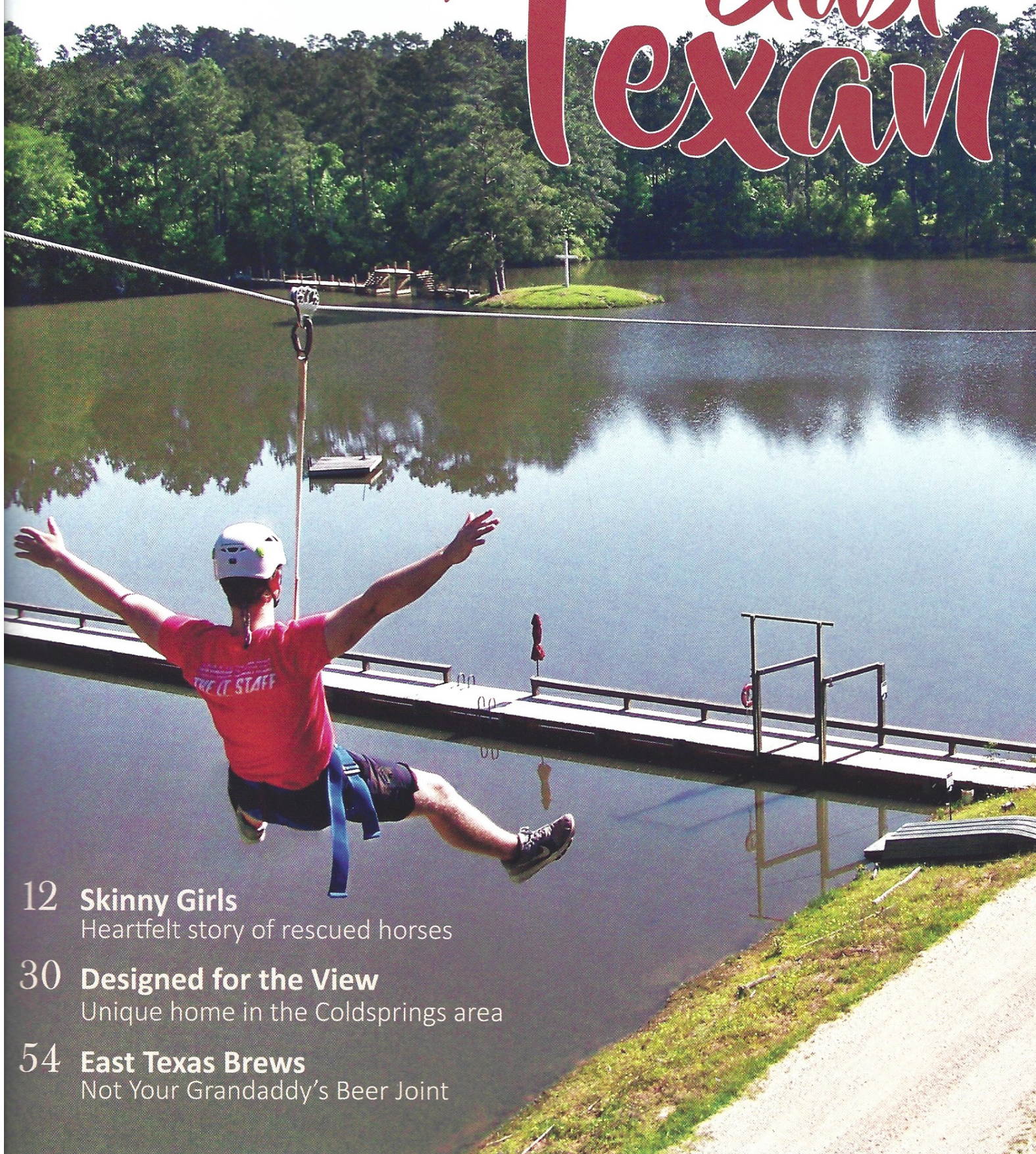


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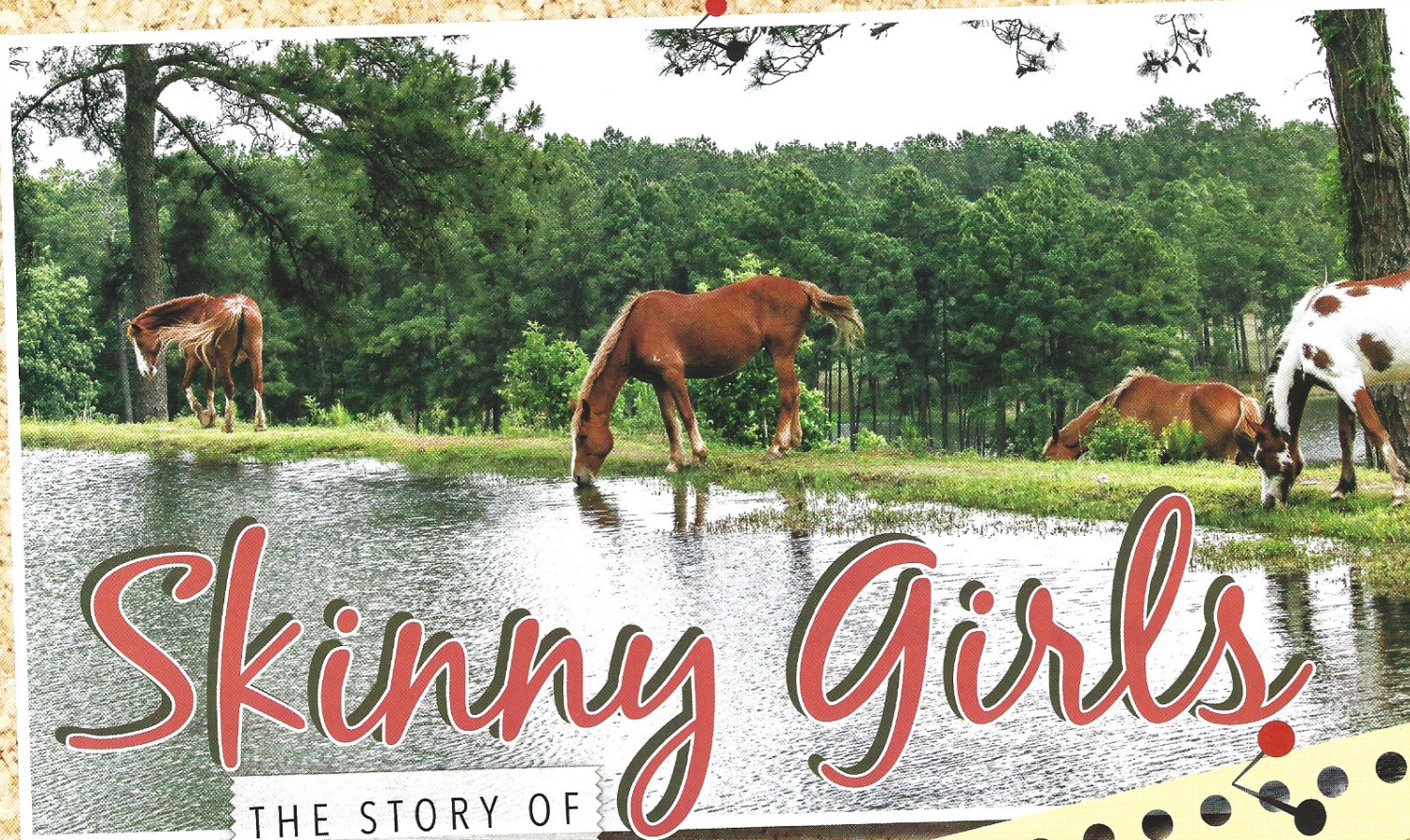
East Texas



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Heartfelt story of rescued horses

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Not Your Granddaddy's Beer Joint



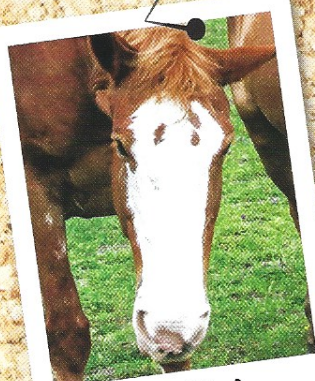
Tallulah



Gracie



Gypsy



Delilah



Bella



Hazel



Daisy

Skinny girls? Not so much anymore. But only through the kindness of concerned citizens and one special person to adopt these horses in desperate need of love and attention.



Delilah playfully nudges her daughter Gypsy.

Story by Amanda Barker

Photos by Brian Besch

It is hard to pick your favorite once you meet them — the skinny girls, rescued horses in the Bold Springs area just outside Livingston. Whether it is laying out in the sun, fighting for attention, or splashing in the water, these animals act more like teenage girls than equines. From the oldest, Gracie, to the leader, Tallulah, and all in between, these girls are not-so-skinny anymore, more curious than ever, and fight against skinny one blade of grass at a time. An everyday hero of sorts turned her property into a sanctuary. Karen Pruitt took it upon herself to adopt seven horses and give them a life of much needed love and affection. And, lucky for me, she was willing to let me see these super sweet horses that know no stranger.

Backstory


This story starts off sadly with a call to a Polk County Enterprise reporter. On the phone was a concerned citizen, upset that yet another horse was dying and she wanted something done to remedy the problem. As reported by the Polk County Enterprise, a reportedly absentee owner who lives approximately 70 miles from the property had given neighbors a series of excuses

why they hadn't taken care of the horses. A neighbor went to Karen's house and asked her if she knew that another horse was dying.

"At that point, I felt like I was just as guilty as the next person if I drove by and did nothing," Karen said. "A year ago, another one was dead. I thought that somebody had to do something. It made me so mad, that I did something about it. They were breeding them and not feeding them and it was abuse."

Statements from local witnesses conveyed the previous owner would use the mares only for breeding. They would have their foals, become impregnated again, and the cycle would repeat. Some of the foals would be hauled away after weaning and some would remain on the property to become new brood mares alongside their mothers, while all were inadequately fed. Some felt many of the mares probably passed away from an inability to eat enough to regenerate after foaling.

Polk County Animal Control contacted the owners, threatening animal cruelty charges, though nothing occurred, and the horses could not be removed. When Karen learned the horses would remain in poverty, she contacted the owner. Her explanation



“They have been great. It started out that you could not touch them, except for Tallulah, but she would bite you. They were just scared. Now, you can see, they are hard to get rid of. They are all over you and they understand love and want attention.”

to the owner was that she would not stand by and allow the neglect to continue. Ownership was relinquished and the next day Karen brought them to her property with the help of a county commissioner. One horse did not survive long enough to make the trip, but the sadness ended with it and the other skulls scattered across the property.

Present Day

My trip began as my fiancée and I took a drive full of winding roads and beautiful pastures to Karen Pruitt's house. As we drove to her property we were greeted by adorable miniature horses who lined the gravel road peering into our truck. Although extremely cute, the marvel was around the corner behind the house — the sanctuary. Acres as far as the eye could see, rolling green grass, wooden bridges over two large ponds and a beautiful white gazebo. The property could give any nice park a run for

their money. Karen met us outside and introduced herself and we headed down the pasture to see the horses. At first, I did not see any, then I spotted them in the distance, the main act of the show. Karen called for the skinny girls to come closer with a series of whistles and to my surprise, they came. At first, I could see four. As I walked closer, three more appeared. They were extremely friendly and showed no sign that they had ever experienced neglect. It was amazing.

Karen said a couple of the horses were a bit wary of strangers, so I was not expected to be greeted by all of them. But even those came close letting me pet them, even if just for a moment. My favorite, Bella, a beautiful flashy paint, was a sweetheart. Although she was young, she was not timid. She loved the attention so much that if she were smaller, she may have tried jumping in my lap.

Tallulah, Bella's mom, came to me next. The group's leader, she



Daisy is enjoying an evening snack and sunning in the pasture.

is a draft bay horse with a bald spot on her face. She does not realize her own size and almost stepped on my feet trying to get closer to me.

"Now, they are strong as an ox and you have to be careful," Karen said. Within 10 minutes of meeting Tallulah, she was very protective of me, trying to shoo the other horses away. Gracie, the grey mare, is also very friendly and is the oldest of the bunch at 22 years of age. Karen said she would have not lasted another month if not rescued. Gracie is in good health except for being sway back from spending many years as a brood mare.

"They were not all in horrible shape, but Gracie was the owner's favorite," Karen said. "I find that ironic if that is how you treat your favorite horse."

Delilah, an 18-year-old sorrel draft mare, is the mother to Gypsy, one of the more timid paint horses. Delilah's hooves were

in very bad shape, cracked and overgrown. I was excited that Karen was able to keep her from foundering. They now looked trimmed and very well maintained, just as the rest were. Karen mentioned that she first had to feed them hay along with grain feed to fatten them up. But now they only eat grain once a day and, of course, all the grass they want. She has a very nice barn for shelter, but she said they don't really enjoy the indoors unless there are treats. They love their treats just as much as any dog.

Speaking of dogs, Skinny Pup, is a rescued dog Karen saved from the brink of death. She and a friend found him on the side of the road and Karen thought he was dead. Thankfully, he was not. With surgeries, medicine, food and love, this pup is happy and healthy with his own Facebook page. Karen now posts updates about the mares under Skinny Pup's Facebook page. People enjoy hearing about the horses' recovery and "Skinny Pup"



Tallulah cooling off in the pasture pond.

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enjoys writing about them.

I continued to pet and love on the horses as we talked about Karen first procuring the horses.

"You could still see ribs on everybody," Karen said. "There was no mange, so that was good. With the big mares, it was hard to tell because, as we know now, they are pregnant."

The horses' new owner did not breed them; the extra package was conceived before reaching her lush land. Karen has grown very protective and attached to the girls.

"I don't want them to go through this again. I don't necessarily need to keep them all, but I will if that is what it takes. They have been great. It started out that you could not touch them, except for Tallulah, but she would bite you. They were just scared. Now, you can see, they are hard to get rid of. They are all over you and they understand love and want attention. They know the vehicle I drive down to feed them in, so they immediately perk up. The most beautiful thing to see is them running across the pasture, because they did not run. They were depressed. You could see it in their eyes, they were just beaten. They just needed food and human interaction. You don't just put a horse in a pasture and not go see it."

She will not sell them, but if possible, she may donate them to horse-related charities. Pruitt said some have offered to take a horse, but she wants all horses to be ready and needs time to research a potential owner's background.

We were wrapping up our interview when the girls really cranked up the charm. Hazel decided to lie down and take a

nap 20 feet from us. That is extremely rare for a horse (I trained horses in a former life and am familiar with their temperament) and proof that these horses are free of fear and stress. She finally got up, but only before I was almost able to pet her. As my fiancé and I were leaving, Tallulah decided to splash around in the water and show off, as if trying to secure a glamor shot in the magazine, her sassiness on display. The whole experience was calming to me, seeing them so peaceful.

Karen stated that all the older horses are pregnant, so she will have a handful when they foal this year. She does not know what she will do with the foals yet, but any adoption process will be performed under extreme caution. As of now, the horses go through almost a bag and a half of feed per day, so it can cost around \$500 each month. That will grow exponentially when the foals are weaned and they show up at the trough. Karen has been fortunate to have funds donated toward caring for the horses, but most comes out of her pocket. A Go Fund Me account has been set up for those who wish to donate to the rehabilitation of the "Skinny Girls," as Pruitt calls them. Go to [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com/vshxa2gs) and search skinny girls to find the account. Additional pictures of the skinny girls are also available on the webpage.

I am glad I was able to meet Karen and her group of rescued horses. They are definitely in a much better place and will never have to be worried about abuse or hunger again. And if someone would like to help donate money to caring for the horses please visit the Go Fund Me account, <https://www.gofundme.com/vshxa2gs>, to donate. ■

Gracie in deep thought enjoying the breeze.

