

# A Horse Named "Chance"



**February 20, 1996 – August 20, 2008**

*by Lance Logan*

It was a cold January day in 1997 when Ann and I decided to go to the Belle Plaine tack and horse sale just for something to do. Several horses had gone through the ring when a big gorgeous loud colored sorrel/overo yearling colt was led in. He was way too nice to let go at a ridiculously low price, so I jumped in and WON. Little did I know at that time how deeply bonded and attached I would become to this fine animal.

We did not go to the sale intending to buy a horse, but friends trailered him home for us. Heza King Sonny was his registered name, but there are just too many Sonny's in this world to have yet another. Because I "took a chance" buying this yearling colt, his name became simply "Chance."

All that winter was rather uneventful. Chance got his debut in the spring when the kids decided to show him at the 4-H fair. They did a lot of ground work with him, including clipping and bathing. It was during one of his sudsings that I reached down and felt a "swelling" in his scrotum. Our "gelding" was really all boy! That's when I realized I had a stud colt on my hands, though you would never know it from his behavior. Because he was under two years old, he was allowed into the fun show, where he did quite well. The next week, Doc Charles came out and performed the necessary snip, snip.

As a yearling, Chance was handled extensively. Every day I worked with him, he would lay his head on my shoulder and I would rub his neck. The last thing before the work was to begin, I would breathe

directly into his nostrils. We would share breaths just like this throughout his life at special moments, just as we shared so many other things.

His two-year-old year saw a little under saddle work, though not much. Even though Chance was a big colt I do not like to push young horses very hard. I worry about their joint formation. He was ridden just enough that year to know whoa, walk, and trot, all of which he learned easily. Never did he do so much as crow hop, let alone buck. I put maybe two dozen short and brief rides on him that season in the training pen.

By the summer of his three-year-old year, Chance was 15.3 ½ hands. It was time to extend his training. He picked up the lope easily and quickly, again never offering to buck or argue. He was the most intelligent horse I have ever had the privilege to ride. Teach it to him once and consistently reinforce it was all that he ever needed.

That summer the family was going on our second trip to the Black Hills of South Dakota, but one of the intended horses showed up lame at the last minute, so Chance was substituted, and would have to cowboy up and carry my 200 plus pounds all over the mountains with only about 30 days training under saddle. I was concerned, but what else could we do? That vacation was Chance's coming out party. He rode like an old veteran with nothing but a ring snaffle. He never balked, never hesitated, never majorly spooked at anything that I can recall. We made a pact then and there that we both lived up to. He would do anything I asked, and I would not ask him to do anything that would hurt him. After this trip, Chance and I were partners and I never desired to ride another horse.

In 2001, Chance and I made our debut into team roping. I am not a veteran team roping trainer and basically we blundered our way through it, but over time we started to look like we knew what we were doing.

But it was on the trail where we bonded and felt as one. Over the years we have ridden countless miles through the mountains of South Dakota, the hills of Missouri, the prairies of Nebraska, the forests of Minnesota, and of course the Iowa woodlands. We have swum rivers, climbed mountain stair step trails, opened and closed gates, and always enjoyed our times together. I do not recall a single bad day with Chance, ever.

In about 2005, an odd thing occurred. Chance was tied to the trailer as usual for saddling at Matsell Bridge, but he uncharacteristically pulled back and broke the snap. He literally flipped upside down, but when he got up and I checked him out, he seemed to be okay. The incident left me scratching my head. What was THAT all about?

This year, 2008, because of the horrible floods and conditions, we didn't get to trail ride much and team roping was almost non-existent. But we did have a plan to return to the Black Hills for the first time since 2002 with six of our friends and we were all anxiously looking forward to the trip. We left on June 27, arriving at Elk Haven Horse camp on June 28.

The first morning we were all saddling up to ride. I had Chance buffalo tied near the back of the trailer to be saddled. I had the saddle on him when I gently asked him to move over. For whatever reason, he spooked and again broke his lead. Even though I ended up with a sore toe from the incident, Chance was okay and ready to go on the ride.

The ride was incredible. Chance and I were so in tune with each other that I could ride him without even thinking about it. Everything was second nature. I could steer with my legs, lean back to stop, look right or left to turn and he would follow. I rarely rode with more than one finger on the reins. He was pure joy to ride. We rode the rocks, crossed the streams, and led the way across the prairies and up the buttes in Custer State Park.

The last couple of days Ann and I spent in the badlands. It was just the two of us, as everyone else had to return home after a week. We rode through the eroded peaks and structures that are the badlands of South Dakota. Chance and I rode up one particularly tall mound for a Kodak moment. He was as good as gold and gave no indication of the horror that was soon to come; that he was in all likelihood already starting to feel the effects of.

We got home Monday night, July 7, and life returned to normal.

The following Monday night I saddled Chance up for team roping practice. He trotted halfway around the arena and then I picked him up into the lope. He completed the rest of the circle and slammed on the brakes and would not move. That is when I noticed this conditioned athlete could not catch his breath. He was heaving and struggling for breath like an asthmatic. Pneumonia? Maybe.

A subsequent ultrasound of his lungs, performed by our daughter, Jessica Young, DVM, revealed fluid that needed to be drained, so we took him to the Ames veterinary college. There, they proceeded to drain 82 liters of bloody fluid out of his pleural cavity over the next 2-3 days. They took another ultrasound and observed two masses, one on his diaphragm and one near his heart. A needle biopsy detected only epithelial cells and fatty protein tissue, which weren't supposed to be there. The vet college could not explain this any other way other than to say it must be neo-plastic, which is a fancy word for cancer. Further, a thoracic biopsy revealed nothing definitive. All they could tell me was that the odds were it was cancer and highly unlikely it was anything else. There were no treatment options.

Well, Chance was his name and a chance he was going to get.

I took him home in the hopes he would gradually get better. By this time he had dropped at least 200 pounds, maybe more. His spine was sticking out as were his hips and ribs. We poured the feed to him to get him to gain weight. He ate willingly, but continued to worsen.

Still, when I would walk into the barn, he would stick his head out of the door to greet me and I could see the spirit of the old Chance in his eyes. I would go in and stroke him, pet his neck, and breathe into his nostrils. I would lean across his back and I could feel his shoulder blades, his spine, and his ribs.

When my friend, Brad, asked him, "Chance, how you doing buddy?"

I answered for him in a broken voice, "Not so good. I'm dying."

Brad didn't say anything more and I walked outside to call Jess, to make the decision to do the most difficult thing I have ever had to do. I could not allow this noble creature to suffer just for me. I had to remember our pact. He would do anything I asked, and I would not ask him to do anything that would hurt him. To ask him to endure more would hurt him, and I could not ask it of him.

We made arrangements to have Chance laid to rest in the pasture in front of the house for the next day. As difficult as I knew it would be, I had to be there, because Chance and I were partners; buddies; and we had a special bond that a non-horseman would never understand. He had always been there for me and I could not let him down. I had to cowboy up. It had to be me that would hold his head, gently stroke his neck, and tell him it would be ok, that we would be together again someday.

Jess did a wonderful, compassionate job. As she inserted the tranquilizer, I gazed into his eyes, breathed into his nostrils for the last time, and thanked him for 12 wonderful years. I was the last thing he saw and the last thing he smelled as he gently laid down, and made the journey to the other side. It was a little after 7:00 PM, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

It has only been two days as I write this and I feel the world is out of balance. It is just not right. I am having a difficult time adjusting to a world without Chance in it. It should not have been his time and it all happened so very quickly. He went from perfectly normal to almost gone in three days. He was so tough and willing he would not tell me he was not feeling well. He had to be hurting in South Dakota and yet never a misstep. I wonder now if this had been coming for some time and when he was cinched up it may have put pressure where these masses were growing, causing him to hurt and to pull. If that was it, it was the only indication he ever gave. I do not know if there is anything I could have done to prevent this or to cure it but he was beginning to suffer for certain. All I can say is we tried the best we could.

There will be other horses, but there will never be another Chance. Being with him and my wife and family on the trail was my favorite place in the world. Hopefully, God willing, someday it will be my favorite place in the other world.

Wait for me buddy. As they say, I will be there when my chores are through.