



what money they had left into his rehabilitation so he could continue his career as a riding horse.

Then, only a few days after I had worked on him and deemed him completely sound, I received an emergency phone call from his owners that any horse person dreads. The boarding facility where Strider was stabled had caught fire and literally burned to the ground. Even though the barn owner, and her family, risked their lives to get the horses out of the barn, there just wasn't enough time to open all the doors before the barn was engulfed in flames. Strider was one of the lucky ones, but he had sustained extensive severe burns over his body. A barn fire is tragic enough, unfortunately, of the 12 horses in the barn, 6 perished in the fire. Two escaped from their stalls unburned, however, the remaining 4 sustained moderate to severe burns. I was able to arrive at the scene in time to help with the emergency transport of Strider and three other burn victims to a local emergency equine clinic. Once there, the decision was made to humanely euthanize one of the horses that had suffered extensive burns and lung damage. Strider and the other horse were immediately treated and stabilized, but their prognosis was poor.

Strider's burns extended from his ears to his tail, all along his topline, and down his sides. In the following days what originally looked like superficial burns with singed hair, quickly transformed into severe swelling and blistering skin. Days later the remaining skin began to slough. Once Strider was stabilized at the emergency clinic, he was transported to my rehabilitation facility, Cedarbrook Veterinary Care in Snohomish, WA for the remainder of his recovery. I was able to treat him holistically using a combination of western medicines and alternative treatments. Strider was immediately started on a high protein diet with vitamin E supplementation, pain medication, antibiotics and topical treatments. In addition, we utilized supportive liver and respiratory herbs, along with a custom flower essence formula to help with the resulting emotional trauma from the event. Diane Garwood, with Healing Touch for Animals, generously donated her time to perform energy work to further help with Strider's recovery.

The year to come would be a test of Strider's strength of character. Many horses in similar situations become sour towards the people around them. This is largely due to the pain associated with treating their wounds day after day. Strider, on the other hand, engaged playfully with his team of humans. Even when things were so painful for him that I questioned if we had made the right decision to keep him alive, he gave me the clear sense that he knew we were helping him and, more importantly, that he wanted to heal.

Our office location, which is in the barn with the horses so that our staff members are able to create a close connection with the horses during the day, proved to be ideal for Strider. With this extra attention, his energy work from Diane, and frequent visits from his owners, he quickly became part of our barn family. It took weeks for Strider to turn the corner to where all of the necrotic skin that was going to slough off, had done so. It was an ugly process where deep, painful pockets of infection would rupture and drain. And even though towards the end of this process his patience began to wear thin, his strength of character remained intact and became an inspiration to us all.

Once this process finally ended, the real healing began. A healthy layer of granulation tissue formed over the extensive burn area, the skin edges slowly healed inward taking over a year for the skin and scar tissue to completely heal over the burn area. Still the healing process had been slow but steady until February 2012 (about 8 months into recovery) when it became apparent that his healing was at a standstill. At this point a thick, fibrous layer of granulation tissue had formed in the remaining area and the skin was unable to close over it.

By this time in Strider's recovery, his owners had been unable to pay for his care and his ownership had been transferred to S.A.F.E. (Save a Forgotten Equine). In order to continue with Strider's healing, surgery was needed to debride the granulation tissue and conduct a skin graft procedure. Strider's luck continued in the form of the Northwest Equine Stewardship Center (NWESC), a non-profit professional level rehabilitation organization that I co-founded. It was through NWESC that I was able to donate and discount my veterinary services, in partnership with my veterinary clinic Cedarbrook Veterinary Care, to Strider and other horses in the care of local horse rescue organizations. Through this collaboration of organizations we were able to continue his treatment, and care, and provide him with the skin graft procedure he needed.

It truly was a team effort! In order for S.A.F.E. to take him on, I donated thousands of dollars of veterinary care to make Strider's recovery affordable. My associate veterinarian, Dr. Penny Lloyd, and I donated 5 hours of our time for the skin grafting procedure. Our staff was on hand to provide moral support for Strider. Diane once again volunteered her time to be there to help support Strider (and all of us) for the intensive procedure. In fact, the procedure and overall experience was such a profound one for all of us, that

**I first met Strider in May of 2011 as a bodywork patient.** He was a new client that was presented to me as a performance horse who had been 'off' in the hind end. However, the problem had yet to be diagnosed or successfully treated. At 9 years old the warmblood gelding was not only huge in stature (at 18 hands) but who also had a huge heart and warm personality. He had many years of riding ahead of him - if I could help him heal from his musculoskeletal injury.

After a thorough examination, I diagnosed Strider with a pelvic injury. He was put into a comprehensive rehabilitation program utilizing acupuncture, chiropractic, stretch exercises and a specific conditioning routine to help him heal. With consistent rehabilitation, by the end of July 2011, Strider was on the road to recovery. When I was out to treat him he was back in work, and for the first time he was trotting and cantering normally.

While his owners were pleased with his progress they also shared with me that they urgently needed to re-home him for financial reasons. Still, their commitment to their horse was priority and they chose to invest



## Strider Undergoes a Successful Skin Graft Procedure

we now try to have Diane present for all of our major surgical procedures!

The skin graft procedure resulted in taking over 60 tiny circles of skin from his chest, and belly, to put into the burn site. While some grafts are expected to fail, the hope is that enough grafts will take, and skin cells will grow outward from each site until they become a solid sheet of skin and scar tissue. When we removed his bandage a few days later it was hard to tell if any grafts had taken or not and we were disappointed. However, that disappointment quickly turned to happiness when we realized that the grafts indeed had survived and were starting to grow! Day after day we watched the tiny circles of skin get larger and larger, soon forming a honeycomb appearance across the entire burn site. The even better news was that not only had a few of the grafts taken, the majority of them had! A few months

later, the grafts had coalesced into a solid sheet of skin and scar tissue, and he was released to S.A.F.E.'s care.

Because of the fragile scar tissue, and lack of hair to protect it, Strider will likely never be ridden again. For many horse people, when a horse can't be ridden they lose their 'value'. However, we believe differently. We feel that all horses have intrinsic value, and that Strider in particular still has incredible value for the individual he is, no matter if he can be ridden or not! We are hoping for a long term sponsor for him, so that he can come back to NWESC as a therapy horse in our Equine Facilitated Learning program, or better yet, for a forever home to come along where he can again have his own person.

Strider's strength of character through this incredible ordeal has changed the lives of the people that he touched. He truly was a gift to us all and we are proud

of the work we did to help him recover. Please take a moment to visit our websites [www.nwesc.org](http://www.nwesc.org) and [www.cedarbrookvet.com](http://www.cedarbrookvet.com) to find out how you can help assist other horses like Strider. For updates on Strider, please visit [www.safehorses.org](http://www.safehorses.org).

*Dr Hannah Mueller is a 2004 graduate from Oregon State University College of Veterinary Medicine. She has loved, cared for, ridden and trained horses most of her life – they are her passion. Dr Hannah offers a full service equine veterinary practice including acupuncture, chiropractic, sports medicine and more. Dr Hannah also runs a nonprofit equine program that focuses on education and professional level services to local equine rescue groups. Find out more at [www.cedarbrookvet.com](http://www.cedarbrookvet.com)*



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