

## MAGAZINE

The Source

Section E

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# A haven for the homeless

Ranch south of Livingston provides love, care  
for abused, sick or hard-to-place animals

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**N**arnia, a 31-year-old mare, nickered softly as she watched Michelle Feldstein carry a blue feed bucket across the frozen barnyard.

After Feldstein hooked the bucket to the fence, Narnia happily chowed down as the wind rippled through her thick, glossy winter coat.

Narnia was underweight when she came to Feldstein's Deer Haven Ranch south of Livingston in October.

She had been lovingly cared for at her former home at the Wyoming Girls' School, a rehabilitation and correctional facility in Sheridan. But, because of her age and poor teeth, she needed a special diet and additional care that would have been difficult for the school to give, said Kerry Eblen, a teacher at the school who is in charge of its therapeutic equine program.

When Feldstein agreed to take in the mare, Eblen was grateful that Narnia would have a comfortable retirement after so many years of service to troubled girls.

During a going-away party, the girls tied ribbons in Narnia's mane, and "a few tears were shed," Eblen said.

At Deer Haven, Narnia was put on a special diet, concocted by Feldstein and her veterinarian, that helped the horse gain 200 pounds.

Narnia is one of 47 equines — including horses, ponies, llamas, a mule, a donkey and a burro — that Feldstein and her husband, Al, have taken in over the years. They also have adopted more than a dozen chickens, 35 cats and three of their four dogs.

The animals all are named, and each has its own story.

Clark, a 2-year old horse, is going blind. Shasta has a malformation of his back right foot.

A horse named Fancy Dancer had been beaten and still is leery of people getting too close.

Jessie, a burro, has a pituitary problem that causes an extra-heavy coat of hair to grow.

Hawk, a 22-year-old llama, is one of what Feldstein calls "throwaways," animals bought for breeding and then rejected when they don't display perfect features.

Daisy, a 28-year-old cow, was owned by an elderly woman who refused to leave her ranch until she knew that her pet would not just be cared for but loved, too. Until Daisy died last year, Feldstein would halter the cow and take her for a daily walk.



Al Feldstein, a retired editor of MAD magazine, was a widower who had never owned an animal when he married Michelle, who grew up in Northern California.

When they moved to the 270-acre ranch 16 years ago, they bought their first horses, one for each of them plus one for their daughter, who still lives nearby.

Turning Deer Haven into a refuge for animals began when Michelle Feldstein found a horse running down the road near their ranch. The horse had been used in Yellowstone National Park as a pack animal. But, because it was too old to work, it was destined for the cannery.

That was the first of scores of abused, sick or hard-to-place animals that have come to live with the Feldsteins.

Because the couple gave up riding years ago, none of the horses on their ranch is saddled or bridled.

Please see Haven, 3E

# Haven

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"This part of their life is spent just being horse," Feldstein said.

A veterinarian and farrier regularly attend to their needs.

Feldstein cares for the animals as long as they have a good quality of life and are not in pain. She does not resort to extreme measures to keep animals alive. When an animal becomes too sick, she and the vet put it to sleep gently.

Feldstein does all of the outside ranch work, going out a couple of times of day to bring special feed and hay to the horses and shovel manure from the pens. Heated tanks keep water available 24 hours a day.

Even on a bitterly cold day with a fierce wind bearing down on the ranch, Feldstein tended to her chores with a wide grin and called delightedly to each animal.

"Insanity reigns here," she said cheerily. "Not everyone is able to do this. We are blessed that we can."

The other animals at Deer Haven are no less tenderly cared for than the horses.

Ten of the cats, including ones named Ole and Lena, live outside or in a large arena.

"Ole and Lena live in the arena," Feldstein said with a laugh at the rhyme.

An electric blanket keeps the arena cats warm in the winter.

The cats, too, each have their own stories to tell. Max, a gray cat with a massive fur coat, was found during a drug raid in Bozeman. Although Max had been well cared for, the Bozeman Human Society was concerned that he would be hard to place, so Feldstein gave him a home.

Al Feldstein doesn't work with the animals directly, although he dotes on the cats and dogs that live in their house. One white cat with a sinus tumor keeps him company in his studio as he paints landscapes and Western and wildlife scenes.

He also pays the feed and vet bills, not an inconsequential part of the operation.

"I never thought when I retired from Mad, my retirement fund would support animals," he said while seated in their home overlooking the Yellowstone River.

A guest house that the Feldsteins rent out in the summer helps defray expenses.

The Feldsteins no longer can take any more animals.

"We are topped out," Michelle Feldstein said.

The Feldsteins do not accept donations because they do not have a nonprofit status. If someone wants to help out, she suggests sending a donation to a local humane society or taking in an animal into their own homes.

The Feldsteins are doing more than just helping animals,



Michelle Feldstein nuzzles Charlie B, one of the 10 outside cats at the ranch.

*"Insanity reigns here. Not everyone is able to do this. We are blessed that we can."*

—Michelle Feldstein

animal lover who provides a home for down-and-out animals



A horse gets a pat on the nose from Michelle Feldstein.

Eblen said. They also are comforting those who can no longer care for animals like Narnia.

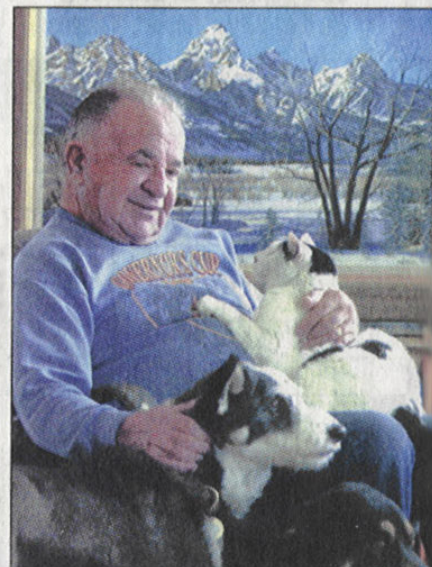
Narnia was born at the Wyoming School for Girls nearly 32 years ago. When she was 3 weeks old, her mother accidentally rolled in a ditch and suffocated, leaving little Narnia to be bottle-fed.

Over the next three decades, she became a great teacher, helping students to learn to trust.

It gives Eblen, and her students, peace of mind to know that Narnia is healthy and happy.

"I found an angel," Eblen said about Michelle Feldstein. "I can't say enough good things about her."

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One of Al Feldstein's paintings almost looks like a window as he holds one of the many cats in the home.