

# Black Bart's Story

By

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He came out of the woods one April night to gaze over the fence at my neighbor's mares inside the fenced pasture. He was big, black and beautiful. In the dusk light I could not tell if he was a donkey or a mule. I stopped my car to watch him. I rolled down my car window to call to him, and in a flash he ran back into the woods. I drove down my rode slowly every night when I came home from work hoping to see him

again. One night he was standing at my neighbor's fence again. I was worried that he would wander onto the busy rode less than one-quarter mile away, so I called the Sheriff's office. A Deputy came to investigate and wrote up a report. He said if I could contain him in a fenced lot, they would send the wrangler to pick him up. He was wild and ran whenever I called out to him. I continued to stop every time I saw him and talked to him. He became accustomed to my voice and quit running away when he heard my voice. He was curious. He switched his ears to listen to my voice and then moved away from me to listen to the mares. He stood at the fence as if he was on guard.

The months passed and I kept stopping to talk to him. My neighbors expressed concern. What would he eat over winter? Where would he find water during the hot Texas weather in August? Who lost him? Worse yet, who might have just turned him out because he was too much to handle and feed? I assured one neighbor he would find his way through the woods to find water, and there was plenty of grass and brush for him to eat. Another neighbor called to ask if my donkeys were getting out at night. I assured him that my donkeys were staying inside their fence. He brayed loudly and my donkeys would answer him. One neighbor

was upset that he stood outside her bedroom window at 3 AM and brayed. Actually, he brayed all day and all night. He was lonesome for company and all the other equine were safe inside their fences. Several of us put grain out for him to eat over the winter. We could not entice him to come close even with grain. He ate the grain after we went back into our homes. I looked out the kitchen window one morning in February, and marveled at how dark jenny's coat looked in the early morning light. Soon I realized it was the wild equine that had wandered our neighborhood for months! He had broken down my fence and jumped in to join my four donkeys, Jenny, Jamie, J.J. and Jasper. I watched him with Jenny. It was now obvious that he was not only a donkey, but also an intact jack that broke into my

pasture  
to mate  
Jenny! I  
had sold  
my jack  
four  
years  
earlier  
when I  
realized  
how fast  
my  
little  
herd  
would  
multiply  
with him



present. He was gentle, but I did not want more donkeys. He also looked for every opportunity to break out of the fence and wander the neighborhood with his herd. They always returned at feeding time so I could put them in the corral and get the fence repaired. Now it looked like I would get more donkeys, whether or not I wanted more. He was mean to my geldings, biting, kicking, chasing them until they stumbled and fell to the ground. Most of all, he was teaching them bad habits that they picked up quickly! The black jack kept the geldings away from their mothers. I fed him grain every morning when I fed my donkeys. I talked to him, as well. He ate the grain, but kept his distance from me. He had a wild look in his eye. He looked even more beautiful now that I could see him closely. He was black and shiny. My geldings lost weight from the stress. They were nervous and obviously afraid of the intruder. I named him Black Jack and continued to talk to him every day. Now I fed and

talked to him twice a day, as I increased the feeding schedule to help my donkeys put some weight back on.

One day Black Jack followed Jamie into the corral. She was now in heat. I ran outside and closed the corral gate. I called the Sheriff's Department and the Deputy came. He called the wrangler, but he was not available that morning. Black Jack rammed the corral gate until it broke open. The Deputy said this was a difficult situation. He said the law addresses what to do if livestock are on or near a busy street or highway. It also addresses what to do when the owner is known. He said they have no jurisdiction over a wild donkey on private property that was not causing a dangerous situation on a street. One option he gave me was to have Black Jack shot. I said that was not an acceptable option for me. He said he would file a report, and drove away. Black Jack was back in my pasture with my donkeys, trying repeatedly to impregnate Jenny and Jamie. A lieutenant from the Sheriff's Department called and gave me the same information: a wild animal on my private property was not their problem. It was my problem!

My son suggested that I call Leah at the American Donkey and Mule Society (ADMS). I wondered how someone in Lewisville, Texas could help me when she was located more than one hundred miles away from my home. I made the call. Leah put out a notice to ADMS members and two days later I received a call from the Texas Burro Rescue. A week later, Bart drove up from San Angelo to pick up Black Jack. He did not bring a horse or a rope, only a huge trailer with another jack that he had rescued earlier that day. He explained that the owner was in the hospital and would not be able to care for him again. The owner's family did not want him and contacted Texas Burro Rescue. He was a gentle jack that Bart haltered and walked into the trailer. That would not be the case with Black Jack! I had placed hay in the corral earlier in the morning, so Bart opened the gate to let the donkeys go in. My donkeys went in to eat the hay. Black Jack did not follow them in. Bart gave me instructions of what he wanted me to do- be quiet and move slowly where he signaled me to move. He said we would take away Black Jack's options until he went into the corral on his own decision, without force from us. Black Jack did eventually go into the corral and Bart ran up to close the gate. Black Jack ate hay with the other donkeys while Bart pulled the trailer up to the corral. He positioned the trailer at the gate opening, set up panels and went into the corral. Black Jack gave Bart the run-around in the corral, but eventually he went where Bart directed him to go. Black Jack was finally in the trailer with the other jack after 1.5 hours of encouragement. Bart reported that it had never taken him so long to trailer a donkey, it was the worst rescue he had done! I told

him I almost named him Black Bart, because he was such a pirate! He raped my jennys and tortured my geldings.

Bart called me the next day to give me an update. He said he liked the name Black Bart and had re-named him. He already had a donkey named Black Jack and they looked nearly identical. Bart had discovered why Black Bart was so wild. He said he discovered his right eye had been gouged out and he was blind on that side. I realized that I had never seen his right side as he always positioned himself so



he looked at me with his left eye. Bart went on to say he had handled Black Bart and was able to give him his vaccinations at the end of the day without even haltering him. Watching Bart work at my place made me think of the horse whisperer. Bart was a man that could talk to a wild donkey and get the donkey to do what he wanted him to do.

Texas Burro Rescue is an organization that captures wild burros, castrates the jacks, trains them to accept a halter and allow their feet to be trimmed, gives their vaccinations and finds a good home for them to go to. Their web site tells the story and I encourage everyone to look it up: [www.donkeyrescue.org/texas](http://www.donkeyrescue.org/texas). Bart said Black Bart would not be adopted out because he would not be safe due to the blindness. He said he would keep him, providing love and a good home for the rest of his life.

I think of Black Bart often and anticipate the rest of his story. Will he settle down after he is castrated and enjoy life on Bart's ranch in San Angelo, Texas? Bart estimated Black Bart's age to be 6 years old, so he has many years yet to live, now that he has a safe home. Will Jenny and Jamie give birth to his offspring? Time will tell the rest of Black Bart's story.