

Artist's one-woman show of wild horses at library

By Helen Schmidling
Correspondent

Five and a half years ago, upon hearing that six horses out of the Ochoco herd near Big Summit Prairie had been shot, Carol Statton grabbed her camera and took a ride that would change her life. She and her husband, Randy, headed out toward Walton Lake, not knowing where or what she'd find.

After several hours, they "came upon what I thought was a mare and a foal," she said. "I spent so much time just watching them; at one point, I started walking backwards toward my car, still watching. Then I felt my foot step on a branch, and as the branch snapped, in that split second, I raised my camera and snapped the picture that changed my life." She had caught a single image of a wild horse, looking straight at her.

The "mare" in that photograph turned out to be a stallion that Carol named Marley, because of his Rastafarian mane. He was the stallion who lost his family in that tragic incident.

"I posted (Marley) to Facebook and I was immediately thrown into the wild horse world," Carol said. "Kate Beardsley of Mustangs to the Rescue and Gail Hunt of Central Oregon Wild Horse Coalition were actively trying to find out who would harm the ones that were killed." Everyone asked where she discovered the herd, but due to her circuitous route, she didn't know. But, by describing the cattle guards, people were able to pinpoint the herd's location.

Statton often returns to the Ochoco herd to watch and to document.

"Not only did I become a photographer in the sense of doing the work, but I'm still doing that work with the purpose of bringing hearts to the (wild) horses. I just love capturing what I see and feel," she said.

She also traveled to Utah to photograph one of the most famous wild herds that exists, around 500 horses living in the Great Basin of the Onaqui Desert.

Carol's photographs of the Ochoco and Onaqui wild horses are displayed in the Community Room and throughout the Sisters Library during June and July. The centerpiece is that grand photograph of Marley, at the moment that catapulted Carol into a life with new purpose.

She was drawn into the world of wild-horse photography, and was asked to be on the board of the Central Oregon Wild Horse Coalition.

"My strengths are building relationships and communicating. There are a lot of people who are way more knowledgeable about the issues, but through my photography, I can show people the depth of these creatures and their spirit, their place in nature."

She said the Bureau of Land Management has plans to round up a majority of the Onaqui horses, to be put up for adoption. Those that don't find homes will likely spend the rest of their lives in corrals.

Carol's purpose, she says, is to "speak to the horses' inherited right." Many people devalue wild horses because of their origins. "It's my belief that generation after generation, something born on the land should have the right to claim that land, that environment," she said.

"They need to be managed well, but they belong there."

Meanwhile, back at home, the wild horses changed Carol's life in dramatic ways. "I never thought I would have four horses, but that's what I have," she said.

Shortly after she discovered Marley, she chanced upon a Craigslist ad for an "Ochoco Mare." One seemingly insurmountable obstacle after another fell away; Carol eventually acquired that mare, and named her Willow.

What followed was a domino effect, as Statton acquired another Ochoco mare, Prairie Rose, who passed a year ago. Next came a young foal with a severe leg injury. They named her Faith, and she had a blessed week of being loved and cared for by humans before she was released from life.

"When we had to let Faith go, I felt compelled to help another injured horse," Statton said.

A year later, she rescued Grace, who came with damaged legs, and who has since survived tremendous medical



PHOTO BY HELEN SCHMIDLING

Carol Statton documents wild horses with a camera.

issues that included surgery to remove massive tumors from her sinuses.

"The tumors could grow back, but she's passed the one-year mark," Carol said.

Grace's survival is, in itself, a kind of miracle of veterinary medicine, faith, and the strength of Carol's support network.

Next came Vida, a domestic horse who had been released and was surviving

on her own in the wild until landing on a rancher's property near Klamath Falls.

"She was about three years old and very fragile," Carol explained. "I asked my daughter if she was ready to have her own horse, and she said yes, so Vida came home with us."

Finally, Statton and her family recently

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