

Willow's Soap Opera Life *by Marty Felix*

In late May of 2010, some friends and I were driving on the 7-mile, bone-jarring, four wheel drive road from Indian Park (IP) to Monument Rock (MR). This is a heavily wooded area, and we rarely see horses in this section of the range. Much to our delight, Sid's band emerged from the pinon/juniper forest and raced down a barren hillside off to our left. Sid's gray mare Ashes had a precious little sorrel foal by her side. The four of us jumped out of the vehicle with our cameras and barely had time to snap a few pictures before the band disappeared into the trees. It was a "wow" moment for all of us. We named the foal Willow, and this is her story.

Sid's band spends most of the time in the rugged wooded area between IP and MR. Once in a while, they slip out of the woods and make a guest appearance in the big sage field at IP. They risk life and limb and winter on the sheer face of the Book Cliffs, and when it snows, they can be seen from the desert with a spotting scope. It's no surprise that Sid's band is one of the wildest bands on the range, because where they live, they rarely come in contact with people. As FOM member Billie Hutchings says, "If you see Sid's band once a year, you're lucky. If you see them twice in one year, it's divine intervention."

I consider myself "lucky" to have found this elusive band in May of 2011 when Willow, who had turned chestnut, was a yearling. My next sighting was in April of 2012, and Willow was even more beautiful than the year before. Depending on the time of year, her color is often that of a liver chestnut.

In early June of 2013, when Willow was a 3-year-old, she left her family band and became one of Brownie's harem mares in IP. Fast forward to mid-May of 2014 when Willow had Brownie's foal, a bay filly we named Ute. They left Brownie in June and joined Nitro's band. Nitro lives "on top" in the Round Mountain area most of the year, but he likes to spend his winters in the lower canyons (Coal Canyon and Main Canyon). By December of that year, I was ecstatic to see Willow in Coal Canyon with Nitro's group. Their love affair ended two weeks later. Willow and Ute left Nitro and joined the blue roan stallion Gideon. For the most part, Willow remained faithful to Gideon for the next (almost) four years, but once in a while she would run off for a quick fling with Snoopy Jr., Gideon's blue roan brother. I guess she had a thing for "The Blues Brothers."

Many people hike, bike, and ride in Coal and Main Canyons, and Willow eventually got used to people, taking her cues from her laid-back stallion Gideon. After she became a permanent resident of the lower canyons, she was no longer the wild, flighty horse that she was when she was growing up in Sid's band. It was fascinating watching this transition in her behavior.

Willow had an interesting life in the Book Cliffs, and it broke my heart to see her removed in the October roundup, for I have loved her since the first time I laid eyes on her. She is smart, sure-footed, and gorgeous. Obviously she adapts well to change. Even though Willow will be nine years old this spring, I pray someone will adopt her and give her a wonderful home. The next episode of Willow's soap opera life is about to air, and I hope it will be a good one.