

My mother used to tell a story about me. When I was two, our family was on a picnic in Goldengate Park. I slipped away and was soon found in the polo pony pasture. I was standing amid the horse's legs patting them saying "doggie, doggie". At that early age, I showed my great love of horses, proclivity toward risk and confusion about life in general.

The days are beautiful, spring is here, and I'm depressed. Historically, business picks up this time of year and is steady through winter. Perhaps it is slow because of the down economy? My business is down 50% due to job losses, wage cuts and competition. Before we got some rain, local hay prices were topping \$20.00 a bale. Now they are about \$16.00 that is good news. Before winter, I bought 50 tons of hay at about \$16.00 a bale to avoid the high cost of spring hay. Before the current year's hay is cut, spring hay is usually at its highest price, but it has come down \$4.00. The hay I bought should have lasted through spring, by my business forecast. But, now I have more hay than I need. If I paid \$16.00 last fall, it is like I stockpiled gas at \$5.00 a gallon; now it's \$2.25 a gallon. Even my little microcosm is being impacted.

Horses are a luxury item. Training them is a costly necessity both in time and money, even in a good economy. Enter my own back yard breeding project: Peanut, Peenah Weena, or Weena for short.



Like many owners, I fell victim to my own need for "a cute little baby".

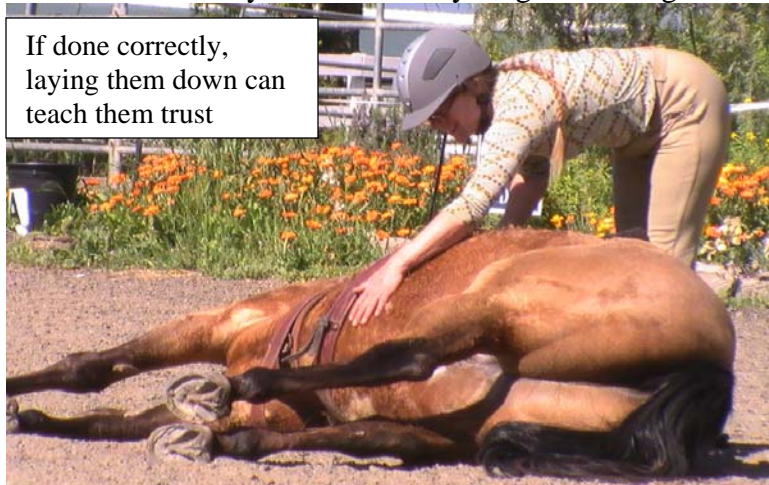


How it all came to be is another story, as a matter of fact, you can read it on my website: equestriantraining.com/articles, or on Bay Area Equestrian Network: bayequest.info/horsetalk/puzzlespeanut.htm.

I justified my breeding decision by saying, "it's a business expense". I'll use her as an example of what many backyard owners do: begin with the best intentions and compete with the amount of time that we have in a day, and then ultimately loose. I don't think I am unordinary. When we have the luxurious choice between working one more hour a day or doing something easy and fun, we choose easy and fun. Most owners have to work

to support their horse habit, just as I do. When the novelty wears off and the oooing and aaahing stop, we must continue to: feed these cute, fuzzy, leggy little creatures, trim their feet, pay their veterinary bills, de-worm them, groom them, teach them manners, teach them to be brave, teach them patience, clean-up after them, teach them to lead, teach them to stand tied, teach them to go in a trailer, teach them about a hose and water, teach them to feel confident away from their mother and then other horses, teach them about fly-spray, teach them about blankets, teach them about other animals, teach them they can trust us and teach them they are not allowed to deliberately harm us. I am sure I am forgetting something. Before the baby is grown up enough to ride or work, depending on the breed of horse, this can be from about two to four years. Larger breed horses need more time for the ends of their bones to calcify, or for the growth plates to close. Too much work or strain on parts of the animal's body when it is too young can damage the animal for its lifetime. A damaged horse is a very costly and sad outcome regardless of good intentions.

Sometimes horses suffer from benign neglect. Nothing damages them, but we just don't do a lot with them. Some horses get spoiled, like humans can be spoiled, and may need a major attitude adjustment when training starts. Either way, training to ride or work is best started in a consistent manner, with daily work for a number of weeks.



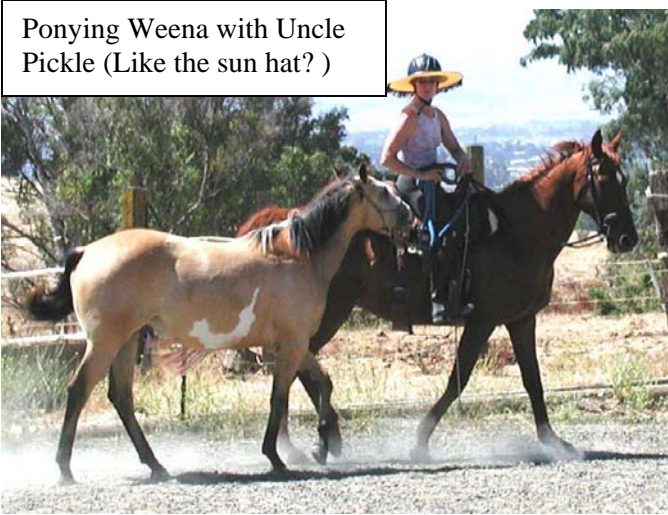
If done correctly, laying them down can teach them trust

When Weena was one I figured she was too young to do too much. This is code for I wanted to ride my other horses, have fun and goof-off and not have to deal with a youngster. I put a little saddle on her when she was four months old I did teach her to pony. This is where the youngster is led beside another horse that is ridden.



Our fat. fuzzv yearling

Ponying Weena with Uncle Pickle (Like the sun hat?)



When Weena was two, I planned to make a video about starting her in the round pen and her first 30 days of real work. The day of the first video shoot, I found her with snotty nose, that snotty nose actually went through the whole herd over a couple of months. It

doesn't bode well to make videos of horses coughing and hacking mucus while they are running and working up a sweat in the round pen, screaming to their horsie friends that are an extra 20 yards away. I only shot one video and I never even looked at it.

When she was three, Weena became very fat and sassy. I vowed to pony her on the trail regularly. Early on, a combination of things made her feet very sore, which required her to be off until winter. Winter is no time to start a horse, unless you have shelter from the elements, like a covered riding area. This is especially true if you have a vendetta against your spouse who complains that you want to spend more money than you can earn.

Oh well.

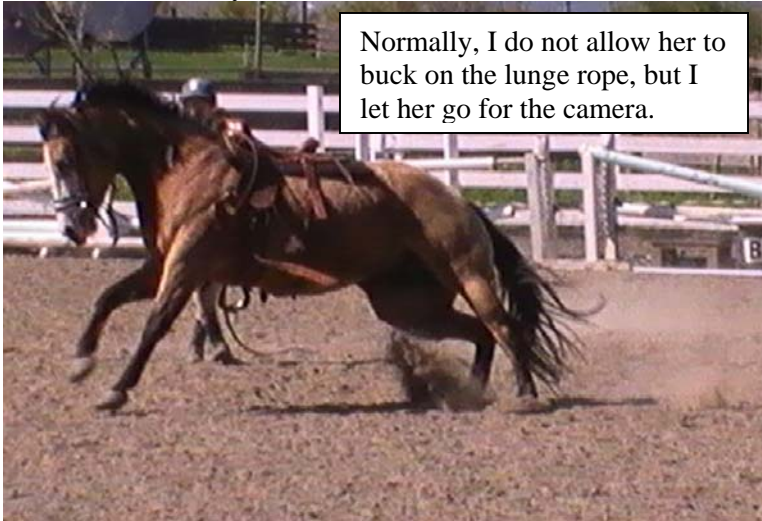
Now Weena is four. She is actually more trained than the dedicated time I have put into her. When I am here with the horses, feeding, doing maintenance, showing folks around, I am almost always in my horse trainer role. I think this explains how some of her training seems to have just happened. She is, however, hot, energetic, athletic and explosive. It is in her breeding. She returns to sanity quickly, but watching her at liberty, seeing how she



A big kiss from Food Mom.

can have all four feet off of the ground in an instant, seeing how she can burst into speed, slide, spin, whinny, and launch loudly expelling pressurized flatulence in a fraction of a

second, I know my work is cut out for me.



Normally, I do not allow her to buck on the lunge rope, but I let her go for the camera.

I'm vowing for April, every Monday thru Friday, she's going to get that hour she deserves.



What a naughty mother bucker!!

April Fools!



She needs to do this for about 500 miles now!