

# A PHOENIX BY ANY OTHER NAME



THE FINAL SEGMENT OF PHOENIX'S STORY PICKS UP ONE YEAR AFTER HIS NEAR DEMISE.

By Kim Hinson (KHinson322449)

From the day he was born, Phoenix loved being hugged, groomed and scratched, often darting around his standoffish mother to be near us. But after a week of veterinary technicians sticking thermometers in his butt several times a day, Phoenix had grown leery of people. For several weeks following his injury, I took to spending time in Phoenix's stall and pasture, sitting on

an overturned feed bucket. I just sat there, not taking his temperature, not examining him, just giving him space and an occasional treat, and hoping Phoenix would learn to trust and love people all over again.

We had another dilemma with Phoenix, which was that he was still too tiny for Megan to train him to drive, which was the goal of Megan's thriving horse business.

To earn money for college, Megan bought miniature horses, trained them to drive, and then sold them. Most of Megan's buyers were horse-loving, feisty ladies who, for a variety of reasons, wanted a bombproof mini they could drive to places like the post office, library and Dairy Queen. Phoenix's mother, father, sister and brother had already been trained and sold, so after deciding that he was just too small to be a driving horse, we focused on finding a forever home for Phoenix as a companion horse. And we knew just the person. A couple of years earlier, a kind, horse-savvy lady named Marilyn bought Phoenix's brother, Daegn, from Megan to drive around her little town of Tioga, Texas. Marilyn loved everything about Daegn's personality and jumped at the chance to get his younger brother Phoenix as a companion for Daegn.

The first thing to do, Marilyn decided, was to give Phoenix a new name, something that would fit his extraordinary cuteness, and her horse-loving friends joined the challenge. "We're down to Gumdrop or Tinkle," she told me over the phone. I nearly keeled over, and it was a good thing she couldn't see my bug-eyed, slack-jawed face. Despite our differences in naming horses, we knew Marilyn treated her horses like royalty, so we loaded Phoenix in our big, gray trailer, hauled him to her farm, and, grinning ear to ear, handed Phoenix's lead rope to Marilyn.

From the moment Phoenix stepped into Marilyn's life and Daegn's pasture, he transformed quickly from lovable little Phoenix to The Little Red Devil. "He's sure not acting like a sweet Gumdrop," Marilyn said, stunned. Phoenix chased, harassed and tackled Daegn, beating his gentle brother's back like a drum with his sharp front hooves. Phoenix ran away, refused to be petted, especially on his neck, and was a terror around fly sprays. With the farrier, he reared, thrashed his feet and threw himself over backwards.

Marilyn was no quitter, but Phoenix had her stumped. "I'm real sorry to have to give him back," she said, "but I'm afraid someone's going to get hurt. Probably me!" We hauled Phoenix back home, and Megan spent the summer working on his manners before putting an ad in the Dallas/Fort Worth area Craigslist. Megan, very picky about potential owners, carefully filtered 20-some inquiries down to two. The first was a family a few hours away that wanted to give Phoenix to their

daughter for her birthday. In email conversations, they sounded ideal. They had a goat to keep Phoenix company, and their daughter, though only 6 years old, loved horses. The mother was very enthusiastic and said that her husband was fixing up the small pasture next to their house, and there was already a small shelter, so it sounded like the whole family was on board. The mother was very persuasive, and it sounded like a perfect fit, so we set up a time for them to pick up Phoenix that Sunday.

Waiting in the shade of the lone hackberry tree in our barnyard, Megan and I watched an ancient pickup turn into our driveway. Two rickety wooden pallets, attached to the sides of the truck bed with baling wire, shrieked and clacked as the truck creaked into the turn, swaying like a drunken cowboy. Only the baling wiring, bunched in rusted tangles, seemed to hold the truck together. It was a grisly sight, and I could read Megan's thoughts in her popeyed expression. "Mom!" she said quickly. "Don't let him take Phoenix!"



**Although Phoenix was just intended to be Diez's travel partner on the road, the two are now best buddies and inseparable.**

Phoenix warming up with groundwork at a tour before heading to the front door to greet fans.



The truck squeaked to a stop and a scruffy, half-shaven man hopped out with a big grin, flashing maybe six teeth. “Now that is one cute little horse!” he said, looking at Phoenix. Still smiling, he said he wanted to load him right up so he could get back before his wife and daughter got home from church.

Megan, a fake smile fixed on her face, had a death grip on Phoenix’s lead rope. I forced what I hoped was a pleasant smile and told him that I wasn’t sure the back of his truck was a safe place for Phoenix to ride. The man’s face was the picture of surprise. “Safe?” he said, shaking a flimsy pallet vigorously, causing splinters to break loose, “Sure it’s safe!” After two tries he managed to lower the tailgate, and I got a better look at the dented metal truck bed, littered with bolts, scraps of wood, and peeling paint. “I’ll drive nice and slow,” he lisped between his teeth, meaning to reassure.

Getting a grip, I told him that if he wanted to take Phoenix he’d have to do a few things to make the truck bed safe first—like put in rubber mats, attach new metal side rails, and spread fresh shavings for a start. Thinking I should give him a fair chance, I told him there was a Tractor Supply about 20 miles away where he could buy everything. His smile and eyes hardened. “Now hold on,” he said. “I missed church to come get this little guy. We had a deal.”

I pulled a feeble smile, but didn’t budge, and repeated again that Tractor Supply was right down the road. Muttering something about a deal, he drew a crumpled bandana from his rear pocket, gave his nose a big honk,

climbed in his truck, and clattered away in a spray of rust and splinters.

Megan and I sighed in unison. Putting her arms around Phoenix, Megan vowed to be much more careful next time.

The second inquiry that made it through our gauntlet of pickiness was from the ranch manager for Clinton Anderson, the famous horse trainer from Australia. Clinton was looking for a small, but brave travel and pasture companion for his favorite gelding, Diez, and the ranch manager thought that Phoenix would be perfect. Megan agreed, and after exchanging many emails, they set a date to pick him up.

With Megan out of town, I waited under the hackberry tree alone this time, holding Phoenix’s lead rope while he grazed. I watched the ranch manager turn into our driveway pulling a horse trailer that looked like a shining palace on wheels. She parked the magnificent trailer, hopped out and walked towards Phoenix and me with a big smile. “He’s a cutie all right!” she said, leaning way down to pet him.

“Oh, he’s cute,” I agreed. “But he can be a stinker.” I told her straight out that sometimes he was hard to catch for anyone but Megan, that he didn’t always like getting his feet trimmed, and I meant to warn her about the rest of his faults, but she stopped me with a grin.

“Oh, we’re not worried about any of that.” She took ahold of his lead rope and said, “OK, little man, let’s see how you like this trailer,” and Phoenix marched into that mansion on wheels like he’d been waiting for it all his life.

## Author’s Note

Kim loves to entertain and charm her readers and listeners with stories of the ordinary and eccentric people, places and animals that have made

her life one big unpredictable story. You can read more about Kim’s stories and animals, and see pictures at [www.kimhinson.com](http://www.kimhinson.com).



Kim with Dorian, Phoenix’s sire.



From the moment Phoenix joined the Downunder Horsemanship team, he's been a fan favorite. He gets petted and kissed by fans on a regular basis and poses for photo ops and has given out his "autograph" more than once.

