

Powerful Dream

By Suzy Hopkins

In 1975 when I married my second husband, Michael, I was living in Derry, New Hampshire. My life-long dream was to have a horse farm where teenagers could learn about how a farm functions, about the animals and their needs, help with chores to build their confidence and learn how to ride horses in order to compete in the local horse shows. We bought a big old farm house and built a barn. The Department of Corrections was supportive financially since the participants were young people who had been arrested for non-violent crimes.

We called it 'Welcome Home Farm' starting with three horses of different sizes: a miniature for those afraid of horses, a rideable pony and a mellow old quarter horse. The kids varied as well: hard core you-can't-teach-me-anything boys to darling young men too afraid to show their sweetness in their neighborhoods. The girls were easier to deal with since their nurturing instincts were intact. They loved to search for eggs, making friends with the chickens. Many of these youthful offenders became like they were our own kids to me and my husband.

Hard work was a guarantee that you could stay at the farm. Most didn't want to go back to their neighborhoods. The boys were up early for morning animal feeding and then we let them run the tractor cleaning stalls and paddocks or plowing since we grew our own alfalfa. We grew our own food as much as possible which was a good lesson for these kids for when they returned to their own families.

At last my dream was coming true.