

Payton Davenport

The Search for the Wild One

There was at least sixteen of them together, standing around and grazing on the grass. Their coats were rough and resembled patches from their hair shedding. They were calmer than expected, but there was one stallion who kept approaching and antagonizing the others. This stallion was black and a little smaller compared to the others. Although he was smaller, his determination was undeniable. He was determined to get a reaction from at least one mustang. After multiple tries, he finally did. A warmer, yellowish red mustang finally gave in to his nagging. It was a sight worth seeing. As both of their front legs came off the ground in unison, the fight began. This may have been something that was worthwhile to see, but the other horses were not bothered at all. Most of them did not even take the time to turn their head even the slightest bit.

Who knows what the stallion wanted? Was it a mate or just attention? Either way, these wild animals were a sight to see. Roughly 150 of them flood the valleys of McCullough Peaks in Cody, Wyoming. After they were brought over from Spain in the sixteenth century, they have freely lived on the lands. They have become loved by many and even a symbol of freedom and the west. Their beauty and grace draw people in.

Addison has always been a lover of horses for as long as she can remember. Addison grew up in Chesapeake, Virginia. Her childhood was full of love and joy. Her favorite memories were spent with her mom at the barn that was only five miles from her house. She used to go to the local barn almost every day if her parents allowed her. The barn was where she met her first best friend, Clover. Addison saw Clover the first time she had visited the barn when she was six.

Once she saw Clover, they were never apart. Clover was a majestic horse with soft eyes and a dark brown coat.

Addison always knew that horses would be in her life forever. When she was with them, it was like she was in another world. Whether it was riding or just caring for them, horses always made Addison feel special. They cared for her just as much as she cared for them. She knew when she was finally old enough that she would have her own barn and adopt her own horses.

She was now 30 years old and a successful veterinarian. She owned her own barn in Virginia with her husband Joshua. Although Addison had everything she wanted, she was still chasing the dream of adopting her own horse. Something was so special about them that she had to have her own. She grew up following a herd of wild horses in Wyoming. She kept track of them through social media and the pictures people posted. That is where Addison found one horse that she knew she had to have. She had never thought about adopting a wild horse until she saw this one horse. The horse she wanted looked similar to Clover which made it even more special.

Addison decided to do more research on wild horses and to see if adopting one today would even be a possibility. After doing some research, she found that the best way to learn about the wild horses and to find the one she wanted would be to go to Cody, Wyoming. Addison decided she would leave the first week of May which was only two weeks out, so she had a lot of planning to do.

Cody is a town in the northwest portion of Wyoming and is along the Shoshone River. It has a population of approximately 9,828 people who have a median household income of \$56,356.

Cody is a popular spot for tourists because it is located 52 miles from the Yellowstone National

Park east entrance. This explains why there are around 1,938 companies in the town. Cody was founded by Colonel William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody and in the mid-1890s the town was developed. There is now a museum dedicated to “Buffalo Bill” in Cody and is a popular spot for tourists as well.



Cody, Wyoming was only three short flights away but once Addison stepped foot off her last flight, she knew that she had made the right decision. It was eight at night and the sky was a mixture of pastel blues and pinks. The cool air hit Addison faster than she could get off the plane. The wind was blowing harder than she had ever experienced except for the occasional storm back home. She hoped it would not be like this the whole trip. After surviving the five-minute walk outside on the runway, she finally made it inside the Cody airport. At first glance of the small airport, she thought if this was how the rest of Cody was then she was in for a surprise. The walls were covered in posters of the wildlife, and the first one that caught her eye was one of the wild horses. She could not wait to see them.

She got her luggage and headed only a few blocks down to an air bnb she had just booked. She arrived at the address for the bnb which was in a small neighborhood. While she was heading into the house there was a man next door waving at her. She waved back and the man said “Hi, I am William. You must be the guest staying here this week. The owner of the air bnb said I would have company this week.” he said with a laugh. Addison responded with “Yes. My name is Addison. Nice to meet you.”, William replied “The owner said you are interested in the wild horses. I have seen them a few times, boy are they a sight”. Addison laughed and went on to explain why she was here in Cody. She hoped everyone in Cody was this nice because if so, she may have to stay longer.

Around 7 am. the next morning Addison woke up freezing, she did not realize how cold it was going to be. Luckily, she packed a lot of layers. After she walked down the block looking for a cup of coffee, she decided it would be the right time to call the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) office because if she wanted information on wild horses, they were the ones to call.

She called the BLM and spent thirty minutes talking to a woman named Trisha. Her call went smoothly, and Trisha offered to take her out into the field to learn more about the wild horses in McCullough Peaks just a couple miles away.

Addison was ecstatic to have the chance to see wild horses up close. She could not wait to see the horse that she had been dreaming about for all these years. She knew that if she saw the horse there today that it was a sign that she needed to adopt.

The Bureau of Land Management was established in 1946. In 1976, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act was passed, and the BLM was said to manage public lands and subsurface

estate under its jurisdiction. This all helped create the Bureau of Land Management's current mission of sustaining the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use of enjoyment of present and future generations.

The Bureau of Land management has many programs, and one of which is the Wild Horse and Burro Program. This program protects wild horses and burros on 26.9 million acres of public lands across 10 western states. This program has had a long history. For instance, in the 1950s a woman called Wild Horse Annie noticed the way wild horses were treated by western rangelands, so she decided to start a grassroots campaign. Nevada Representative Walter Baring introduced the law called "Wild Horse Annie Act" which would prohibit the use of motorized vehicles to hunt wild horses and burros on public land. This bill became public law 86-234 on September 8, 1959. As years passed the population of wild horses steadily kept decreasing. To stop the decrease of the population of wild horses, The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 was passed and signed by President Nixon. Under this act, it says that wild horses are declared living symbols and the spirit of the west. They also include that wild horses and burros shall be protected from capturing, branding, harassment, or death because they are an essential part of the natural system of public lands. In this act, wild horses and burros are defined as unbranded and unclaimed animals on public lands of the United States. The Wild Horse and Burro Program then created its mission using the available management under this act. The mission states its goal is to keep healthy wild horses and burros on thriving public rangelands.

As time has progressed the Wild Horse and Burro Program has maintained wild horses and burros in good conditions and has tried to protect the health of our public lands. This means they need to control the wild horse population. There are currently 82,000 wild horses living on public lands; however, only 27,000 can safely live in balance with wildlife and livestock and to

keep healthy lands. In order to fix this problem, the process of adoption was created. People can adopt wild horses if they pass certain criteria and can provide a good home for the horse. All they must do is pay a \$25 adoption fee and then they are provided the horse and \$1000.

Addison met with Trisha at 11:00 am. prompt to head out to the McCullough Peaks Wild Horse Management Area. Trisha's warm personality perceived over the phone was exactly how she was in person. She was a middle-aged woman with long, blonder hair. She had an upbeat and positive attitude about wild horses.

After what felt like five seconds to Addison, the twenty-minute ride out to McCullough Peaks Wild Horse Management Area was over. Trisha leaned over to Addison and said, "We are here! Are you excited?". Addison replied, "Yes but I do not completely understand what exactly we are doing out here with all this equipment?" as she pointed to a large amount of stuff packed away in the back. Trisha then went onto explain "I decided that I would take you out into the field and show you how we control the population." Addison still confused said "I thought you just allow them to be adopted?", Trisha quickly responded, "Yes, just not here.". Addison's mood drastically changed, and she was starting to regret even coming out here. She did not want to leave empty-handed.

In 2011, The Bureau of Land Management in Cody, Wyoming implemented a field darting fertility control program with the goal of controlling the population of wild horses. They implemented this program to be in the McCullough Peak Wild Horse Management Area (HMA). This area is 110,000 acres and had a herd size of 110 horses in 2011. The amount of land and

horses available during this time made darting valuable as an alternative. Their goal was to have a herd size of 70 to 140 in the future.

The process of field darting included a liquid drug called porcine zona pellucida (PZP) being injected into mares older than one year. This liquid drug blocks the sperm receptor cell on the egg, so it only affects the sperm and no other part of the body. This system allows the BLM to control when certain wild horses can become fertile.

The program has had plenty of success since its start in 2011 which has led to non-profits such as Friends of a Legacy or FOAL to gain interest. FOAL formed in 2005 with a mission to protect and preserve the wild horses in the McCullough Peaks management area. With their mission in mind and seeing the success the BLM was having in Cody, they now help by purchasing the PZP for the BLM.

Addison spent about five hours with Trisha before she saw a horse get hit with a dart. “They usually know when they are going to be darted,” Trisha said as she was talking about the horses. “They sometimes play games with us or act out because they are so smart. One time I saw one of the horses get mad at another horse because they thought they had hit them, but it was just the dart.” Trisha explained. Addison was starting to feel okay about the whole process because it kept the horses in the wild, but it helped with the population. Addison asked “Why exactly are the horses bad? How is having too many a problem?”. Trisha answered with “Well there are no predators after wild horses so there is a large amount of them, and they create a large competition with the other species. The competition for water is getting worse than it has ever been, and the land health is decreasing. It is getting to the point where the lands cannot support all the horses. However, we cannot just get rid of the horses because we need them to help the whole ecosystem

thrive. That is why we just need to help control the population”. Addison nodded her head in understanding.

Addison was still determined to find the horse she had been keeping track of for so long and after describing it to Trisha they went on the look for it. After one hour, they spotted the horse grazing on grass. Addison said, “She looks so peaceful out here”, Trisha nodded in agreement. Although Addison could not adopt the wild horse she wanted, she was at peace knowing that the horse in McCullough Peaks was being protected



They drove back to the BLM office in Cody and right before they said their goodbyes Trisha said “Hey Addison if you are still interested in adopting a wild horse there are plenty of other horses out there. You can go online to see where and they even have schedules on their website for information regarding when and where if you want to see them before adopting.” Addison said with excitement “I would love that. Thank you.”

Source Notes

Chapter 1: The Search for the Wild One

Page 1: These descriptions are all based on what I saw in Cody, Wyoming of wild horses. All descriptions of Addison and her story are completely made up.

Page 2: Picture was taken at Cody Airport by Payton Davenport as we landed. May 14, 2019.

Page 3: The descriptions and story on this page were based on my personal experiences in Cody but again Addison's story is made up. The character Trisha was a stakeholder we talked to who works for the BLM in Cody, Wyoming. The paragraph describing Cody has information from the Census Bureau and the Cody official website. Also, Addison arrives in Cody in this paragraph and she meets a man named William. William was a stakeholder I talked to in Cody and does live next to an Air BNB, so this portion was based on my conversation with him.

Page 4: The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 was where I found information regarding this specific act and its purpose. I also used the Bureau of Land Management's website to find information as well. From the main BLM website, I was able to find the Wild Horse and Burro program which gave me more information regarding "Wild Horse Annie", its mission statement, etc.

Page 5: I continued to use the Wild Horse and Burros Program web page for more information regarding population size. Also, on this page, Addison's time with Trisha starts back up and this is again made up but what Trisha and Addison are saying are based on my own experiences.

Page 6: This information regarding the field darting in McCullough Peaks was from our meeting with Trisha while in Cody and from the BLM website. The information regarding their conversation and population on this page is from a video I watched called "Horse Rich and Dirt Poor".

Page 7: The end of the chapter is made up. The picture of the wild horse was taken by Payton Davenport while driving in the McCullough Peaks Management Area.