

Will to Live

How the future of my 2000 show mare changed forever in the spring of 2004.

By Linda Von Rotz



I'm a first time breeder—in fact, a first time horse owner—and opened my operation, the Shaide Alliance, with the purchase of a young stallion, Evening Shaide (*Simeon Shai x Bint Zlabiya). I later leased several well bred mares, and was elated on my third breeding attempt to get a filly, a beautiful bay no less, Mon Sharade (Evening Shaide x WCA Mon Cherie).

Sharade was sweet, gentle, beautiful and successful in the show ring from the beginning. She won champion junior filly against some stiff competition at her first show, and reserve champion at her second show. She never failed to reach the championship finals in her short halter career.

She was started under saddle as a 3-year-old. She was a beautiful, free-flowing hunter, very much a lady in her movement. I planned to show for a couple of years then retire her to broodmare status.

A few weeks before an area show, she came up lame. I scratched her from the competition so she would have several weeks to recuperate.

It was then, during a light exercise period in March 2004, that the accident occurred. The pastern bone of her right front leg completely shattered. I was living in Sacramento at the time, more than 100 miles away and after receiving this horrible news, I was surprised at how relatively calm I was. Perhaps not being there made it easier to remove myself and focus instead on how to make the best decisions for Sharade.

The news from the vet was as bad as it gets. The first phalangeal bone (long pastern) was completely shattered —“like a bag of crushed ice” were the exact words—and there was fetlock damage as well. He told me there was no hope, and was on his way back to the ranch to put her down.

I called Dr. Bob Morgan, owner of Loomis Basin Equestrian Medical Center, in Loomis, Calif., for a second opinion. He and his wife Cindy own and operate Mt. Pleasant Stallion Station in Lincoln, Calif., where Evening Shaide has stood at stud for several years.

The last thing I wanted to do was prolong Sharade's life if there would be only misery for her and I knew that if that was her future, Bob would tell me so.

The vet on site stabilized Sharade; I took the x-rays to Bob and the clinic's surgeon, Dr. Tom Yarborough, the next

ANATOMY OF A RECOVERY

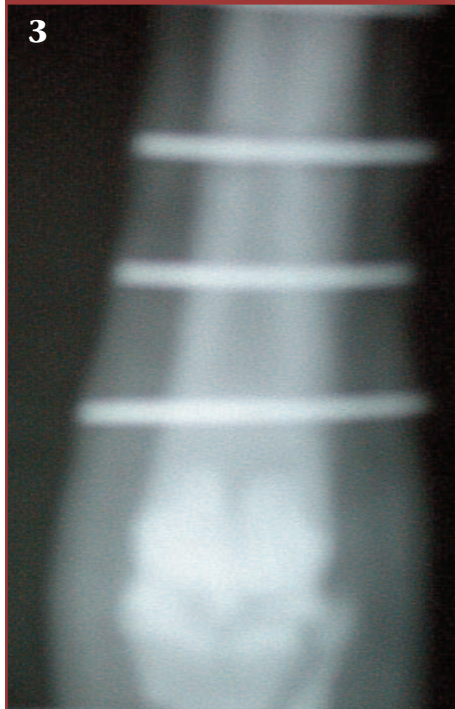
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Anatomy of a Recovery: (1) an anterior/posterior image of a normal lower limb (2) same view, showing Sharade's injury, in which the shattered long pastern bone resembled a "bag of crushed ice," according to the vet. (3) shot through the cast, this image shows the three pins through the cannon bone after surgery (4) Sharade's healing progress, after some 15 months.

Facing Page: Von Rotz and her 3-year-old filly, Mon Sharade, in 2003.

COURTESY OF DR. BOB MORGAN

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day. They agreed the damage was more extensive than originally thought, but an option existed that could give Sharade about a 30 percent chance of survival. They told me much of the success of the procedure would hinge on the mare herself, how she handled the procedure, the recovery and the confinement.

Cost was another factor. It would be well over \$10,000 for the surgeries, casts, x-rays, medications, special shoeing, etc. It all had to be considered, as I had other horses. But saving Sharade became my top priority.

Dr. Yarborough's post surgery phone call was very upbeat. The procedure went well but only time would tell how successful it would be. The next morning, he led Sharade out of her stall. She moved better than I could have imagined. He emphasized that her behavior and respect for the injured area would be the key—"it's up to her now," he told me.

For rehabilitation, Sharade then went to the Morgan's farm, where they gave her 110 percent attention and care.

April was hard. When I visited Sharade, I found her mostly down in her stall. Yet, for the next few months, she was a magnificent patient, very quiet, literally only touching her cast with her nose, never trying to tear or damage it.

By June, Sharade was in her second cast and appeared to be growing more and more uncomfortable. When this cast was replaced for a stiff bandage, we discovered a horrible cast sore that made even the vets wince. Yet she had given no indication that she was experiencing severe pain, despite having developed previous minor cast and body sores while she was down in her stall so much during April and May.

Treatment continued; Sharade continued to fight the pain and appeared to improve. She required specialized shoeing on both front feet, to offset the slight rotation in her good left front, and the correct angle and support to sole on the damaged right front. Her front feet looked like she was wearing orthopedic shoes, but she was walking comfortably.

By early fall, Sharade was being hand walked and responding favorably. She was turned out to a small confined area and hand walked in that space for a few days to familiarize herself with her new surroundings. On her first "loose" day, she was given a mild sedative and after a couple of uneasy moments for all concerned, seemed to

move around quite easily. It was her first true freedom in over eight months.

As the days progressed, she moved out a bit, occasionally bucking and trotting. Turns were slow and deliberate, but as she became stronger she became more daring, testing her movement potential even further. We all felt this was another sign of her desire to return to a more normal horse lifestyle.

I realize my experience doesn't happen to many people. Most horses would probably have been euthanized on the spot, given the slim chances for recovery and the steep costs, financially, emotionally and physically.

From the Veterinarians' Viewpoint

There appears to be neither rhyme nor reason for Mon Sharade's injury, which veterinarian Bob Morgan called "a freak accident." While he's seen this injury most often in cutting horses who work off the hind legs, a simple slip in the mud also could have been to blame.

"It's like a ski injury—you fall, the binding doesn't release, the leg starts to rotate and the torsion snaps it," he explained.

Despite the severity of the injury, Morgan knew from his surgeon, Dr. Tom Yarborough, that there was at least a chance to save the mare's life.

The surgery involved placing three pins through the cannon bone above the injury. A transfixation cast was applied, which redistributes weight up through the leg and works like "standing traction," Morgan said.

After about eight weeks in this cast, treatment graduated to a regular cast, then splinting and wraps as healing progressed.

The vets' biggest concern was foundering on the opposite foot but the mare was "watched like a hawk" and it never happened. Morgan attributed much of this success story to Sharade's own quiet ability to tolerate her rehabilitation through eight months of stall confinement.

"She just had the right personality to survive the injury," Morgan said. "She wasn't a quitter but she wasn't aggressive, either. Some horses just refuse to accept the cast and the confinement."

Today, Morgan said, Sharade may have a small amount of pain and stiffness. She's lost the mobility of the fetlock joint, a high motion joint that's needed for most types of riding. The fusing of the pastern joint is less of an issue, since it's sometimes fused anyway, especially in arthritic horses, Morgan added.

Yet there were many people who gave their professional expertise and were dedicated from the beginning to save my mare. I hope my story helps others realize this injury doesn't have to be fatal.

The ultimate success was hers—she realized the extent of her situation and had the innate intelligence to be an excellent patient.

Sharade will live out her life on my property. Perhaps one year soon she may have a foal on her side. I know the future presents a challenging path, but we will experience the challenges together.

I look forward to many long years of enjoying my beautiful mare and watching her enjoy life in her pasture. 🐾

Mon Sharade's saddle career is probably over but she is a beloved horse. Perhaps one year soon, she may have a foal on her side, when she can bear the extra weight of pregnancy.

"I've seen maybe six or seven injuries like this in my career and thanks to improved knowledge and surgical procedures, it doesn't have to be a fatal injury," Morgan explained.

"The owner has to be prepared for expenses and setbacks and the horse has to be worth it to them," he added.

For Linda Von Rotz, it was and continues to be.



Surgeon Dr. Tom Yarborough, left, and Dr. Bob Morgan knew Sharade's injury was very serious but believed there was a chance to save her life.