

A SURPRISE **BIRTH**



PHOENIX'S STORY BEGINS, PART ONE

By Kim Hinson (NWC KHinson322449)

“Well,” said Dr. Farnon, finishing up his examination of our miniature horse mare, Felicia. “She’s not pregnant. She’s just fat.”

It all started on a sunny fall day in 2006. My daughter, Megan, bought a shiny, seal-brown miniature horse mare that had been running with a stallion, and we had high hopes that she might be in foal. Megan named the little mare Felicia, and Felicia loved to eat. At the slightest rustle of hay, Felicia nickered and trotted to the gate, all eyes and stomach. Even her forelock looked interested. The more Felicia ate, and the wider Felicia grew, the more excited we became. And the more we fed her.

None of our six full-sized horses dared come close to Felicia while she ate since she was not only cranky, but well armed. She had a built-in arsenal of weaponry in her fierce teeth and double-kicking back feet. We took this feisty attitude as another sign that she must be in foal, so we set to work on a birthing stall in a sunny, three-sided room at the far end of our barn.

Megan and I raked the soft dirt floor, hammered loose boards, spread fluffy shavings, and even built a small paddock around Felicia’s sparkling new stall. Felicia stood in the distance, watching every move we made. Wise and as wary as a mustang, she only came up to people for a quick treat or some hay. Other times she was as hard to catch as a greased pig in a rodeo.

We decided that we’d be wise to get our favorite

equine veterinarian’s opinion on Felicia’s due date, so Megan lured her into our gunmetal gray three-horse trailer, and shut the door. Tiny Felicia was a small, dark outline in the trailer as I pulled up to the vet clinic.

“We just want to know when the baby will be born,” I told Dr. Farnon, explaining that we already had her birthing stall ready.

Megan and I grinned at each other over Felicia’s head while Dr. Farnon examined her, his quiet face a picture of concentration. Patting Felicia’s rounded figure, Megan pressed for an answer when Dr. Farnon pursed his lips, stripped off the examination glove, and looked at us.

“Well,” he said. “She’s just fat.”

Our jaws dropped as one, and I doggedly pointed out that Felicia was, well, pregnant-looking fat. With a wide grin, Dr. Farnon agreed that she was fat, and said again that Felicia was definitely not in foal.

So not only were we not having a foal, but we were guilty of overfeeding one of our horses!



Megan and a newborn Phoenix size each other up. Felicia, Phoenix’s dam, is in the background. “Always with food in her mouth!” Kim notes.



Phoenix's first moments.

By the time we slowly pulled through the farm gate, the hackberry trees in the barnyard were throwing long shadows, and it was evening in the lonely new birthing stall.

Megan immediately planned a strict new diet for Felicia and willpower lessons for herself and me. All that summer, fall and winter we did our best to keep Felicia on a strict, healthy diet. Spring finally arrived with a

warm breeze and the smell of Bermuda grass. Felicia was fit and healthy, but just as fat as ever. And to our surprise, she seemed to be showing signs of pregnancy.

Megan and I were more than a little skeptical because the only “man” in the pasture with Felicia was our barely two-year-old, very miniature and very sissy stallion, Dorian. Felicia hated his guts, and Dorian kept his distance, scared to death of Felicia’s fierce attacks. She whaled at him with both back feet whenever he accidentally drifted near her. They never stood anywhere close to each other. Or so we had thought.

Megan looked hopefully at the sunny, unused birthing stall, and we sheepishly took Felicia in to see Dr. Farnon. This time he confirmed that, yes, she was in foal, and, he proclaimed, she was due in about four weeks! Megan grinned, patted Felicia’s bulging stomach, and said, “I take back every bad thing I ever said about you eating like a pig.”

The birthing stall had been sitting idle for a whole year so we knocked out the cobwebs, spread new shavings, and added fresh water and a mineral block. It was perfect. Felicia acted the queen, and we settled in to wait.

Less than a week later, the sun hadn’t been up long, and the morning glories were just beginning to unfurl, when my husband, Brett, looked out the kitchen window and drawled, “Looks like Felicia had her baby.”

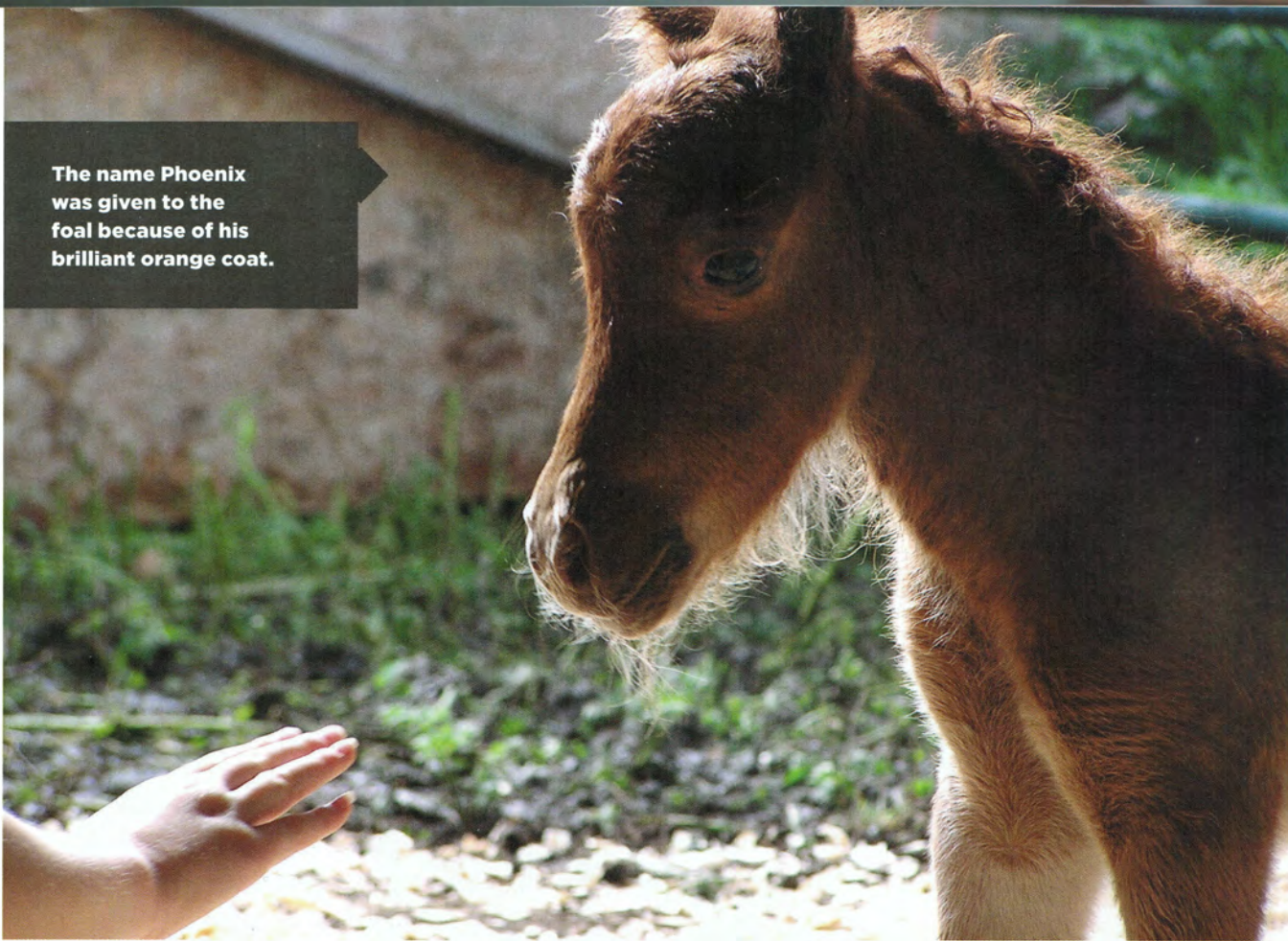
The effect was electric. Megan and I screamed at the same time, and flew down to the paddock. The birthing stall was golden with sunlight and shavings, and a tiny, orange miniature horse foal hugged Felicia’s flank. Megan watched him teeter across the thick bed of pine shavings, and it didn’t take her long to come up with the perfect name.

“Phoenix,” she said. “His name is Phoenix.”

In Greek mythology, a Phoenix is a long-lived royal bird whose body reflects rays of pure sunshine, and who is dramatically reborn from ashes time after time throughout its life. Early Christians adopted the Phoenix as a symbol of immortality and resurrection.

That’s all very impressive and high-minded, but we really named him Phoenix because he was orange. Bright orange. As orange as a blazing Texas sunset.

And though we didn’t know it yet, Phoenix—dramatically reborn and a symbol of resurrection—was the perfect name for our brave, strong, tiny foal.



The name Phoenix was given to the foal because of his brilliant orange coat.

Tell Us More!

"My daughter Megan and I were the lucky, original owners of Phoenix, Clinton's miniature pasture and traveling companion for Diez. Phoenix was born and raised on our farm in Van Alstyne, Texas, and from reading the *No Worries Journal* and the blogs on the Downunder Horsemanship website, it looks like Phoenix is now a well-loved member of your Downunder Horsemanship team and of the No Worries Club members. Clinton's fans might be interested to read that Phoenix had quite a surprising and even miraculous life before his current, wonderful career with Clinton and Diez."

When we read that message from club member Kim Hinson, we wanted to know more, and knew you'd want to get the nitty-gritty on Phoenix's beginnings too! Kim's sharing a three-part saga of Phoenix's life before Downunder Horsemanship.



Kim on her horse Jackson.

Besides being Phoenix's original owner, Kim is an outside loving, forever optimistic, yet frequently worried writer, professor and mother who lives in Vermont with four horses, two cats, 21 chickens, two hermit crabs, a dog, a bunny, a daughter and one husband. "We've cut back. We used to have 26 hermit crabs," she jokes.

Look for part two of Phoenix's story in the fall issue of the *No Worries Journal*.