





Story by Charlie Deitch

Illustrations by David Pohl

the final Roundup

Here in America, we don't eat horsemeat.

But every week, our unwanted horses are being shipped overseas so other people *can* eat them.

Pennsylvania activists want to change that — or at least make the process more humane.

It's hard to imagine this horse's life before today.

The beautiful brown thoroughbred is tied to a fence next to hundreds of other horses with no regard to breed or temper. Still others roam free, their lead ropes dangling, trying to take one more walk of freedom before entering the sale ring.

The brown horse, known only by the thoroughbred registration number tattooed on his upper lip—A34692—stands on the old straw, in his own waste, as if he's waiting for something. This is not a place he's been before, and he seems ill at ease in the unfamiliar, crowded environment.

What was his life like before he acquired the swollen knee that expedited his trip here to the New Holland Livestock Auction in Lancaster County, Pa., on this cold, rainy September morning? He can't run anymore; that's why his previous owners sold him at auction and why his new owner brought him here—to squeeze the last dollar out of this as-of-yet unknown equine. The next few hours of his life will be a game of Russian roulette.

The grandstand beyond the massive stable area is packed with potential buyers. There are some looking for a new riding horse; others are searching for work horses. Maybe someone will see something salvageable about A34692 and retire him to a plush, green pasture. Other buyers, though, are looking for bargains—large, fat, and most important, cheap—to resell to a very specialized market.

These are the customers known around the auctions as the “killer buyers.” They buy horses to sell to slaughterhouses in Texas and Canada. Those middlemen then process the horses for meat, which is sold overseas to countries in Europe and Asia where it's considered a delicacy.

For years, slaughter has been the “dirty little secret” of the equine world, according to local and national anti-slaughter activists. But meat dealers and auction owners argue that slaughter is an important, necessary function of the industry.

While many Americans may have vague notions of old horses ending up in a glue factory, they have little awareness that many of the animals are actually being sent overseas as steaks. Most Pennsylvanians have no idea that their state hosts several auctions where horses meet this type of end every week, including one sale about an hour south of Pittsburgh in Waynesburg.

Since 1980, more than 3.8 million American horses have been slaughtered in the United States., according to figures from the USDA. Though slaughter numbers have declined over the years, due in part to a decreasing number of slaughterhouses, last year more than 50,500 horses were slaughtered, up from 42,300 the year before. The number hit its largest number in 1988, when 415,700 horses were killed for meat in the U.S. and Canada.

The issue of horse slaughter has been creeping into the public consciousness. The Friedensburg, Pa.-based Equine Protection Network, founded and run by one woman, Christine Berry, has begun a media campaign featuring billboards reading “Keep America's horses in the stable and off the table”—several of which can be seen across Pittsburgh. California has completely banned the practice of selling horses for human consumption, and federal legislation banning the practice is making its way through three house committees. Now, a fight that has been waged inside the auction barns and on the Internet is making its way into the mainstream, and both sides seem to be equally impassioned.

On that September morning in the middle of a driving rain,

more than 70 horses found their way onto large transport trailers and a one-way ticket to the slaughterhouse. Among them was A34692, the frightened thoroughbred with the swollen knee. He was herded onto a truck for a day's drive into Canada before his final stop: a diner's plate in a country far away from the industry and the controversy that put him there.

Slaughter has been part of the horse business for years.

There are no set criteria for why a horse goes to the slaughterhouse. Injured thoroughbreds that can't run anymore or racehorses that just aren't fast enough can find a seat in the truck next to a broken-down work horse or a gentle camp horse that outlived its usefulness at the end of the season.

The memories of riding Buttercup all summer can stick with a child for a lifetime. Once the season ends, however, Buttercup becomes a liability that must be fed, groomed and boarded all winter. It's cheaper for some camp owners, says Christine Berry, to sell their stable of horses at auction and start again next year than to pay food and board fees.

The auction business is conducted on a more-or-less weekly basis without the knowledge of the general public. Those in the know, regardless of the opinion they hold on the issue, pretty much agree on why slaughter exists. Where they differ is on whether those reasons warrant keeping the practice around as a means of disposal.

Slaughter exists to deal with the horses no one wants. The breeding of horses is out of control, most agree: Breeders desperately trying to find the next Triple Crown winner mate horses at staggering rates with the knowledge that they can dump the horse if it doesn't work out. The same can be said for breeders of show horses and riding horses—traditionally quarter horses.

Horses also find their way to slaughter via owners who can no longer afford to care for the animals or because the horse is sick or lame. They don't want to deal with the problem, so they sell it to someone who will.

Another source of slaughter horses is the pharmaceutical industry. The menopause drug Premarin is made from the urine of pregnant mares. The manufacturers impregnate the horses, according to Susan Wagner of the group Equine Advocates, in order to make the drug. A lot of unwanted foals then find themselves victims of slaughter.

Proponents say that's why slaughter is vital to the industry: Without slaughter, there would be a glut of abused and abandoned animals. Animal cruelty, they say, would go through the roof.

“Those horses have got to be slaughtered,” says Leroy Baker, the owner of the Sugar Creek (Ohio) Livestock Auction. “This is a cheaper, humane alternative. Disposing of horses themselves is not cost-effective for a lot of people.”

“Folks want to save these horses that are hurt and sick. They take them home and try to help them—but they're never right. With slaughter, that horse's problems are over in 24 hours. I think that's pretty humane.”

It's true—once a horse is killed, it has no idea what happens to it next. But that doesn't make it right, according to Berry and many others in her line of work. Horses aren't the same as other livestock. They're not raised, she points out, to be food. They're companion and work animals. In fact, while they're listed by the USDA as livestock so they can be slaughtered, horses' owners are charged sales

tax for owning luxury animals, says Cathy Doyle of the national lobbying group HOOFPAC.

Doyle's California-based organization ran the successful campaign to place the issue of slaughter before California voters in November 1998. Voters banned slaughter by a margin of more than 60 percent of 5 million ballots cast.

The campaign was a grassroots effort, Doyle says—and although the group seeking passage was small, two things became clear during the campaign. First, most citizens contacted had no idea that horse slaughter even existed. And second, when they found out, Doyle says, most were wholeheartedly against it. In subsequent polls in other states, HOOFPAC says, the numbers against slaughter run consistently over 80 percent.

If there's such public disdain for the practice, why does it continue? Not only are most people uninformed about it, Doyle says, the horse industry also allows slaughter to continue.

While not exactly saying they are pro-slaughter, the American Quarter Horse Association, the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Equine Practitioners oppose the proposed federal regulations banning slaughter. What's more, many of the thoroughbreds that find their way to auctions were bought directly off the backstretch of race tracks.

Locally, officials at Mountaineer Race Track and Gaming Resort in Chester, W.Va., say they favor adoption or retirement of the horses that run at their tracks, although they have no way to enforce it. (Many Mountaineer racers find their way into the hands of killer buyers.) As for The Meadows, officials there never returned phone calls seeking comment.

Tim Case, manager of public policy for the American Quarter Horse Association and its hundreds of thousands of members, says his group agrees with the veterinary organization that banning slaughter will take away a humane, cost-effective way to get rid of unwanted horses.

"We've been labeled pro-slaughter because we're opposed to the federal legislation," Case says. "We're against the legislation because horse owners should have every viable option of euthanasia available to them."

The AQHA, Case says, is concerned for the animals' last days of life, that they are treated humanely. They do not concern themselves with what happens to horses after death.

That's part of the problem, according to slaughter opponents: The last days of slaughter-bound horse are anything but humane.

Hundreds of horses are shipped into auctions like New Holland and Sugar Creek every week. Once they arrive, they're checked in and examined by a veterinarian to make sure they're sound enough for sale. Ideally, the horses should be healthy—but the picture of health is in the eye of the lawmaker. Basically speaking, a horse can't be sold for slaughter if it's blind and can't be sold at all if it's unable to bear weight on all four legs. Unfortunately, some of the horses observed at both sales could



barely stand, but still met the technical definitions of the law.

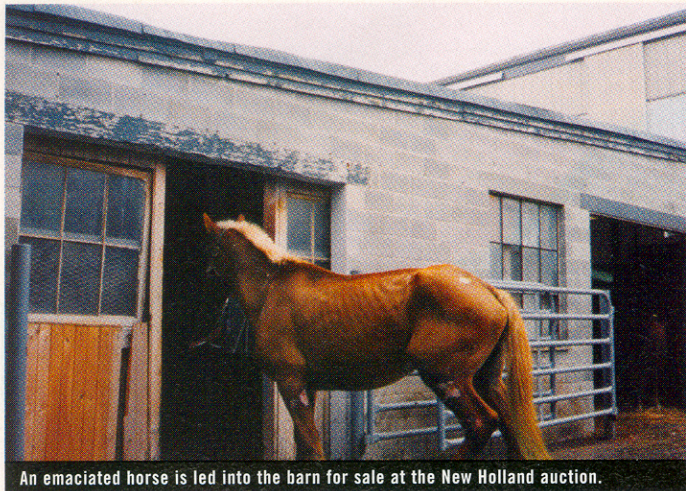
One horse at New Holland staggered around the sale like a seasick drunkard, practically dragging his back leg. He found his way into the sale ring and the kill pen. At Sugar Creek, several horses were obviously mistreated before they arrived—skeleton-thin and barely able to stand. One of those horses stood in the kill pen, his right eye hanging from the socket. These are just some examples of the equines deemed fit for sale and slaughter.

After arriving at auction, the horses are kept in close proximity to one another. Tied to a rope at New Holland, as previously mentioned, and at Sugar Creek, horses are crammed into pens until the sale begins. There is hay or straw on the ground, but by Pennsylvania state law the horses are not required to be fed or watered. In fact, horses can be legally transported for up to 28 hours without food or water.

Once a horse enters the sale ring, it is either led or ridden bare-back by its owner or auction attendants. The potential buyers run the gamut from killer buyers to average Joes to horse-rescue groups. The rescue groups try to save the horses specifically set for the slaughterhouses—a practice that itself has become a point of disagreement among anti-slaughter activists.

The killers look for the unwanted horses; some are lame or sickly, but most are large, strapping beasts that will fetch a handsome price at anywhere from 20 to 40 cents a pound at the meat factories. Most of the horses going to slaughter, Berry says, are healthy.

Once a horse is sold for slaughter, it is loaded onto the killer buyer's truck for the long trip to Canada or Texas. Most of the horses from New Holland go to Canadian facilities, although Sugar Creek's Baker normally sends his to Texas. He does this because of Pennsylvania's transport law, which prohibits the transport of disabled animals and prohibits horses from being transported in a



An emaciated horse is led into the barn for sale at the New Holland auction.

double-decker trailer. The double, outlawed by the 2001 Horse Transport Law, caused horses to be crammed and stacked on top of one another during the sometimes 24-hour ride to slaughter. The bottoms of the trailers contained a deep well, and horses were pushed or forced to jump down into the pit, according to Berry.

As she fought to get the transport law passed, Berry spent many Mondays at New Holland documenting the sale and every truck that left the facility. Even before Pennsylvania enacted its law, New York had similar restrictions, and Berry or a volunteer would trail the horses into New York and call the state police, who would then levy fines.

In Pennsylvania, violations of the transport law can net fines up

to \$750 and/or up to 90 days in jail, although no one has been incarcerated for violations. Probably the stiffest penalty for the killer buyers to absorb is forfeiture of the animals. That's why Baker goes to Texas; a previous trip through Pennsylvania and New York cost him big. Besides an undisclosed fine, he says he lost \$23,000 in merchandise.

"The laws need to be the same everywhere," Baker says. "If I had taken that load through Ohio and Michigan, nothing would have happened. It doesn't make any sense."

Once a legal load of horses makes it to the slaughter houses, the end is a frightening one for the animals, Berry says. Her point is illustrated in an undercover videotape taken by a group called Save the Horses and distributed by many organizations, including the Equine Protection Network.

In the video, the horses are herded into a long metal chute, many jumping and kicking as they're bothered by the whirl of activity around them. A metal door rises at the end of the chute, and one by one the horses are forced into an open-top chamber.

As each horse looks up, it sees a man with a large, metal, drill-like instrument. The tool is a pneumatic captive bolt device. It is endorsed by the American Veterinary Medical Association as a humane form of euthanasia. It works by placing the device on the top of the animal's head and using compressed air to drive a steel bolt into its brain, "quickly rendering death and unconsciousness," according to literature by the AVMA. In this particular video, however, instant death was never achieved.

Many times, because the animal is naturally skittish, the opera-

tor misses the horse's head. The bolt hits the shoulder or another part of the skull. In such instances, the operator can be seen to unload as many as four bolts into the horse before it falls.

Once the horse is down, the side wall of the chamber lifts, exposing the sometimes still-twitching horse. A chain is tied around the animal's leg and it is lifted into the air. The horse's throat then is slit—in plain view of the other animals waiting their turn to die—and allowed to bleed out.

That's most likely how the horse known to auctioneers as A34692 died last September.

According to advocates like Doyle and Berry, he didn't deserve that kind of end.

Every horse has a story, according to Susan Wagner, head of the Bedford, N.Y.-based Equine Advocates group. Wagner's organization is in the business of rescuing horses. Since 1996, her group has saved some 500 horses from unwanted situations—most, she says, from Pennsylvania. Some were rescued from auctions, others before they made it that far.

She can't save every horse, she understands. But she saves all she can, hoping they will become ambassadors for those who die each week in the slaughterhouses. She uses the rescued horses to educate the public about both slaughter and animal cruelty, teaching horse owners to thoroughly check out the backgrounds of potential buyers before they sell their animals—and even advising casual riders to ask around about the eventual fates of the horses available for rent at trail-riding barns and camps.

Wagner only buys horses when she has to; usually she'll solicit

donations of horses as an alternative to slaughter. She likes to keep her money for the care of the animals, which can be astronomically expensive.

She blames slaughter on the overbreeding of horses. Take away slaughter as an option, she says, and that will force the breeders to think twice before they carelessly breed their animals. "These horses don't deserve the fate that is forced upon them," she argues. "Why should they have to go through this because they're the wrong color or because they're not fast enough? These people will continue to breed horses haphazardly as long as they know there'll be a guy waiting at the backstretch with \$200. It's too easy."

On the topic of slaughter, Wagner and the Equine Protection Network's Chris Berry are on the same philosophical page. They're friends who share a common cause. Where their philosophy differs is on the subject of horse rescue.

Berry picked up the calling in 1995, when she heard of the conditions at New Holland. She visited the auction—she described it as a "horror" at the time—and the scene of sick, abused horses being sold for meat depressed her to the point of action. She contacted Cathy Doyle about a year later, when she heard of the California initiative. Doyle became her teacher, telling her where and how to begin the campaign that would result in the transport law.

Berry has spent many Monday mornings traipsing through the New Holland stables, her denim-clad figure constantly moving around the barn taking little care about what she steps in. She's there for one purpose: to make sure the auction operation is following the law concerning the treatment of the animals. She knows

perfectly well that her one-woman policing won't prevent many of these horses from being slaughtered—but while she works with other legislative activists to pass a total ban on slaughter, in the meanwhile she intends to be a thorn in the side of every killer buyer and auction owner.

Berry trains and boards horses by trade. She loves animals, and she loves responsible owners. Responsible ownership, in her eyes, is to take care of your horse, and when the animal is no longer viable, to do the right thing and put it down. Most people, she says, don't do that. They say they can't bear to see the animal die, so they sell it. Lame, sick, weak, helpless—they sell it. Oftentimes, those animals fall into the hands of the killer buyers. No one else wants the animal; the killer buyer can buy low and sell high.

“What infuriates me most is a horse owner who refuses to take care of his own mess,” Berry says. “They say they can't bear to put it down, but they don't want it anymore because it has outlived its usefulness. The astounding thing to me is, if you don't want the horse that you love, who else is going to take care of it?”

So instead of euthanasia, the owner sells the horse with thoughts that it will live out its life in a grassy meadow. More than likely, its life ends instead on a blood-covered metal floor with a 4-inch steel bolt in the brain.

That's why Wagner rescues horses. That's why Berry doesn't.

Berry says rescuing horses feeds the slaughter industry, for the simple reason that some rescues pay the killer buyer directly for the horses. The horse is saved, but that's irrelevant to the killer buyer, Berry says, because he accomplished his goal: a profit on the horse.

Berry has documented many horses at auction and posted them on her Web site. She has tried to educate the public that way. But she has never paid for a horse bound for slaughter.

Although on one rainy Monday in September, she came close.

It's not hard to determine the identity of many of the horses that find their way to the kill sales. The Lexington, Ky.-based Jockey Club keeps records on horses based on their lip tags. It also helps to listen to the transactions during an auction; often, information is given as a selling point for the horse.

During A34692's trip through the ring, the auctioneer gave an interesting piece of information. Besides being a former racer, the horse had been rehabilitated and served the city of Newark, N.J., police department's mounted patrol.

The horse's name, according to information provided later by the Jockey Club, was Southern Banjo. Born on Valentine's Day 1997, he was a racehorse of some note, winning \$36,397 in 15 races between 1999 and 2001. His pedigree was an impressive one, too: His grandfather was Northern Dancer, the 1964 winner of the Kentucky Derby who fell just two spots shy of the Triple Crown at the Belmont Stakes. Banjo's father, Dixieland Band, totaled nearly \$500,000 during his racing career, and 13 of Banjo's brothers went on to racing careers and cushy second careers as studs.

But Southern Banjo turned out to be the black sheep of the family. After he stopped winning races in 2001, he was rehabilitated into a member of the mounted patrol in Newark, where he was eventually injured. How he came to the sale ring at New Holland remains a mystery; several calls to the Newark police department

inquiring about its practices when discarding former police horses went unanswered.

Similar fears were brought up locally last fall, when Pittsburgh's budget crunch forced the disbandment of the city's mounted patrol. Fortunately, all of Pittsburgh's police horses were either returned to the owners who donated them or adopted by the officers who rode them, according to a police spokeswoman.

But Southern Banjo wasn't so lucky. When the auctioneer announced his previous work history, Berry immediately began debating whether to buy the horse. In a second, though, the horse was purchased for \$200 by a killer buyer. Any further deal would have to go through him.

His asking price? \$250. For \$250, Chris Berry could have saved the life of an equine public servant. For \$250, this horse could have become a cause celebre, a fundraising bonanza. For \$250, Chris Berry could have turned her back on every belief she has held since beginning this endeavor almost 10 years ago.

She visited Banjo several times in the kill pen, breaking one of her other cardinal rules: Don't look into the horse's eyes. She made phone calls to colleagues and friends for advice. She bought and didn't buy the horse at least a dozen times in a two-hour period.

She struggled between heart and head before making the final decision. Southern Banjo would die.

It was one of the hardest choices she says she's ever had to make. In the end, she realized she'd already made it when she adopted her no-rescue policy years ago. "I wanted to buy that horse more than anything, but I knew I couldn't," she said a few hours later. "If I decided to start rescuing horses, where do I stop? There wasn't a



The ill-fated Southern Banjo, with Christine Berry, at the New Holland auction.

CHARLIE DEITCH

horse in that pen that deserves what's going to happen to it, but feeding an industry that I despise isn't the right thing to do. And I almost let emotion override that."

Berry's friend, Susan Wagner, disagrees with her decision—and has told her so. Southern Banjo, she says, would have been the perfect anti-slaughter ambassador. "The horse was a perfect poster-child," Wagner says. "It's one thing to take pictures and tell his story, but it's a crime to have let him die."

The two women are still friends, still fighting for the same cause—the end of slaughter. They've accepted each other's different philosophies and still do what they can to end the practice. Both feel Southern Banjo was a great anti-slaughter diplomat.

They just disagree as to whether the right course was as poster child or martyr.

Leroy Baker doesn't have much use for horse-rescue folks. Speaking by telephone from his livestock auction in Sugar Creek, Ohio, in early January, he claims there are "three of them in my barn right now." They'll pay his asking price for the animals, avoiding the Friday-afternoon auction and the killer buyers. On the day of the auction, however, more than a hundred more horses will take the places of those that were saved.

There are a lot of unwanted horses, Baker says—not racehorses, not police horses, just plain, workaday animals from barns all around the country—that have to be disposed of somehow. Baker grew up around horses, he says; he understands the horse business, and yes, he profits from it. Yes, killer buyers frequent his auction. On a day last November, they lined the front of the sale ring. The ring is a half-moon shape with coliseum-style stadium seating surrounding it. Bidders that arrive early get a seat; the rest cram into the standing-room-only balcony on the second level.

Baker says slaughter serves a purpose: It keeps the cost of euthanasia down and provides a pricing floor for the horse industry. "I can't be sentimental about an old horse that isn't good to anyone anymore," he says. "You may love that old horse, but if he falls on your child, what good is he?"

"We sell all kinds of horses. If they can walk in here and bear weight on all four feet, we'll sell them. That's the way it should be."

Some of the horses at Baker's sale last November looked pretty shaky. Standing on their own? It would have been tough not to,

crammed sideways into corrals the way they were.

But Ohio law is more lenient than Pennsylvania, and Baker isn't breaking any laws. The horses must bear weight, and it's illegal to send a blind horse to slaughter—a law Baker disagrees with, but says he follows because of the \$10,000 penalty that awaits him if he breaks the law. That, he says, he can't afford.

On this day, in fact, a blind horse did enter Baker's ring, and he purchased it himself for \$20. The horses are herded between the corrals, and when it's their turn to enter the ring, an assistant (on this day, a young Amish boy) pushes, cajoles and hits the horses until they enter the ring. This particular horse seemed confused, and the teen had trouble moving him along. After several raps on the nose with a switchlike stick, the horse continued to buck and fight. When Baker came out to check the status, he told the boy the horse was blind and led him in.

While not remembering the specific incident afterward, Baker freely acknowledges that blind horses do come through the ring. It's only illegal to sell them for slaughter, not for any other reason. He says he often buys those horses himself, then pays a vet \$35 to put them down, because otherwise they're a risk to his operation.

"I guarantee you that horse didn't get on a truck," he said emphatically. "It's not worth it if you're caught. But frankly, it makes no sense not to send a blind horse to slaughter. That's precisely the horse that *should* go."

Baker says he spends about \$2,000 a week buying horses that he needs to have put down. (Records were not available.) He bids just to keep the price of slaughter horses high enough to protect his sale, he says—adding that a horse is livestock and should be

treated that way.

Banning slaughter would hurt his business. Banning slaughter, Baker says, would hurt a lot of folks.

The rights of horse owners are exactly why Tim Case says the American Quarter Horse Association does not support the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act. Slaughter, he argues, allows for a humane, inexpensive method of euthanasia.

Case says the AQHA doesn't endorse retirement-and-adoption organizations as an alternative to slaughter because there's no guarantee those organizations won't relinquish ownership, thus making the horse a disposal problem once again down the line. But the bottom line for the AQHA is options. "It has to be the horse owner's choice," Case explains. "We don't encourage them to use one particular method over the other."

As far as becoming food at the end of the horse's life, the AQHA recognizes eating horse as a cultural issue that differs from country to country. Because the AQHA is an international organization, it does not offer an official opinion on equine consumption.

That stance has garnered the AQHA criticism by a group known as Blue Horse Charities. Blue Horse, which advocates for several equine-rights issues, is an offshoot of the Lexington-based Fasig-Tipton, a thoroughbred auction company that has sold horses since 1898, including the legendary Seattle Slew and Man o' War. One of its goals is to work toward the abolition of horse slaughter.

"As far as I'm concerned, slaughter has been this industry's dirty little convenience for far too long," says Blue Horse founder and Fasig-Tipton majority shareholder John Hettinger. "I don't think

it's right that a guy can walk away from his problem with \$400 in his pocket. I, for one, have known about this problem for 30 years, and I'm ashamed to say I did nothing about it for far too long. I shut my eyes to something I shouldn't have, and now I'm opening as many as I can."

Blue Horse is a supporter of the pending federal legislation to ban slaughter. Demetrios Karoutsos, communications director for the bill's original sponsor, Congressman John Sweeney (R-New York), says the congressman is hopeful it will pass this year. The bill, which was introduced with 172 co-sponsors, is likely to pass once it emerges from the three committees it currently sits in. A bill needs just 273 votes for passage, and the 173 co-sponsors are a good start, Karoutsos says.

While the AQHA may not admit to being pro-slaughter, even Case admits there may be a bit of hair-splitting in the definition of the term. Case, like many slaughter proponents, hangs on the main argument that without slaughter an estimated 70,000 unwanted horses would be left in the world. At a cost of roughly \$1,850 annually just to feed each one, that's \$130 million a year just to feed animals no one wants. That many, Case contends, would lead to greater instances of abuse and neglect.

Anti-slaughter groups dispute that claim. Joann Mauger, a humane officer with the Large Animal Protection Society in southeastern Pennsylvania, says slaughter and horse neglect are two very different issues. Abuse and neglect go on *now*, she says, at a staggering pace. Slaughter, she argues, is simply a trash dump for irresponsible breeders; eliminating it as an option would force higher responsibility, not increase the number of neglect cases.

Cathleen Doyle says a ban on slaughter would mean horse owners would have to their horses put down humanely in familiar surroundings. Most anti-slaughter activists believe shooting horses is far preferable than the ordeal of auction, transport and slaughter.

"I can take my horse out of the barn one morning and shoot him in the head, and that would be more humane than slaughter," Berry says. "Is it violent? Absolutely. But he has no idea it's coming. It's a much better end than a trip to the slaughterhouse."

When a racehorse named Cajun hurt his knee while running at Mountaineer Race Track, his chances of escaping slaughter were pretty slim. But he never made it as far as the auctioneer's gavel. Instead, he found himself running through the snow this winter on a beautiful farm with an incredible view in a small rural area outside Erie. Lucky for Cajun, his owner had a contact other than the killer buyer.

Beverlee Dee has brought many horses from Mountaineer to her Bright Futures Farm, just over two hours northwest of Pittsburgh. As a beneficiary of Blue Horse Charities, she has, in fact, placed several horses in the Pittsburgh area. Thanks to her decision to get involved in horse retraining and adoption about three years ago, Cajun runs and plays with a beautiful cast of characters including Shifter, Arturo, Ziezo, Dex and Zorro.

After deciding she had to do something to help the situation, Dee sold her home in Butler and bought the current site of Bright Futures Farm. Standing in the pasture, she radiates love and commitment to her flock. As she tries to speak, a horse named Lystra,

a grandson of the storied racehorse Seattle Slew, peeks over her shoulder, trying to get attention.

These horses are well-fed and loved. Some, too old to adopt, will stay here forever. Others will be adopted out after a careful screening process and will take on new, second careers as riding and show horses.

Dee has never been to a slaughter auction; she gets her horses through direct donations. But she is adamant in her feelings about the practice. Mention how close some of her stable came to that end, and she simply can't discuss it. She focuses on the accomplishment: They're safe now and will find good homes, just as others have before them.

Dee recently went back to a 9-to-5 job after spending two years at the farm on a full-time basis. Her workload is still there—now it simply occupies her mornings and nights. She gets up early before work to feed and care for the horses. When she arrives home in the evening, she spends a few hours in the barn taking care of chores and visiting with her charges. She grooms them, plays with them and talks with them.

It's hard to let one go when the time comes, but she understands that's her purpose in all of this. "As much as I love these horses," she says, "I realize there are others out there who deserve the same thing as Cajun and Shifter. I tell myself all the time that I should do more. I need to find a way to save more of these precious animals. They deserve it."

Even as she strives to do more, though, Dee realizes deep down that there's no way she can personally rescue every horse that's destined to end its days as a meal.

That's the bottom line. For every horse like Cajun, there's a horse like Southern Banjo. The only thing that ultimately will save them is a ban on slaughter. However, for every Bev Dee, Chris Berry and Cathleen Doyle, there's a Leroy Baker. And writing off the killer buyers and auction owners as the bad guys in this saga would be wrong-headed and short-sighted. It's easy to dislike them, but the fact is, they're making a living within the limits of the law.

The current role of the anti-slaughter forces is to save as many horses as they can and push for a change in the law. But more than that, they must serve in the very delicate checks-and-balances process with the dealers. The relationship is and always will be adversarial, but that doesn't mean it's not worth the effort.

It's tough to find a right and wrong in all of this. It all comes down to personal feelings. It is, as Cathleen Doyle says, a cultural and social-policy issue.

Even Baker agrees with that point. In illustrating it, he recalls a trip to a Canadian slaughterhouse from which he brought back a filet that had been taken from a horse.

He had the steak prepared Swiss-style in

the auction's kitchen and served it to the women working in his office without their knowledge. They loved it, he explained—until he told them what it was. Their reaction was an expected one: Some gagged, one vomited.

"It's all a mindset," he says. "It was great until they found out what it was." The meat tasted good to people who had never had it before, so what's the problem? Baker uses the story as a pro-slaughter argument—but it may serve to bolster the argument *against* the practice, which isn't about whether the meat tastes good or whether there's a market for it in other countries. The fact that those women got sick only after realizing what they were eating gives more than a little merit to the anti-slaughter forces' core argument.

"It's a cultural issue, not an economic one," Doyle says. "If you were writing a story about dogs being taken out the back of a shelter and turned into hamburger, no one would stand for that.

"As Americans, we don't eat our horses. We can talk the issue and study the issue to death, but in the end, that unchallenged argument is the only one that should matter." ○