

Bindy – nominated for the Milagro Animal Award
By Ruth Bourgeois, Equine Spirit Sanctuary

Bindy is an 11 year old miniature donkey. He looks like a common little gray burro with the marking of the cross on his shoulders and down his back. But when you get to know Bindy, you come to realize that he is not just a common little burro.

Bindy is a resident of the Equine Spirit Sanctuary (ESS). ESS was incorporated in 2005 as a 501c(3) non-profit organization, volunteer-based healing center. Our programs include horse rescue and rehab, along with educational and therapeutic programs for people. ESS is unique in that we don't just rescue horses – we also offer programs for people, and many of our equines that were rescued or unwanted are used in our programs for people.

Bindy came to ESS in 2005. He was five years old and had been a companion to a thoroughbred horse his whole life. He was not halter broke, nor was he gelded. Because of his small size and shy disposition, whenever the owners wanted to move him they'd just herd him around or put a rope around his neck and lead him. Pretty much he just followed along wherever his big thoroughbred friend went. ESS took the thoroughbred in when the owner moved out of state and was unable to trailer him due to his age (24) and neurological problems from a bone spur on his spinal column.

When Bindy came to ESS, he had no self image. He was just a companion to a nice big horse. He had no sense of self worth. He was timid. He didn't like being touched. He acted like he was being punished if he were brushed or had to have his feet trimmed. The first time I dewormed him and gave him routine vaccinations, he was so outraged I couldn't get near him for weeks. We had him gelded (another insult to his fragile ego!), got a fancy little red halter for him to wear, and I spent a lot of time with him, teaching him to lead. He was so adorable, looked so sweet and loveable, so huggable, soon he had to learn to tolerate my fussing over him and giving him hugs.

After a couple years, Bindy's thoroughbred friend had to be put down because of the advanced health and age problems. Bindy grieved for his lifelong buddy. Then he picked out a new companion. He chose Buck, an ESS rescue. Buck was a big Belgium Quarter horse gelding that had nearly been starved to death. Buck was at the bottom of the pecking order and had to be separated from the other horses at feeding time so that he would not be chased away from his feed. Bindy soon became his best friend.

In 2007, ESS rented a new facility. Prior to this, we'd done some horse rescue work but had no place to do programs for people. In our new facility, we were able to begin our program of activities with disabled persons, a kids' learn about horses program, educational and art classes, as well as take in more rescues. By this time Bindy had become much happier to have attention and had gained a lot of self confidence. From the first day he came to ESS, I had told him over and over how special he is and how he's the best donkey friend ever.

At our new facility, we began to get visitors regularly. Everyone is charmed by Bindy. He is still bashful, but he seeks out attention when people come to visit the equines. One of our activities includes weekly visits from disabled persons from the dayhab program of the Taos Los Angelitos (Arc). Some are in wheelchairs or use walkers. Bindy learned to stand quietly beside a wheelchair to be groomed. Once afraid of being brushed, now he enjoys it. He learned to walk patiently alongside a client with autism, who does not talk but does seem to communicate quite well with Bindy. When little children come crowding up to the fence to see the equines, Bindy will come up to greet them and to be petted. He is happy to pose for pictures and to be a model for art classes at ESS also.

Bindy soon became the ESS mascot. His public appearances include walking in the Fiesta

Day Parade with one of his favorite friends, a young woman with autism, and an ESS volunteer. He also was in the Taos Hippy Dippy Parade, riding proudly on a decorated flatbed trailer with his buddy Max, a black Lab Delta Society Pet Partner dog. That day he also represented ESS at the Animal Matter Day event in Taos. He and Buck greeted visitors at the Taos Pet Fair. He represented ESS at the Spirit of the Horse art exhibit, a benefit for ESS. He was the inspiration for a painting done by the well known artist Ed Sandoval, which sold for \$1,000 at the art exhibit silent auction. Bindy has also put in appearances at Cid's Food Market, promoting ESS programs and, of course, he is always participating in ESS events and open houses.

Bindy was happy to be with his best friend Buck. But donkeys really need friends their own size, too. The winter of 2010, another miniature donkey named Marley came to ESS as a boarder for the winter. The two donkeys had so much fun together. They ran and played like a couple of crazy kids, providing endless entertainment for us to watch. Marley is several years younger than Bindy and did not have Bindy's nice manners with people. But Bindy mentored him in how to behave nicely with visitors and especially the disabled persons. The two made a great team.

Meanwhile, Buck had been put out with three other horses. Ever since Buck had been rescued, he'd been a cribber. He had become a healthy, well adjusted horse otherwise, but he still cribbed. Then when he was turned out with the two mares and a young gelding, he was like a new horse. He immediately established that he was the top one in his new little herd. The mares fell in love with big, beautiful Buck. The young gelding now had a playmate. He and Buck played like a couple of young stallions, play fighting, running, nipping at each other. Buck was extremely gentle with the young gelding, never hurting him or being aggressive, but being a nice big buddy. And suddenly, Buck's urge to crib disappeared. Apparently, all his needs were met with his new family and he was a healed, happy horse in every way. I have to think that those years of being with Bindy had instilled in Buck the peace and stability to overcome his life issues.

Bindy was devastated when Marley, Bindy's donkey friend, left to go home for the summer. He had to be locked up as Marley was loaded into the trailer and they drove away. Bindy stood with his head pressed against the gate, watching his buddy leave. He was inconsolable. I took him to see Buck. Buck put his head over the fence and put his lips on Bindy's forehead. Bindy made gurgling noises in his throat. If ever a donkey was crying, this was it. We all cried. Bindy is so gentle, so sweet, but his heart is huge and he forms tremendous attachments. I let Bindy hang out with Buck again after that.

Just a couple months later, Buck was acting colicky one day. I brought him up to the main barn and did all the usual things – called the vet, walked him, medicated him. It was a severe colic. The pain meds did not control the pain. Bindy was right by his side. As it grew worse, and we were waiting for the veterinarian to arrive, I took Bindy out of the stall. A few minutes later, Buck went down and started having a massive seizure. Bindy started braying at the top of his lungs. "Help, HELP my friend!" he seemed to be crying. We stood helplessly by, unable to do anything to help Buck. He died within a minute. Bindy knew. He ran out the door and around to the back of the barn. When I found him, he was standing with his head in a corner, shaking uncontrollably, devastated by the loss of his dear friend. It was a sad, sad day at ESS.

Bindy grieved now for the loss of a second friend. He was a sad little donkey. After we dealt with the loss of Buck, we started the search for another miniature donkey. Bindy needed and deserved to have a friend who would live here with him and not go away. Last spring, we were given a one year old miniature Mediterranean donkey named Talitha. "Tali" had been an orphan at birth, hand raised and bottle fed. She has some neurological problems, apparently due to not getting enough oxygen at birth.

Bindy took one look at helpless little Tali and just looked disgusted. What good was a donkey that just falls down? He wanted a buddy to run and play with and have fun with. But as

the weeks went by, he came to accept Tali and bond with her, too.

Marley, the boarder donkey, comes back for winters and occasionally for short periods in the summertime when his owner is away. The three little donkeys hang out together and do what they do best – look adorable, are friendly to visitors to ESS, and take part in all our programs to the best of their abilities. Or, in Tali's case, dis-abilities.

Bindy is incredibly sensitive. He seems to know when a person needs to hug a donkey. He'll shyly come up for a rub, a scratch on the withers, a pat. Anyone, any age, can give Bindy a treat. Somehow, he has always known to take treats gently with his lips, never his teeth. He's never tried to bite or kick. I think of him as a wise old soul in a little donkey body.

With doing rescue work, occasionally we have to have a horse put down here at ESS. Bindy knows the truck that comes to take the horses away afterwards. He grieves for every horse we lose, along with us. When the truck comes, he starts shaking all over and we have to take him and hold him, and we say our prayers, telling the horse goodbye. Bindy grieves, and then he gets back to his routine of being the best ambassador ESS could ask for.

The first week of May, I was getting ready to go feed the horses in the morning. I heard dogs barking at the main barn. Then I heard Bindy start braying – his loud, insistent “**Help – something's wrong – HELP!**” bray. He was frantic. I rushed up to the barn and found two dogs attacking Tali, the baby donkey. In the few minutes that it took me to run from the house to the barn, they had managed to get her down and bite her all over. She had one ear chewed up badly, and deep gashes under her front elbow and inside hind leg. I chased the dogs away and tended to Tali. The veterinarian came right out and stitched her up and she survived the attack just fine. But if it had not been for Bindy sounding the alert, we would have probably lost little Tali. Bindy was in a turnout a couple stalls down from where Tali spends the night. He could see the dogs go after her but could not reach her stall. Even though he couldn't get to her, he definitely saved her life by calling for help.

Bindy is a very special little donkey. He's a good, loyal friend; a kind, sensitive soul. He truly represents the true essence of the Equine Spirit Sanctuary.

Photos: Bindy with artist Ed Sandoval; Bindy and Tali; Bindy with Nathan grooming; Bindy and Buck at the 2007 Pet Fair; Bindy winter and dressed for the Christmas ESS open house. I have original, color files for these.

