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Ironing it all out

If nothing else, period movies are useful for reminding us that the good old days were often not so great for women. My friend Carole and I were watching "The Girl with the Pearl Earring" on DVD, and the scenes with the eponymous girl boiling canal water in huge copper vats and spooning in gooey, caustic lye soap to do the laundry was unpleasant, but only on an intellectual level.

Because, really, not many people my age who didn't live in backwater communes had to do laundry by hand, so it's rather unimaginable and we can't get that worked up about it.

No, the real visceral reaction came when Griet was walking through rows and rows of highly wrinkled sheets she had just hung up. We looked at each other and had the homemaker version of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Ironing sheets! "Remember how we learned to iron doing pillowcases?" Carole asked. Of course I do — there was no permanent press until the mid-60s, and we ironed sheets, pillowcases, handkerchiefs and every other piece of clothing we owned. Some of my friends even had to iron their male relatives' boxer shorts.

Ever wonder why they make ironing boards height-adjustable? Because ironing is such a tedious chore that as soon as we got big enough to see over the top of the lowest setting, our mothers decided it was time to spread the pain around.

Oh, sure, they tried to make it seem like a game at first — "Honey! How would you like to iron for real?" (Of course we all had play ironing boards and irons — it was the 1950s, after all.)

So ironing Daddy's handkerchiefs was our introduction to the joys of domestic indentured servitude. It was fun at first, doing big girl stuff like Mommy did; but after the first few, it quickly became as boring as a trip to the auto parts store with Dad. After that, when you saw the ironing basket, you just wanted to cry.

I was watching a movie set in the 1950s with my daughter when a character goes to the refrigerator and pulls out a bundle of clothes encased in Saran Wrap. My kid was totally mystified, so I had to explain the concept of sprinkling clothes with water, then wrapping them up to make them easier to iron. You put them in the fridge to keep them from drying out while you ironed.

If they sold a special sprinkler bottle, we never had one. Ours were made by fitting a special cork with a sprinkler head on it — made expressly for that purpose — into a glass pop bottle.

And everything you hung out on the line had to be ironed. I got my first idea about infinity from a clothes pin bag of my mother's. It had a drawing of a typical 1950s housewife hanging up a load of clothes, using a clothes pin bag which had a picture of her using a clothes pin bag which had a picture of her on it, and so on until the pictures were so small you couldn't see them, but you just knew it went on forever.

I don't iron anymore. I will buy a blouse on sale at Ross for 10 bucks, then pay \$3.50 a pop to have it dry-cleaned. Stupid, maybe, but life's too short to stand behind an ironing board.

I guess my kids have taken my cue, because they don't iron, either. They mostly buy stuff that doesn't need ironing, or they send it to the cleaners then leave it for a while until they can afford to get it out.

Dry cleaning stores are like jail for clothes — they do time until they get out on a work furlough, then it's back to the joint.

Because frankly, better they should do time than me — at the ironing board. Or maybe I should do what my daughter did — find the right sort of man. Among his many virtues and fine qualities, my son-in-law irons all my daughter's clothes.

From my perspective, greater love hath no man than this, that a man pick up an iron for his wife.



NEW HOME
At left are some of the lucky donkeys who have found a home at the Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue in Acton, where Mark and Amy Myers harbor many abused and neglected animals. Below is Old Wiley from Tehachapi, who then led on a merry chase before succumbing to thirst, and, below that, the Rescue's slogan. **Chelley Kitzmiller photos**

Every rescued donkey has a story to be told

By **CHELLEY KITZMILLER**
Special to the Valley Press

"The Ass You Save Could Be Your Own" reads the sign at the entrance of the Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue in Acton. The sign is just the first thing that gets your attention. The number of donkeys, nearly a hundred of them, is second.

There are donkeys with backs so swayed they look like swing seats, donkeys with bandaged legs, elderly donkeys with greying muzzles, big donkeys and little donkeys. You have to wonder: What brought them all here?

Mark Meyers is eager to tell you. Every donkey has a story, some tragic, some heart-warming. He knows them all. "Ilene has a severe leg deformity. She was left to die alone. Friday is a pony mule with a hormone imbalance. Wyatt is scarred and battered."

Amy Meyers, Mark's wife, is the founder of the rescue. She bought a donkey off the Internet, Izzy. "She was a year old and very lovable," Mark said. "Using her as the pattern of a 'normal' donkey behavior, we discovered that most other donkeys in our area didn't act like her."

"Amy started buying donkeys that she found at feed lots, auctions and from people's back yards. After a few months of medical treatment and love, we found that most could be rehabilitated. After we had several, we decided to start a donkey rescue as a means to place them in good, permanent homes."

Amy, the mother of five children, said, "It is a great feeling to know that you have found your purpose in life."

Mark operates the business end of the operation and handles most of the training and gentling. "I've never met a donkey I didn't like. Wish I could say the same about people," he mused.

Many of the donkeys come to the rescue terrified of people. A frightened donkey can be a handful. Once such a donkey tested Mark's patience. In spite of offers of pets and carrots, the donkey bit or kicked him every time he went near. He had almost given up when an idea came to him.

Mark is a tall man, more than 6 feet in height. Donkeys, even big donkeys, aren't as tall as a man. Mark wondered if his height was the problem, so he took a chance, sat down on the ground in the newcomer's stall and waited to see what would happen. If he was

wrong, he'd know it soon enough. The donkey's behavior changed immediately and because it didn't feel threatened, the gentling process could begin.

Another thing worth noticing about the Rescue is how clean it is. Nearly a hundred donkeys produce a lot of waste, but it is quickly removed and disposed of, which cuts down on flies, which cuts down on eye problems, which cuts down on medical bills, etc., etc., etc.," Mark explained.

Mark is a wealth of donkey-related information — information about proper feeding, worming, shots, hoof trimming and castration. He calls himself an animal behaviorist, and one of his goals is to dispel people's fear of donkeys. "So many people are afraid of getting kicked," he said. "When a farrier works on a donkey's hooves, and the donkey tries to kick his hand off, the donkey isn't trying to hurt him, he's just trying to shake the farrier's hand off."

During a TV appearance on "Beverly Hills Vet," Mark demonstrated how a donkey will give off a sign before he kicks. "A donkey will always warn you first."

Since almost all the jennys (female donkeys) that the Bureau of Land Management, or BLM, rounds up are pregnant, Mark doesn't believe in breeding donkeys and won't adopt out a jack (male donkey) unless he has been castrated or a jenny unless the adoptive parents agree not to breed her.

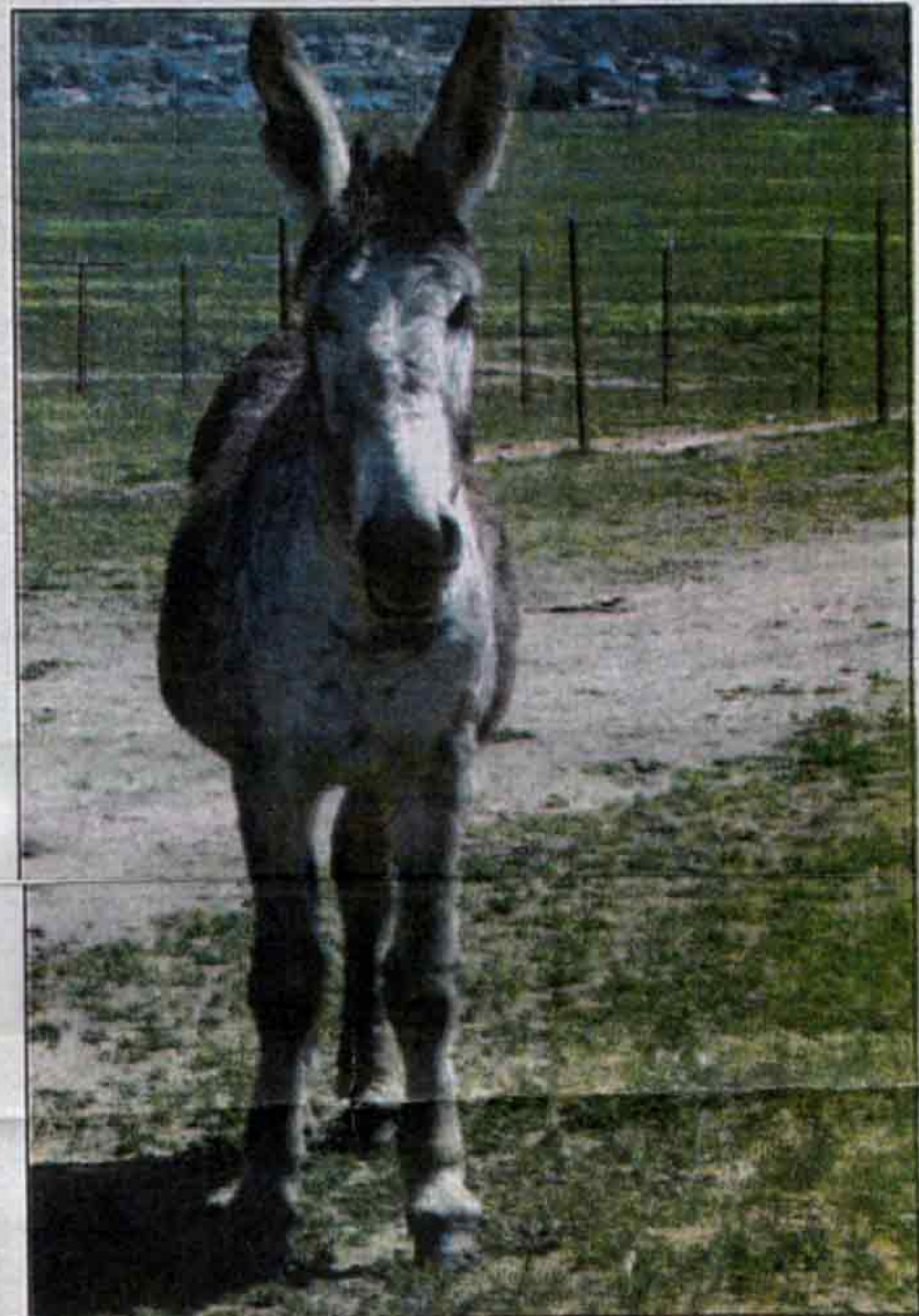
Two years ago Mark and Amy received a call from a Tehachapi resident who had adopted two older, uncastrated jacks from the BLM to add to his herd. They were wild, and even after being corralled for several weeks, they couldn't be tamed. Once they were allowed to roam the ranch, they started fighting each other over the jennys. The wounds couldn't be treated because the animals couldn't be caught.

Mark was quick to offer help. "Amy and me, we can catch any donkey!" he likes to boast.

The donkeys had the run of a 1,200-acre ranch. Mark and Amy were prepared to spend as much time as needed to catch them. The ranch hand had corralled the four tame donkeys for hoof trimming, shots and worming. Amy and Mark joined in to help. One of donkeys bolted and broke Amy's finger, but that didn't stop her from the job she had come to do.

The first old jack was comparatively easy to catch, but the other one, Old Wiley, eyed them from afar, then kicked up his heels and galloped away the moment

See **DONKEY** on B6



PEOPLE-FRIENDLY

At left, Mark Meyers holds two babies, who are people-friendly only because of the time he has spent with them. Above, Nanci Anderson, a Tehachapi resident, keeps her distance so mama won't get nervous.