

Forgiveness

By Suzy Hopkins

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Since it was sunny and hot while I was patrolling as a mounted park ranger at Folsom Lake State Park I assumed my horse was thirsty. I rode my horse, Za Boe, up to the edge of the lake to take a drink. This lake is a reservoir that was built to provide drinking water for Los Angeles during the summer. As of July 1st a specific amount of water is released daily to flow down the American River to southern California. About six feet of additional exposed beach from the day before was shining in the sun. Za Boe approached the water carefully since he is an Arabian and they don't like water. He immediately sank up to his belly in the fresh mud. I was standing on the ground with my horse underneath. He was definitely stuck. Quickly I dismounted. Za Boe, in a panic, pulled himself out of the mud and ran up the beach and into the woods. Great! Park ranger's horses are trained to stay, untethered, with the ranger when they need to dismount. Oh, no! He was gone. Luckily I didn't sink much in the mud so I was able to start running towards where I had last seen him, calling his name. I could hear him crashing around in the woods. He responded to my voice, eventually stepping cautiously towards me. The wet mud had flown up from his legs during his struggle and subsequent fleeing so he was pretty much covered with the drying chunks. I greeted this sweet and scared horse in a dry area and attempted to clean the saddle off enough to look respectable. I WAS on duty.

His survival instinct had kicked in when he couldn't free himself. Even though Za Boe had abandoned me, I forgave him.