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A feast fit for a queen: Mabel delights in the "Tower of Hay" just delivered by Andrew Elsabee.



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At 30 years old, Mabel is experiencing the world anew at Unbridled Sanctuary.



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Gentle care and carrots! Volunteer Alex Whitcraft grooms Mabel, helping her feel loved and comfortable in her new home.

Mabel's tale: A journey through darkness into light

Horses of Unbridled



SUSAN KAYNE

Dear Readers,

This week, I have the privilege of sharing a story that has profoundly touched my heart and, I believe, will touch yours as well.

It's the tale of Mabel, a 30-year-old molly mule who was rescued from the slaughter pipeline by Unbridled. Mabel's journey from neglect to nurture is a powerful testament to the spirit residing in the heart of all equines — and a stark reminder of our responsibility towards these precious souls who serve us in whatever capacity we ask.

As the founder of Unbridled, I've witnessed many transformations, but Mabel's story stands out as a crucial example of why our work is so important. This week, I'm stepping aside to let Mabel tell her own story in her own words. Yes, you read that correctly — today, Mabel is our guest columnist.

Bear in mind, at 30 years old, Mabel is the equivalent of a 90-year-old human. Through her eyes, you'll experience the harsh realities faced not only by her but by many working animals, and witness how compassion can transform their lives.

Mabel's voice deserves to be heard, for in her story, you will find a call to action that resonates beyond the bounds of our sanctuary. So, without further ado, I present to you Mabel's tale, in her own words.

MABEL SPEAKS

I am Mabel, a molly mule of 30 summers, though the weight of my experiences makes me feel far older. My tale is one of silent endurance. I've lived through times so dark, I didn't know if I'd see another sunrise. But even when my body ached and my spirit wavered, something deep inside me refused to give up.

Born into the Mennonite community, I spent most of my life in service. From dawn to dusk, I pulled plows through unyielding earth, my hooves carving furrows in the soil as surely as the years carved lines into my body. In those early days, when my coat gleamed and my muscles rippled with strength, I felt a sense of purpose. The approving nods of the farmers, the gentle pats on my flank after a long day's work — these were the small joys that sustained me.

But as seasons passed, those approving glances grew fewer, the gentle touches rarer. My joints, once fluid and strong, began to ache with each step.



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Mabel loving her new life of freedom and peace at Unbridled.

The bitter cold of winter seeped deeper into my bones, and the summer sun felt heavier on my back. Still, I persevered. What else could I do? This was my world, my purpose, and I held onto it with the quiet determination that is the hallmark of my kind.

Then came the day when I was led not to the fields, but to a forgotten corner of the stable. The change was subtle at first — a missed meal here, a cursory glance there. But soon, the neglect became a palpable thing, as real and heavy as the loads I had carried for so long. My hooves, once tended with care, grew long and painful. Each step became an exercise in endurance, the simple act of standing a test of will. Hunger was my constant companion, a gnawing emptiness that hollowed me from the inside out.

I watched as the family I had served for decades passed by my stall, their eyes sliding over me as if I were already a ghost. The silence of their indifference was deafening. In those dark hours, as my body weakened, I held fast to the warmth of sunlit memories, and to the feeling of a kind hand on my muzzle. These thoughts were mine alone, a treasure no neglect could tarnish.

The day they led me from the old barn, I dared not hope. The bright world beyond blinded me. A few painful steps later, I was forced into a cramped stock trailer. Each bump in the road sent shocks through my aching hooves. By the journey's end, my joints had stiffened and I could barely move to back out of that tiny metal prison.

At this new place, the air was thick with the scent of fear — not just my own, but that of



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Mabel in the stable with volunteer Rachel Zanchelli.

dozens of horses. Like me, their bodies bore the marks of hard lives and harder endings. As I was brought into the lineup and tethered to the wall, my legs trembled. I felt the full weight of my mortality.

What use was a frail, arthritic mule who could no longer even graze? The thought was a cold stone in my heart. I couldn't control the world around me, but I could choose how I met it. And so, I stood tall — or as tall as my weary body would allow — and waited.

"It's OK, sweet girl. We're here to help you." I could barely turn my head when I heard these words. Her soft tone cascaded over me like a soothing balm. She led me out to a trailer where a ramp awaited — a consideration I hadn't known in years. As I stepped onto that ramp, I didn't realize it then, but my journey to Unbridled had

begun.

A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS

When the trailer pulled into the next farm, horses nickered, and people smiled as they opened the doors to say Hello. Cindy Noll met me first. She gave more love than I've ever known. She was my quarantine provider. It was with Cindy that I discovered what it meant to be treated with kindness and understanding.

Cindy even made an elevated feeding station so I could eat! No longer did I have to strain, painfully reaching for each mouthful. The simple act of eating without discomfort was a luxury I had forgotten.

As my body began to heal, and I became healthier, the veterinarians said it was OK for me to move to Unbridled. I will never forget the love and care Cindy showered over me.



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Mules Mabel and Arnie meet for the first time.



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The power of second chances: Mabel, once bound for slaughter, now thrives at Unbridled Sanctuary.

At Unbridled, I met Arnie, another mule who, like me, had endured a hard life in an Amish community. Though his body didn't bear the visible scars of his past, his eyes told a story I knew all too well — one of a soul beaten into submission. In that moment, I understood why I was here. Standing beside him, I feel a new purpose. I will be his protector, his guide, helping him find the strength I know lies dormant within him.

Each day at Unbridled brings new wonders. The touch of a volunteer's hand on my muzzle, so different from the rough handling I once knew, sends a shiver of joy through me. The taste of a peppermint on my tongue is a burst of sweetness that reminds me life can hold unexpected delights. Even the simple pleasure of

feeling the warm sun on my back, without the weight of a harness, is a gift I savor.

From the safety of Unbridled, my heart aches for countless others still suffering in dark stables, crowded auctions, and slaughterhouse shadows. Their worth measured in pounds; their lives reduced to numbers. I share my tale for them. Each day, more face the fate I escaped.

I beg you, dear readers, open your eyes and hearts to the voiceless among us. I was once bound for slaughter, but someone cared. You can be that "someone" for another. Will you answer the call?

Susan Kayne is the founder and president of Unbridled Sanctuary, an equine rescue on the border of Albany County and Greenville.