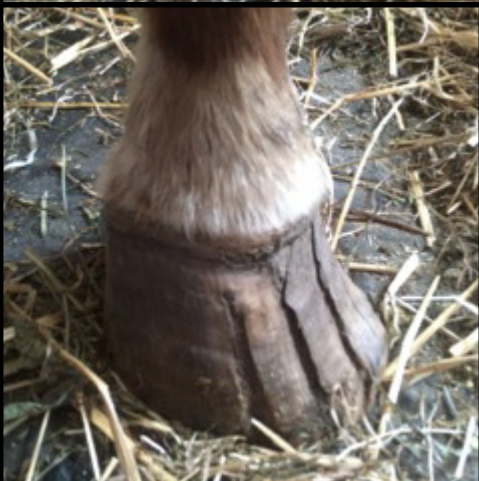


**neglect and constant pain was a mare we named Sophia.** Sophia was the sweetest, most gentle creature I have ever met. She stood on horribly bowed legs, one knee previously broken. Radiographs at Equine Specialty Hospital showed the broken bones had fused at a bad angle and she could not bend this leg at all. **This meant the horse had endured this intense pain and discomfort for quite some time.** She was unable to lay down, because a leg





that would not bend prohibits the horse's physical ability to stand up from a laying position. She had lost weight, most likely due to severe pain, according to the attending veterinarian. Sophia was one of the horses kept standing in a disgusting stall in the



garage. Her hooves had not been trimmed, and both front hooves were horribly cracked from the base all the way to the coronet band at the bottom of her leg.

After reviewing the radiographs at the equine hospital, we realized that to let her go was the best gift we could give this gentle creature. I went over to her stall one last time to tell her how sorry I was this happened to her. I apologized for all the pain and neglect she experienced. I thanked her for understanding that the decision to help her pass, though it was the right thing to do, was extremely difficult for us. We wanted to take away her pain, give her an amazing quality of life, and help her know that not all people are so cruel. Unfortunately this was not an option. There was never any question that euthanasia for Sophia was the correct decision. But when anger at the situation combines with overwhelming sadness at the lack of compassion for the abused animals, it is often the most difficult part of animal rescue.

### A Few Important Facts

- **Often people convicted of animal abuse deny any wrongdoing, and the cycle of abuse continues.** While we are hopeful that the court-ordered mental-health assessment will somehow be successful to stop the cycle of

abuse, we are also realistic in that many people cannot or will not change their abusive and destructive behaviors. It is up to the community to be aware of animal abusers in our neighborhoods, and to make reports if these individuals violate their probation. Diane and Tom Silbaugh are not permitted to own or be involved

with the care of horses or animals other than their current pet dogs and domestic birds during the next year of their probation. If you see a violation of this probation, please report it to the Summit County Humane Society, your local police department and/or the county probation department.

- **Judge Kim Hoover took this case of animal abuse very seriously, and he should be commended for sentencing the defendants to jail time and acknowledging the role of Happy Trails and awarding restitution to the sanctuary.** As I mentioned earlier - we are realistic in that we may not actually see much of the restitution, but it is now ordered by the court. Sometimes prosecutors won't even ask for restitution to cover our expenses or they reduce our request. Often in court the organization that provides the most support and assistance and pays for the care of the animals is the one who gets the raw end of the deal. In this case, the judge recognized that our restitution request was reasonable for the number of horses in our case and the level of neglect these animals suffered.

**Please take a few seconds and send a polite letter to Judge Kim Hoover expressing gratitude for his role in making sure justice was served and for acknowledg-**

**ing the serious nature of animal abuse cases.** Letters should be addressed to Stow Municipal Court, Attention Judge Kim R. Hoover, 4400 Courthouse Drive, Stow, Ohio 44224.

**A sample letter could be as simple as:**

*Dear Judge Hoover,  
Thank you for making sure that justice was served in the animal abuse casing involving Diane and Tom Silbaugh.*

*I feel it's important that animal abusers do serve jail time and that organizations such as Happy Trails who care for the neglected animals during their recovery are given restitution for the expenses incurred during the rehabilitation.*

*I want to see animal abuse cases taken seriously in our court system. Thank you for making sure sentencing for these cases will continue to hold guilty parties accountable with the highest punishment possible for the suffering they inflict on animals.*

*Thank you,  
Your signature and contact information here*

• **Animal abuse is often so closely linked to other crimes. This case is no different.** There are other criminal charges currently filed against the Silbaughs, and there was a past conviction in

### **Animal Abuse Cases Connected to Other Violent Crimes**

Animal abuse cases involving Happy Trails have been linked to other crimes including statutory rape, theft, forgery, domestic violence, child abuse and elder abuse.

Other crimes connected to our cock fighting raids have included illegal fire arms, illegal drugs, underage drinking, and illegal gambling.

2008 against Diane for grand theft and forgery for falsifying documents to show she owned a horse that belonged to someone else. **Animal abuse is often a red flag for mental defect and alerts us to the potential of that individual to commit other, often violent, crimes.**

We address the safety of our communities if we take animal abuse cases seriously and inflict the maximum penalties allowed by law. **If you suspect animal neglect, please report it.** You can find information on reporting suspected animal abuse on our website at [www.happytrailsfarm.org/report-cruelty/](http://www.happytrailsfarm.org/report-cruelty/)

• **Many of the horses who have been placed in private foster homes will be adopted by their foster parents. However, there will be some of the horses now available for adoption.** There are currently 50+ horses in Happy Trails rescue program whose court cases are completed and are now seeking a home of their own where they can continue to heal from past abuse. All have a lot of love to give. **For adoption information, contact Happy Trails Animal Placement Coordinator, Rebecca, at [rebeccas@happytrailsfarm.org](mailto:rebeccas@happytrailsfarm.org)**

• **A special thanks goes out to the folks who volunteered on the Happy Trails rescue crew on that bitter cold day in February - to those who helped load horses, haul horses,**

**organize the foster homes and vet exams, and those who helped with photo documentation.** Special thanks goes out to **Bentley Hudson, Amanda Fowler, Ken Aberegg, and Rebecca Scalise.** And **our appreciation goes out to the two humane officers from Summit County, Tim Harland and Shannon O'Herron,** for removing these horses and for allowing Happy Trails to provide assistance in this case. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve and protect, and Tim and Shannon did a great job in making the call to remove these horses from a horrific situation.



*One of Diane and Tom Silbaugh's horses was a beautiful (and sadly pregnant) Palomino mare who had a horribly swollen leg. An open, oozing wound was present where the skin had broken apart.*

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• **Things to look for regarding horse abuse** — with winter and cold weather coming, outdoor animals have much less to eat as the quality of grass diminishes. If they are not being fed hay or grain and are relying solely on



Another of Diane and Tom Silbaugh's horses was a handsome gelding who also had an open leg wound. Immediate vet care was needed for many of the horses.

grass for nutrition, the horses will begin to lose weight as the nutrition in the grass disappears. **Also, remember that while blankets can be a source of protection and warmth, they can also cover the bodies of emaciated horses and cause more harm than good if placed over wet or matted fur.** If blankets are left on horses who may be exposed to rain and heavy snow, the blankets often get soaked and can actually freeze,

causing much harm to the animal. Blankets need to be checked daily and possibly changed daily depending on the conditions and the environment where the horse lives. Don't let a blanket on a horse fool you into thinking you can't report suspected neglect. In each of Diane Silbaugh's horse abuse cases, blankets were on horse throughout the winter. Those blankets didn't keep them from starving to death or having serious skin issues because of the serious neglect caused by leaving blankets on when they should have been checked and/or changed. **Be in the know — don't let owner excuses cloud your better judgement when you start to wonder if a horse is being neglected.**

• **Most abuse cases do not result in restitution for the sanctuary.** In this case, with the defendant at poverty level, we understand that we often get the judgement for restitution, and it stops there. We get the *judgement*, not the actual restitution.

However, we don't let that stop us from stepping up and doing the right thing in the next farm animal abuse case. That doesn't prevent us from hooking up the trailer to respond to the next cruelty call that comes in.

**Together, you and Happy Trails provide services that no other organization in Ohio provides. We rely on each other to form an amazing team of people dedicated to stopping animal abuse on all levels.** If you want to consider joining our emergency rescue team as a volunteer, let us know. Email us at

info@happytrailsfarm.org. We get called out at all hours of the day and night. If your time restraints involving work and family commitments prevent you from joining us on rescues when it's 6 degrees above zero this winter, **please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to make sure we can respond to that next call on behalf of everyone.**

**Donations can be made via the website at** www.happytrailsfarm.org; **by credit card by calling the office at 330-296-5914; or by sending a check to Happy Trails, 5623 New Milford Road, Ravenna, Ohio 44266.**

**We appreciate the opportunity to work with you to end the suffering of horses like Bentley and Sophia, and to provide education that brings everyone together to take a stand against animal abuse of ALL animals.** While county humane societies are often structured to handle and house dogs and cats, animal abuse doesn't stop there. The same person who is capable of abusing dogs and cats is also capable of abusing horses, goats, sheep, pigs, and feathered friends. **They are also capable of abusing people in their lives as well.** Abuse is abuse. *Together we can stop it.*



*Spreading kindness and compassion for all animals.*

**happytrailsfarm.org**  
**(330) 296-5914**

5623 New Milford Road  
Ravenna, Ohio 44266