

Best-laid plans of horses, men go astray

TIME AND AGAIN, the best laid plans of horses and men go astray.

I thought I'd done a great job of planning for both my farrier and equine veterinarian to work on our horses and ponies the same day.

Typically, my farrier arrives promptly. The same could be said for my vet.

However, two nights prior, my farrier phoned to say he was coming the next day between noon and 1 p.m.

"What? I put you on my calendar for Thursday."

"Yeah, well," he drawled, "tomorrow works better for some of my other clients so I switched days. Is that OK?"

I hesitated momentarily, then assured him it was fine.

Lacey, our quarter horse, is staying at a friend's house.

I'd planned on bringing her home late the next day.

His change in plans meant a change in my plans — and I'd have to wake before the crack of noon to get her home on time.

Bummer.

The next day, I retrieved Lacey, she got her new shoes, and the boys, Indy, Snowball Express and Goldie Boy, received hoof trims.

I expected the vet to arrive the next day at 10 a.m.

The morning came and went. I figured he was working on an emergency call so I busied myself with chores around the house.

At 1:45 p.m. I called his cell phone.

"Hi, Doc. You still coming today?"

"I have you on my schedule for tomorrow at 10," he said.

I groaned.

Veterinarian **Erik Splawn** arrived the next morning promptly at 10 a.m.

The main reason I'd scheduled the appointment was to have Gold's teeth floated.

The pony was experiencing rapid weight loss, plus, in spite of wearing a winter blanket, growing unusually long hair.

I'd also seen signs of his quid,

PENINSULA HORSEPLAY

Karen Griffiths



or clumps of hay, being chewed on like a wad of chewing tobacco and then spat out.

Teeth-floating is a routine and necessary practice with horses.

Unlike human teeth, equine teeth

grow continuously throughout life.

Sharp points grow on the outside edges of the teeth.

Those points need to be filed off; otherwise, they can become so sharp the act of normal chewing can severely cut the tongue and inside cheeks.

While some can live to their late 30s, and even an occasional 40, most equines have a life expectancy of 25 to 30 years.

Goldie Boy was 16 when he came into our lives.

I figured he was now about 24 or 25.

I retrieved Gold's registration papers from my file cabinet. The paper stated he was born in 1981. So, Gold is 29.

I guess I had noticed Goldie Boy getting older.

This was the first winter I've kept a blanket on him 24/7.

While I've always supplemented Gold's hay with grass pellets, recently I'd switched to supplementing with senior horse feed, plus I'd started feeding him apart from the others in a quiet place where he could take his time eating.

After realizing how old Gold truly is, I ventured outside to spend some time with him.

Staring into his dark brown eyes, I saw how worn and tired they looked.

I stroked the silky soft hair on his neck before gently trickling my fingers across his back, massaging the bone as I made my way past his hips.



KAREN GRIFFITHS/PENINSULA DAILY NEWS

After filing sharp points off the outside edges of Goldie Boy's teeth and noting most of his teeth had worn down to mere nubs due to old age, veterinarian Erik Splawn explained the red gashes on the cheek were caused by jugged edges, or points, which had grown so sharp that normal chewing had cut and ulcerated the jowl.

There was no denying Gold's geriatric body.

I also had a hunch I knew the cause of Gold's rapid demise.

When Dr. Splawn arrived, I removed Gold's blanket.

He ran an expert eye over Gold's body and asked if the pony had fully shed his coat during the summer.

I shook my head no.

"Well, with his age and all his clinical signs, we don't have to give him a \$300 test to prove he's Cushingoid."

Equine Cushing's disease is caused by a small, benign tumor in the pituitary gland.

Visual signs may include a long, wavy, overgrown coat; an increase in appetite, drinking and urination; developing a potbellied appearance; laminitis; and recurrent respiratory and dental problems.

Gold's also arthritic.

I could have chosen to euthanize Gold then and there, but I wasn't ready.

Dr. Splawn explained ways I could help Gold be comfortable and happy.

The multifaceted approach includes full, not just supplemental, twice-daily rations of a low-carb, high-fat diet of grass pellets mixed with a complete senior feed; a daily tiny dose of Previcox for arthritis; and pergolide mesylate to moderate the Cushing's.

I gave him the go ahead to sedate Gold to float his teeth.

After finishing he propped open Gold's mouth to show me most of the teeth were worn down to the gumline.

I also saw the cuts on his inside cheek that had been caused by jagged points, which Dr. Splawn had filed off the edges of his teeth.

It's only been a few days, but

already Gold is gaining weight and seems to be more comfy and pleased.

Events:

■ Feb. 27, 1 p.m. Junior Rodeo Royalty tryouts will be at Baker Stable. For more information call Teresa Ballou 360-928-9691.

■ April 23-25. BCH Leave No Trace training in the Port Townsend area. For more information, e-mail baysinger@centurytel.net.

Karen Griffiths' column, Peninsula Horseplay, appears every other Wednesday.

If you have a horse event, clinic or seminar you would like listed, please e-mail Griffiths at horse.play.kbg@olympus.net at least two weeks in advance. You can also write Griffiths at PDN, P.O. Box 1330, Port Angeles, WA 98362.