

Beyond Sanctuary is veterinarian created, non-profit organization that provides rescue and sanctuary to all animal species, as well as wide spread education, focusing especially on holistic animal care.

IN THE BEGINNING (Beyond Sanctuary Inc.)

September 3, 2019

We closed on 45 acres of magic and beauty located in Wright County, Minnesota. This will become Beyond Sanctuary Inc. – Education and Retreat Center. It's also located just 10 minutes from our house and the property will need some work to house the many animals we rescue. This was the beginning of it all. I don't think we even had a name for what we would become...within the last week, our family has grown by 7 horses and 1 mule. They are a special group, and we call them the Gate Keepers of our new Beyond Sanctuary Inc. We welcome Doc, Cy, Sandor, Apollo, Elmer, Orin, Roman and Selwin (you can read about each of them on our website) and 6 of the horses came in basically the last 24 hours. Their souls are pure magic.

Elmer the mule was absolutely one of a kind. Dr. Melissa Shelton, rescued this very old, skinny, and discarded mule; with hardly enough teeth to chew his food. He was destined for slaughter – but became an important member of the “Gate Keepers” – the first equids rescued as part of Beyond Sanctuary Inc.

Elmer required an emergency surgery for an abdominal hernia, and while the surgery itself went well, Elmer did not wake up from anesthesia. We feel Elmer's presence in everything we do. He is a guardian of the Sanctuary – ever present, like an evergreen tree. Read below for the full story of how Elmer came to us.

Here's Elmer's Story and how he became the first of the “Gatekeepers” for Beyond Sanctuary.

Written as a post on facebook by Dr. Melissa Shelton –

What a special, special “You are not a number” Sunday...

Elmer. Number 4266. I am sure this will end up as a very long and emotional post. So I may do this one as a word document or pdf. He deserves nothing less than a book.

Here is what I finally wrote to Elmer...

Dearest Elmer,

It's been difficult to find the right time to write your story. Time passes so quickly - with so much to do - it helps to fill the spaces. Spaces that if left empty - can be quickly filled with loss. Let's start from the beginning...

Doc & Cy were already home. It was truly an odd month at the rescue pen - many horses were carried over into the next week's lot - but also new horses were still being added weekly.

September 23rd - Monday - you were listed. It wasn't hard to fall in love with you immediately.

**4266 JOHN MULE APPROX
20+YRS
\$ 325**



What a guy!!! This guy is phenominal and is a total sweetheart. He is very thin and will need help getting up to weight as winter comes on as he needs to put on about 200lbs - 300lbs. It can be done but he needs to get on a proper feed program ASAP. He's gentle and SUPER broke.

Category:	Horses
Subcategory:	Mule
Ad Type:	For Sale
Name:	4266
Gender:	Gelding
Height:	15 hands
Registered:	No
Country:	United States of America
Price:	\$ 325
Location:	Cannon falls, Goodhue, Minnesota, MN 55009

**Listed as #4266 John Mule
Approx 20+ years \$325**

You were skinny. An old knowing face. Accepting of everything. You served a long life - and now this was how it was to end. Being shipped off to slaughter. You didn't deserve this. You deserved to retire in style!

September 24th - Tuesday - I texted the pen and began arrangements to see if I could pick you up before my aromatherapy conference started on the 26th. The other complication...we were picking up our friend Saskia, from the Netherlands today: September 24th, at 3pm. But the airport is closer to the pen than to our house...

Thankfully, planes have WiFi and all sorts of ability for messaging these days. I messaged our friend, "Would you be okay if we picked you up with the horse trailer? And went to pick another horse? An old Mule?"

"YES!!!" was the response. After over 12 hours of travel - surely exhausted, Saskia was 110% behind saving another life! No matter what. And, the pen was willing to have someone there until 5pm for us. Perfect timing - even if it would be by the skin of our teeth - we would try to make it there by

4 pm so that we could load up by our 5pm deadline. We hoped that Saskia would sail through customs, so we could make it in time.

I had a "message" come into my head the night of the 23rd, that told me your name was Elmer. When I told Jennifer at the pen that your name would be Elmer, she replied "That's EXACTLY what I called him yesterday...no I'm not kidding."

So, Elmer it is. Not a number - 4266 - you had a name. A strong old fashioned name - befitting a Mule. And no - the thought of Elmer's Glue NEVER once entered my mind until others brought it up. NEVER. Not once. I did think of Elmer Fudd - but that still was not your true namesake. Elmer. Just Elmer. A strong, lovely, old fashioned name.

We would need to arrive at the pen "no later than 4pm." The plane was due to land at 3pm. Collect luggage. Clear customs. And GPS gave us an estimate of 24 minutes to the pen from the airport.

All was on our side that day. Saskia landed, cleared customs, and we were ready to leave the airport at 3:24pm - trailer in tow.

There were three other horses we wanted to meet while picking up Elmer. A little Shetland pony a friend was interested in, a paint horse who captured my heart with his beauty of spirit, and "off the track Thoroughbred" (OTTB), and "the one with the sore front feet". They all stuck in my head. So we figured we could just meet them while picking up Elmer.

Those other horses have a story all their own...that will be shared later. The Shetland was already sold. The OTTB soon after that. My daughter also begged and pleaded for us to meet "the white horse" (who of course had already caught my eye as well).

We did arrive before 4pm at the pen. We had an hour to meet horses, do paper work, and load whoever might be coming home on this ride to freedom & love with Elmer.

Saskia was one of the first to see Elmer. He was tucked away in a corner of the pen. He instantly came straight to Saskia and "slimed her". His Love Slobber on her front of her jacket. He was so kind. So caring. So special. He had a mission. Get me out of here.

We quickly looked at the other horses. We had a deadline, and there were so many other horses. There had to be at least 30 other horses in the pen with Elmer at this time. The white horse (Apollo) and the paint horse (Sandor) would join Elmer on this ride. But there were others that would haunt us during the drive home.

Elmer easily accepted his halter. Likely he had many, many years of being haltered and asked to perform a service for his humans. But true to Mule form - Elmer knew he had to get out of there. And even though Saskia led him one way - he barreled the other way. The way to the trailer. The way home.

Elmer made no delay. He was going - and he was going NOW! He drug Jennifer and Sandor to the trailer. Elmer had such determination - and was blazing the way. Sandor and Apollo would have to follow.

And hour and a half later, we arrived home. Home. Such a special word, with hopefully a whole new meaning for these three. Elmer, Sandor, and Apollo all came home on the same trailer.

Elmer was first into the trailer, but then last out. His patience was running thin, he wanted out. He was still polite, even if a bit of a bulldozer! His personality became just that. A polite bulldozer. Never in a mean way, but loving and almost as if he just couldn't stop getting closer to you. He'd plow right into you for a scratch.

He integrated well into the herd. Not much to-do about anything. Sandor seemed to become his faithful companion. Elmer would eat initially in one of the shelters, and Sandor seemed to always be standing with him. Sweet companions.

October 9th - the farrier came out to trim the Gate Keepers for the first time. Elmer was a complete gentleman.

October 10th - the equine vet came for a full day of exams, teeth checks, teeth floating, deworming, and whatever else the horses needed. Elmer's exam revealed that he only had 9 teeth (molars) when he should have 24. This was likely a big reason why Elmer was so thin (although he had already started to gain weight on a special senior hay cube he could gum to death). The vet prescribed a regimen of Calf Manna, Cracked Corn, Senior Pellets, Rice Bran, and oils to start increasing his weight gains, especially before winter.

Elmer was VERY happy to have extra special meals. Roman had also come to us incredibly underweight, and so was also on this weight gaining regimen. It didn't take long for these two boys to recognize the "food train" when it arrived. Nicker and "almost braying" which became Elmer's trademark - as morning and evening extras were served.

Elmer got his very own orange feed bag - which helped prevent dropping grain - but also protected his meals from others. Elmer started to gain weight quite nicely.



On **November 3rd** - the morning started off as expected. 8am - deliver feed bags to Roman & Elmer. Both so happy to see me - and ready and willing to start chowing down. But then I turned to the other side of Elmer as he ate - and saw a large lump on his left flank area. His left rear leg, over his femur was also swollen. Of course it was a Sunday. I called his Equine Vet - who agreed that we should have an emergency exam to check Elmer out.

Elmer had a bit of sedation - and then a rectal exam which confirmed he had a tear in his abdominal wall - resulting in an abdominal hernia. It was suspected that Elmer either fell or was accidentally pushed by the other horses into a tree or shelter causing his delicate and thin muscling to rip. His weight loss had also eaten up his muscle mass, making it weak and susceptible to injury. The treatment for this sort of injury is usually to wait several months if possible to have the

ripped muscle tissue scar and heal - so that the hernia can be sutured. And if mesh was needed to repair the hole - it would be able to "hold" a suture and not just rip, and rip more as the sutures were placed.

Elmer was given pain medications and some antibiotics, just to be sure that he would be comfortable. And then we would wait. Wait for his muscling to have the best chance at a successful repair surgery. For Elmer's safety - he had to be separated from the rest of the herd. Some of his intestine was coming through the hole in his abdominal wall. Even a slight bump, as horses often do, or a kick could be very dangerous for him. We made a pen next to the other horses,



and Elmer had to stay next to them, yet away. He was not super thrilled with this prospect - and would "bulldoze" the gate in a slight protest at least once a day. Then, he'd settle down as we explained we had to keep him there for his own good. But, he would make sure we knew that he had an opinion.

Before the hernia - Elmer had discovered napping in hay. Most people would have been annoyed at horses wasting hay - especially with the current hay shortage we are experiencing. But Elmer was so angelic, so peaceful sleeping in his hay - I made a promise that he could lay in hay as much as he wanted. But once his hernia happened - he would not be able to lay down anymore. The hernia caused him discomfort - and surely it may have ripped further if he had not remained standing. The beautiful pictures and video of Elmer napping in his hay - was his last time he could fully lay down in comfort.

Elmer seemed to have a bit more swelling under his abdomen on November 4th, but we anticipated that there would likely be some edema due to the injury. He was still eating great, drinking, urinating and defecating normally. We would continue to just wait.

Before Elmer's hernia - we had promised to get him another Mule friend. As Mules are not quite horses, and not quite donkeys - we thought he deserved a friend who thought just as he did. On Monday, **November 4th** - a Molly (girl) Mule was posted to the auction pen. She was over 20 years old, just like Elmer. Our hearts were broken. We promised we'd get him a Mule friend, and here was a perfect match. But he could have to be isolated for months waiting for surgical repair. And after surgery - confined to a stall during recovery. It would be lovely for a Mule friend to be side by side with him - but would that be fair to her to ask her to be in a stall next to him? Would they even like each other? We wanted what was best for Elmer, but naturally did not want the Molly Mule to have any hardship in the process of keeping him company. You'll have to read JuneBug's (Juney B's) full story - but we did end up getting her. She is lovely.

My brain never tends to put sad thoughts into my head. I am pretty good at keeping a positive outlook on things. But while with Elmer, before we had fully decided to take Juney B - a distinct sentiment came into my head. I'm pretty sure Elmer put it there now, as it is truly not a thought pattern I would typically have. "At least if Elmer can't stay with us, we'll still have a Mule"... I quickly purged the thought from my mind. Why would I think that!? I was horrified and sad all at the same time - while filled with such love for Elmer.

Elmer was a caretaker. His gentle soul always seemed to be right there for you. Old, wise eyes. An older and knowing soul. What a special, special being he was (and still is).

I struggled with the decision to take Juney B for some time - but in the end - Elmer helped me decide to take her. Being with him - solidified my decision. No one else had stepped up to take Juney...so - we committed to taking her home. A mule friend for Elmer.

Juney was brought home on **November 7th** - a Thursday. Her "through the gate" meeting with Elmer was not all that impressive actually. He seemed a bit miffed at her. Leave it to a Mule - to have the opposite opinion of whatever you think they will be thinking! But Juney integrated well with the rest of the herd - and especially with Sandor (just like Elmer).

But, on **November 8th** - the day after Juney came home. Elmer took a turn for the worse. His hernia had enlarged, and now extended to the other side of his midline. His sheath was even swollen. We made a call to the vet - and they recommended that we trailer him into the equine hospital for an ultrasound and further exam. We hooked up the trailer, and took him right in. We were fit in at noon - and his exam and ultrasound revealed that the hernia had "dissected" - and

ripped much farther all over his abdominal wall. There was no other option but to try surgery if Elmer was going to survive this. The vet checked his books, cleared his schedule and we were left waiting to have Elmer enter surgery within hours.



*Thank you to everyone
who loves Elmer* 💖

Elmer still had his Mule opinions during his exams. He was certainly not down and out. He still gave much grief towards having injections or an IV catheter placed. The veterinary technician gave us all a great and much needed giggle when she told Elmer "Your Donkey is Showing!" And so it was. Elmer decided he did not want to walk into a hospital stall. Politely stopping with all of the stubbornness of a Mule - right where the cement floor changed to black stall mats. Nope - no thank you. Elmer did not want to enter that hospital stall. The hospital staff said that was fine - he could stand in the hallway.

Elmer was clipped, cleaned, his mouth flushed for surgery...and then he was walked into the surgery suite. I whispered sweet nothings into his long ear, and gave him one last kiss on his forehead. Those damn thoughts popping into my mind again..."What if this is my last kiss to him..." DAMN IT! Do not think that! Why are you thinking that!? And maybe Elmer was again telling me something I did not want to hear.

Even though I am a vet, you don't always get to watch surgery or have special provisions. I get it. It can be a bit nerve wracking to have another vet standing over your shoulder. Or asking you

questions during a difficult surgery. I don't know the equine vet well enough for him to know I wouldn't turn into a blubbering idiot during surgery...and one truly never knows. Surgery on your own fur baby is such a different matter. So, I waited in the waiting room. Waited with my daughter Ramie and Haley (our employee and knowledgeable equine person who used to work at this very equine hospital) - just like every other animal guardian. Waiting for any sort of update.

It would be a while. We hadn't had any lunch. So, the staff encouraged us to head down the road for a bite to eat. Then when we came back, we would have an update for sure. We were still at the restaurant when Haley's phone rang. It was one of the doctors on staff - not scrubbed into the surgery. And she would be putting the surgeon on speaker phone to talk with me. A call during surgery...my heart sank.

The intestines had become compromised in the hernia. Certainly if we had waited over the weekend with Elmer - he would have declined drastically - and likely would have suffered horrible pain. As it was now - the surgeon would have to remove the compromised bowel section, and stitch healthy bowel back together. THEN...try to repair the hernia. All extending

the length and risk of surgery and subsequent healing. We decided we had come this far - do everything we could for Elmer - unless he was obviously suffering. Then we would let him go.

We returned to the hospital, and waited. And waited. And waited. We had arrived right before noon - and it was now 7pm. Elmer was out of surgery - but had to wake up safely.



There was a huge risk of him tearing open his abdominal incision while waking up. If you have never witnessed an animal waking up from anesthesia - it can be a bit chaotic. With dogs and cats, we can easily cradle them if they thrash around a bit - and it is normal for them to remain laying down. But with horses and other equine - they stand. And so - part of them waking up from a very drunken state - includes this need to stand. And it can be a bit dangerous for those around them. Humans can be smashed, horses can fall and be injured. It is a risky, but necessary step of waking a horse up from anesthesia. We had to wait more. And hope that Elmer could wake up with grace and ease.

The hernia repair had actually gone better than expected. The mesh was implanted and sewed in - and it seemed to hold very

well. However, Elmer never did stand again after surgery. We went home around 8:30pm - when it was clear there was not much more we could do by waiting there. Hospital staff would be present all night, and we were instructed to get some rest, and the doctor would update me in the morning.

The call came at around 8:30 the next morning. Elmer had never recovered fully from anesthesia. Around 1 am he may have experienced a stroke, and exhibited signs of paddling consistent with seizure-like activity. At approximately 3:30am - Saturday **November 9th**...Elmer passed away.

My heart sank. I couldn't even think of what questions I wanted or needed to ask. Finally - I asked "what do we do now"? There were options of cremation or sending his body to a landfill... None seemed to be the right choice. Elmer needed to come home. We would bury him at HOME.

We had to leave immediately that morning to meet the hospital staff and pick up Elmer's body. Everything about dealing with an equine body is not pretty. They are huge. They are difficult to move. But, I have always felt we owed it to animals to handle their remains with the utmost respect. So although we still had to use a forklift to move Elmer - we projected as much love and respect into the process as we possibly could. It was very difficult to see Elmer in such a lifeless form.

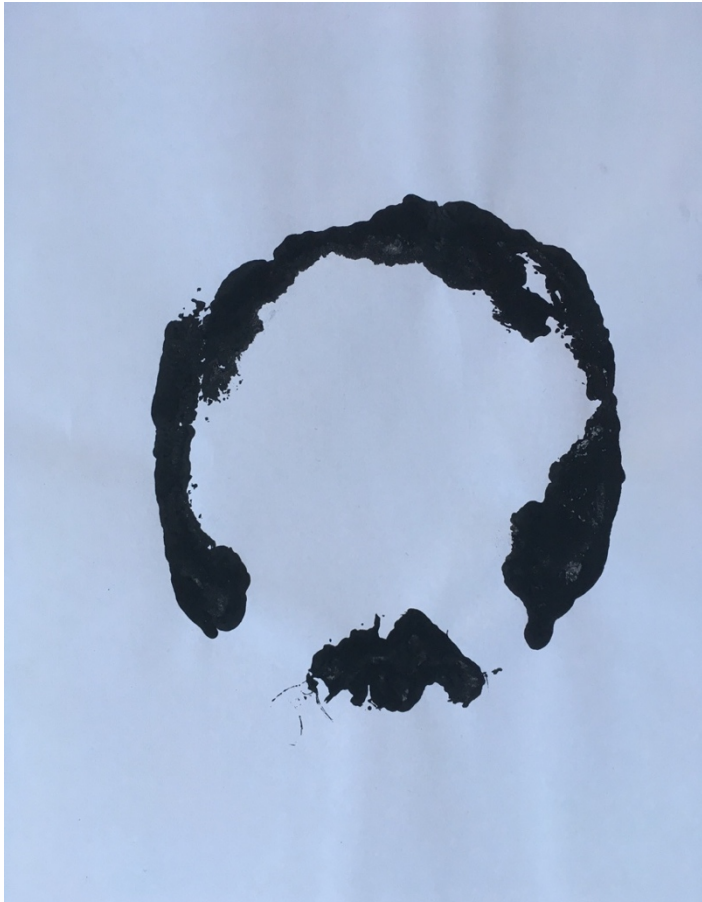


We brought Elmer home, and while we had first thought that he should be buried at the Sanctuary land (not where he was at our home with the herd). But, then he would be alone until spring. That just did not seem right. While his final resting place may be at the Sanctuary - his resting place now was near his herd. At his Home. The last Home he knew.

If you followed along after Elmer passed – you'll know that it was difficult. There were strong moments. And there were moments of many tears. We honored all of the "Gate Keepers" on **November 11th**. On 11-11. A very special day, and at a very special time 11:11am - we honored Elmer specifically. We gave him a special memorial service and collected his mane and tail. There are beautiful artisans who make bracelets, rings, wire wrapped ornaments, keychains, and many other mementos that include the mane or tail hair of an equine friend lost.

The night before, I made cement hoof prints of Elmer - which will forever remind us of the imprint Elmer made on our hearts. And not just my heart, or those who were in direct contact with him.

Elmer touched the hearts of thousands. Literally thousands. You loved him too. You cried with us, you laughed with us, you remember with us. I cannot thank everyone enough for the companionship and support as we lost this special friend. He was a force to be reckoned with. He bulldozed his way into everyone's heart...and I am certain - he will remain there for all eternity.



(Shown at left – Elmer’s hoof print in ink.)

Rest in Peace Elmer – for I am certain you are still with us. Everyday. Every minute.

I feel your presence, and the importance of your short time with us.

I will forever campaign for the old and forgotten. The toothless and discarded.

*You have impacte
Beyond Sanctuary's mission forever –
that is your legacy.*

“I know Elmer watches over everything now. He was “First Through the Gates” of the original gate keepers. I miss you everyday, Elmer. We all miss you.”

– Dr.Melissa Shelton



**In the beginning...
Beyond Sanctuary Inc.**

On September 3, 2019 – we closed on 45 acres of magic and beauty! This will become Beyond Sanctuary Education & Retreat Center. It is only 10 minutes from our house - and still needs some work to house the many animals we rescue.

We are obtaining our 501(c)(3) status as a charitable non-profit. We've already rescued a total of 12 slaughter bound equids. First our two Donkeys and now 10 more (8 horses, a mule, and a pony).

There are so many wonderful stories to share. I will be introducing you to the new members of the herd and will feature other animals on our farm as well. We also have the ups and downs with rescuing animals in need. We hope that all of our sponsors and angels can follow along the progress of everyone as you laugh with us, love with us, even cry with us.

Beyond Sanctuary Inc. is not only for animals but for humans to heal as well. Veterinarians have the highest suicide rate of any profession. It is an epidemic right now, and not just in the United States but worldwide. The Sanctuary will be a respite for veterinarians in need. We will provide travel expenses and hopefully a stipend as well so that animals and humans can heal each other. There is so much beauty and innocence in the animal world and we need to reconnect to that energy.

If you feel it in your heart to donate to our animals or if you have known a veterinarian who has committed suicide. If you have appreciated your veterinarian, as I have appreciated our Equine Vet this morning, for interrupting his Sunday coming from Church with his wife in the truck, still in her church clothes...then please donate. Our village is strong. Our angels are amazing. I LOVE that everyone is becoming part of Beyond Sanctuary. It truly is for everyone who ever dreamed of having a Sanctuary or animal rescue of their own. I want everyone to be able to visit and experience what their love can build. And the good that can be done, and the healing that animals provide to our hectic lives.

More words from Dr. Melissa Shelton:


Why start a rescue or sanctuary if you have to raise funds and donations?

I thought this sort of mind nugget needs an answer. My answer is not that I cannot fund the horses or other animals that we have. I am fortunate in that we have an additional animal related business that is successful. And with that success, I've chosen to invest into a sanctuary that can help more animals.

So why ask for donations? I think that it is an exchange of love. Love as a material thing, but also as an energetic love. The bond that everyone can create through photos, videos, and stories before they even get to meet one of the sanctuary animals in person is a very strong thing. And I can guarantee you, that everyone at the non-profit 501 (c)(3) Beyond Sanctuary Inc. feel the immense amount of love that is given when you donate even \$5.00.

It is a way to show that you care. That you love animals that you haven't even met. That matters so much. And the Universe provides that extension of love – so many times over.

We relay that love every moment of every day...to our souls, and to the spirits of the animals at Beyond Sanctuary. We tell them..."do you know how many people love and care for you!?" It is powerful. Never underestimate what your donations mean. For animals, but also to myself, my co-workers, and to the other veterinarians and animal care staff members around the world. We will heal some of the wounds of the world. Together. And with your donations, it can mean that we can help even more animals in need.

This is what Beyond Sanctuary is all about! It's a village of wondrous people. And it's meant for all of us to be one 

We do this together. Not just myself. Not just my husband and me. An entire village. Whether physically present or in spirit. But when you get to work WITH people (not have people work for you)...who get it. Value it. And feel it everyday... that is magic.

Shown below, here is Juneey B's (JuneBug's) first moments home at our farm. She is getting her essential oils blend applied, and being told she is home at Beyond Sanctuary Inc.

Photo credit to Mary Sue Stevens.



**Photographer
Mary Sue's
words...**

“This photo illustrates the compassion and love each one of these lucky animals receives upon arriving to Beyond Sanctuary under the care of Melissa and Winston Shelton.

Look at your faces, this makes me tear up. Love is the greatest gift of all. So glad I get to share in this with photos.”