

The Year of the Fire Horse

Honouring Xena, the Warrior Princess

by E. Anne Porteous

The plan was for my husband, Stu, and I to share one horse. I had purchased Sierra, my quarter horse, and remember thinking, *We'll see how this goes!* Many horse people said, "Are you kidding? That does not work!" And after three weeks of 'sharing' I asked Stu to find his own horse.

Stu had in his mind what he was looking for, and after a couple of months of searching arrived one day at the boarding facility with a horse trailer. Out came Xena. My first impression was *She is huge!* As she proceeded very calmly off the trailer, I could see that she had beautiful markings, referred to as 'paw prints' (small clusters of dark spots that appear on white hair, sometimes referred to as ink spots), a long mane, and a beautiful black and white tail. As I gazed into her eyes and observed her stance, felt her energy, I knew that indeed, she was a warrior princess.



We spent about three more years at this boarding facility. Stu and I had many great rides together on Sierra and Xena. Xena was strong and steady, until she saw a very shallow puddle with some tiny green frogs swimming around. No way would she step in the puddle – people do not realize that those little green frogs could carry you away!! With calmness and patience, Stu eventually got Xena to put one foot in the puddle and taking her time she got across safely. I was amazed how scary this was for a 1500 lb. horse!

On another occasion Stu was riding Xena on a trail with a group of folks. He suffered a severe kick from another horse, on his shin/calf. He had to be brought back to the boarding facility and rode Xena back, knowing she would take safe care of him. And she did; he arrived to a waiting ambulance ready to transport him to a local emergency. Steady and trustworthy comes to mind.

We moved to our farm with five horses -- do not ask! In this environment Xena established herself as the alpha mare, the boss. I was fortunate to have observed her in this role. She was clear with boundaries, consistent, and patient. When I established Sierra Acres Equine Assisted Learning Centre, Xena was one of my most trusted colleagues. She would come to be instrumental in teaching women how to be a strong, confident leader. Xena would push members of her herd

forward to help clients – recognizing the strengths that member had to help clients.

When a young colt named Watson joined our herd, Xena calmly showed him what his role would be, and would not let him join the group until he brought the right energy – not silly, and child-like, rather calm, and respectful.

Xena was exceptionally good at demonstrating how to hold space. If a client gravitated to a horse other than her, she would hold space for the work between client and horse to occur, keeping the other horses away. She did not chase them. She would simply raise her energy, look towards them, and seemly say “stay back,” which they did.

In this Year of the Fire Horse, I am focusing on ways that horses can help humans. Horses possess an extraordinary sensitivity to non-verbal communication and energy, allowing them to mirror human emotions in a way that is immediate, honest, and non-judgmental. This mirroring gives participants valuable feedback on their behaviours and internal states. In addition, horses can help us build essential life skills such as confidence, trust, and the ability to set healthy boundaries. Xena was exemplary in her teaching skills ... firm when she needed to be, and able to wait patiently until the ‘student’ got it.

We lost Xena in November 2025. What an honour to have been in her presence for over two decades; learning from her, watching how she balanced being a leader and able to show vulnerability. I carry Xena in my heart, and often find myself often, “What would Xena do?” She always has an answer.

RIP my Beauty.



Tribute to Xena: The Lead Mare’s Lasting Legacy

Xena’s Legacy as Lead Mare

Xena, our Percheron Paint mix mare, held the role of lead mare on our farm for two decades. Throughout those years, she faithfully watched over the herd—three mares and one gelding—guiding them with unwavering leadership and teaching them about boundaries and respect. Over time, our group expanded to include one more mare and two additional geldings, and Xena’s dedication to her leadership never faltered. In November 2025, health issues made it clear that it was time for her to rest. Even after her passing, it felt as though her presence remained by my side.

Closure for the Herd

After Xena died, I wanted to ensure the herd had closure. One by one, I brought each horse to the paddock. Some sniffed around her grave; Cheyanne, the eldest, spent time where Xena had lain before burial. Eventually, each horse returned to grazing peacefully. When it was time to move them into the hay paddock, they did so without hesitation. Suddenly, Gunner turned and raced back to the gravesite, prompting Molly and Sierra to follow him out of the hay paddock.