

A STAR IS BORN

By Jane Greenwood, Zen Cowboys

Fifteen years ago, my husband, Wes, and I stood in the approaching darkness, North Dakota snow swirling all around us as we loaded seven frightened and very wild Spanish Mustang weanlings into our trailer. Little did we know that one day one of them would become a STAR. But the little black colt that would soon go by the name of *Skandranon Rashke* (named after a literary raptor, a black gryphon) now has his very own book, "A Marvelous Mustang - Tales from the Life of a Spanish Horse." And from the reactions of those that have already read it, I think it's going to be a very popular book.

Janice Ladendorf, author of the afore-mentioned book, first spotted "Skan" in a video we had taken of a filly we'd just purchased from a North Dakota breeder of registered Spanish Mustangs. Janice had for many years been aware of the superiority of the Spanish horse, especially in the dressage arena. Years ago she'd written a book entitled "Practical Dressage for Amateur Trainers" (still available from Amazon) and had been practicing and riding that discipline for many years. She wanted a Spanish horse, and the Spanish Mustang was in her price range. She contacted the breeder and purchased the little black colt with the white socks she had fallen in love with after spotting him in our video.

Did I mention that we were in North Dakota in the dead of winter? It was December 31st and we had rounded up mares, foals and herd stallions and sorted them out in the growing darkness. Skan had already jumped one fence to be back with his dam, Foxy Little Chick, when Kim put him in an alleyway with a six foot pipe gate closing off the entryway. Kim and Wes were moving some of the weanlings; I was standing shivering in a corner when I saw a dark shadow hurtling toward the gate. I saw it go up and... get hung up on the gate! There it hung upside down, not struggling, just hanging there. I yelled for Wes and he came running. He saw the colt hanging there on the fence by his back leg. He pushed his hoof and the leg popped loose, allowing the colt to fall to the ground. My heart stopped, fearing the worse. But the little colt picked himself up and limped towards the

other babies who were about to be loaded into the trailer. We tried to look at his leg as best we could, but he was so wild we couldn't really get too close to him. We could see there was no blood and he was putting some weight on it, so we just let it be.

We made our way home that night, fighting fog and snowy roads the whole

that realization sunk in. It took weeks and weeks to gain the trust of the little black colt, but gain it she did. As time went on, it became very clear that Janice was SKAN'S human. He was very possessive of her, driving the red filly away if she attempted to come near Janice.

Over the years, Janice kept an excellent record of her training of Skan. I would often come to wherever he was being boarded (he left our place at six months of age to go to a stable with more accommodating features for her to work with him) and take videos and photos. I was also a helper when he was first being backed, and one of the photos in his book is of my backside draped over the saddle!

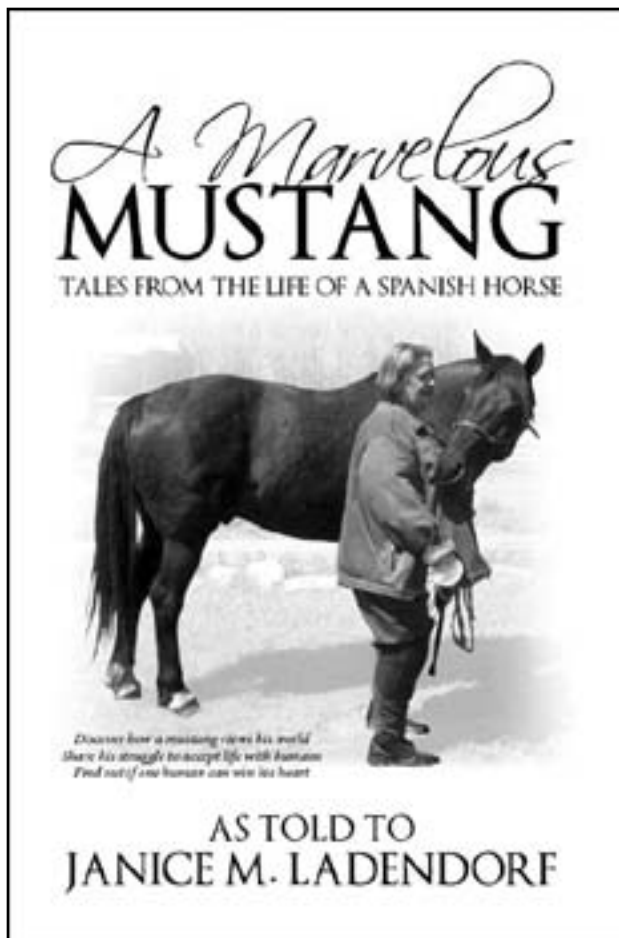
Several times over the years, Skan came back to Zen Cowboys to heal from difficulties that occurred because of various stabling situations, so we were able to watch, and help record, his progress.

All the while, Janice had been writing and publishing stories of Skan's life and training from HIS point of view. The "Marvelous Me" stories ran for several years in the SMR Annuals. Since this was a very unique perspective and several of her readers said they wanted to hear more about Skan and his observations of humans, Janice started putting together a compilation of the stories.

Soon, it became clear she had enough photos to go with the stories to create a book. And so the book, "A Marvelous Mustang - Tales from the Life of a Spanish Horse," came into being. This book is written from Skan's perspective and covers the first four years of his life, with over 50 photographs to help illustrate his tale.

It has been a lot of fun to read about events that took place when I was there, and to see many of the pictures that I had taken over the years we have been friends. I think we are going to be seeing a lot more traffic here on the farm as Skan has retired to his old home here at Zen Cowboys.

It seems everyone who has read the book wants to meet this "Marvelous Mustang" in person, so I expect we'll be seeing more visitors here at the farm. And Skan certainly does enjoy his new celebrity status! He really seems to enjoy meeting folks, especially if they bring this marvelous mustang something tasty to eat.



way. We dropped five of the colts off in St. Cloud and wearily pulled into our place at 6:00 in the morning, having been up for 24 hours straight. The normal six-hour drive had taken us 12. Both of us were tired to the bone and hoped the babies wouldn't need too much in the way of attention. They both popped out of the trailer and headed over to the piles of hay waiting for them. They stood munching and looking around at their new digs, so Wes and I headed for bed!

Later that day, Janice made the trip down from the cities to meet her new colt. It was January 1, 1996, and Janice's birthday. I came out as she was standing in the center of our corral, the black colt and the red filly racing, panicked, around the corral like two little deer. I don't think she had any idea of how wild a range colt was going to be. I'll always remember the look on her face as