

“...and his prognosis for survival is...guarded.”

by Kathy Monroe

These are words you never want to hear, but those were the words we heard at the end of what was certainly the longest day of last summer. But, I'm getting ahead of the story...

Haakon Magnus was the first foal born to our breeding program since our move to Nova Scotia in 2008.

Nancy and I fell in love with this little guy from day one – but then, what fjord owner would not say this about any new foal? He seemed to be an old spirit in a new foal's body. Like his sire, his trot floated and just like his Papa, he would round up as though collected whenever he moved off. He had beauty and grace in his powerful, confident strides. We found it hard to take our eyes off of him. We found it harder, however, to get our hands on him, since his mother, Perle, has outsmarted us and we missed his birth and our planned imprinting. Occasionally, we could scratch his bum while he was nursing, but we never got that hug or love...we never picked him off the ground.



After a month of this silliness, I decided I would call them up for breakfast, but this time with a twist. It was July 2nd and I had picked

up the morning paper and a lawn chair as I made my way out to their field. I noticed Haakon had been lying down, but saw him get up and walk toward his Mum as I approached with her feed. I had intended to shut a gate behind him and park myself in the lawn chair in the middle of this feeding area until he and I made good contact.

I waited for him to come through the gate and, as he did, I noticed what looked like he had maybe picked up a case of diarrhea. I chatted with him as he walked by and then I saw the source of the spots on his leg.

There is a reason why I never became a doctor or vet or nurse or EMT. I don't stomach blood or gore very well. Well, this was a true test for me, for as I looked at his lower left rear leg, I could see a full three inches of his 'shin bone'...the metatarsus, I believe...canon bone.

My first thought was to get a vet on site immediately. Once that call was made, I didn't know what to do next. I got out a couple of cameras and took some photos though the pictures are almost too gory to view. I didn't try to halter him in the state he was in.

What could have caused this much damage? In the far corner it appeared the middle line of the fence had been pulled such that it had caused one of our plastic posts and a wooden post connector to break. It still is a bit of a mystery. We purposely use the thin nylon braided wire fencing, having heard the many horror stories of horses being damaged by the thicker options. We would rather fix a fence than harm a horse. In fact, this is the very first injury we have ever had from our fencing.

The vet finally arrived and I could tell he thought the little guy should be put down. I knew he was the weekend on-call vet, a poultry vet, I later found out. I told him he needed to make contact with the Vet Hospital at the University of Prince Edward Island, so we could take a stab at getting him there. I told him to help me get a halter on Haakon. We got a needle in his bum to slow him down and then, against Perle's wishes, we haltered him and put an initial bandage on his wound. As the vet bandaged him, I asked him to help us get mom

and foal into the trailer since this was Haakon's first haltering and who knew what would happen.

I went off to get the trailer. Attempting the hookup, I realized just how stressed I was. "Breathe" I kept saying to myself. "I won't do the foal any good if I'm not in control of my emotions and fears!"

Then, just as I made my final trailer check, I saw the vet leaving. Needless to say, he won't have a second chance with our herd. I was shocked...but not for the first time on this crazy day.

I got the trailer as close as possible to their field. I took Perle and Nancy followed with Haakon. All seemed OK, though his severed tendon caused him to walk over his hoof occasionally, and I loaded Perle. I tied her and exited to help Nancy with Haakon. Just then, Haakon decided to step away from the back of the trailer. Though we have a very nice, sturdy trailer, Perle was about to take it apart! I couldn't believe we were doing this by ourselves. Many thanks, Chicken Vet.

I carefully approached Perle, knowing we didn't need a trip to the human hospital too. She responded and settled....thankfully. By this time Nancy had guided the little guy back to the door and, as he thought about loading, she 'encouraged' him with a good shove from the rear. We were loaded and on a four-hour trip to the Atlantic Vet Hospital.

I have put many miles on this truck and trailer, but none longer than the trek to PEI. We made several stops, mostly to see if Haakon had lain down...or worse. I knew this was bad, and I didn't know whether I would open the trailer at the hospital with a live foal on board.

We called from the bridge to PEI and were met at the Vet Hospital by a full complement of vets and students. Perle and Haakon were taken into the ICU and the work began.

First came the review by the vets and then their collaboration on a course of action. X-rays were taken and we were presented with a projected bill, all possibilities considered. I don't believe any amount would have kept us

from trying to reclaim Haakon's good health, though at this time, we were only talking survival. No promises were made regarding viability or future soundness. We were simply relieved they would take him on as their patient. My initial fear had been he would not make it to PEI and my next fear was that upon arrival we would be advised to put him down. Two critical points had passed but I feared more were to come.

Our vets began the debridement of his wound and further analysis of what remained of his anatomical structure. Though hours passed while we watched the process and reassured Perle that things were ok, we did periodically hear positive comments. Dr. Radke, chief vet and Haakon's savior, mentioned she was happy all four hooves were cold, rather than only the damaged one. That meant it was possible he was merely tachy and not that he had lost circulation to this injured leg. They checked the splints and didn't see problems. They examined all other tendons and didn't see damage other than the tendon at the very front of his 'shin', the one that controlled his ability to place his hoof properly. It was gone...way gone. I remember hearing that it was better than expected.

It was hard to watch him go through so much at such a young age. It was hard not to feel a terrible sense of guilt, especially in that we didn't know what to change to prevent this from ever happening again. We thought we had done everything but wrap him in bubble wrap to keep him healthy and safe, but it was now apparent this was not enough.

Poor Perle, one month into nursing her foal, was truly miserable with full udders, but a real trouper throughout and we're sure she knew we were doing everything in our power to save her little guy.

Finally the vets had done all they could for the moment. Haakon was cleaned, wrapped, and ready for a long recovery period. Dr. Radke explained that his bone would die from the trauma it received (yikes!), and they would need to scrape the sloughed bone such that this might require a future surgery...yeah.

And (she continued with the good news), he would have good days and bad days and we should be prepared for the bad days. Infection could be a potential killer. I'll never forget her final words to us. "His prognosis for survival is guarded."

We thanked her and the team and waited for him to come out of anesthesia. When he stirred, Perle nickered and he jumped to his feet and immediately began to nurse. He was still nursing when we left fifteen minutes later. As hard as it was, we had to get back to our herd, hopefully before midnight.

I must inject here that the team at the AVH was truly top shelf. We received a call from Dr. Radke each and every day Perle and Haakon remained in her care, a full five weeks! We got through many milestones...the first week, the growth of tissue, the decision to use Medi-Honey to prevent infection and promote healing, and finally the decision to do skin grafts once the tissue had closed the wound.



Dr. Radke took eighteen punch grafts from Haakon's chest, microscopically inserting them into his new tissue. This was done carefully to ensure the skin follicles would grow in the right direction.

Daily communications were more appreciated than the vets can understand. We have a farm to run and a herd to care for. Eight hours on the road to visit our two could not happen often. We made a trip once we felt he was going to pull through. Nancy went back with our friend, Inge Burr, on one of her trips there this summer. Then finally, a few days after the skin grafts were completed, we made a

trip to retrieve Perle and Haakon.

Certainly this, the happiest day we could envision, was a sad day for the team at the AVH. Many genuinely hated to see Haakon leave. Some of the students had even stayed overnight in his stall. Nancy and I were trained in the proper way to remove and rebuild the six-layer protective bandage over his slowly recovering wound and then we headed for home, certainly the best trip of the summer.

Upon their return, Perle and Haakon Magnus entered into a secure stall at the end of the barn. Here they remained, with his dressing changed every other day, for three additional months! This little guy would stand like a soldier, even lift his leg and set the toe of his hoof on the toe of my boot to aid me in wrapping his leg. He went to PEI a bit of a wild boy and came home a gentleman. While this was a pleasant improvement in our connection, I wouldn't recommend it as way to bond with a youngster.

And finally, four months and four days after he nearly committed suicide by fence, both he and Perle were allowed to run outside of the stall.

We had been told that any running prior to the full coverage of skin over the wound would cause mountains and valleys to be created, rather than good, smooth coverage with new skin. We had been visited, for the umpteenth time, by one of the fourth-year students from UPEI's AVH, and when he completed his final review of the wound, he shared that he (and Dr. Radke) had reviewed the photo journal of Haakon's recovery and had now determined that, although Haakon's skin had not yet fully covered his wound, he could finally be allowed to run. That was one big "Wahoo!" from us.

We spent the next morning doing a bit of re-fencing to slightly shorten their field and then released Mom and foal. It couldn't have been any better as Haakon took his initial thrusts by pounding both back hooves in the ground simultaneously and then, like magic, picking up his head, gathering his collection, and trotting with all the float we had witnessed

during his first month. Not only did we have our little guy back, we had him back in the same good health he had prior to the night of July 1st. What a day for all!

It nearly brought tears to see the fjords in the two adjoining fields line up as if to salute him on his first day of freedom since Canada Day. He returned the respect by walking up and down the receiving lines and acknowledging those who had peered over his gate and witnessed his recovery for so many months. With a little imagination you could see them high-fiving each other for his success.

We have made many good friends during this time. We hosted several trips by vets and fourth-year students to our farm. We joke about becoming the Fjord rotation for future vets.

Haakon and Perle proved to be great ambassadors for the breed. In fact, one of the fourth-year students is using Haakon's case as his senior project. For this purpose we have taken photos from each dressing change to add to the complete set of photos taken while he was in PEI. We believe, by the movement we see, that his tendon has regenerated. We will have this confirmed before the project is presented. In fact, we have offered to deliver Haakon to the site of this student's senior presentation. It would be nice to take a trip to PEI for something other than an emergency.

Dr. Radke told us Haakon could not have been injured on a better day. He had just passed the neonatal age (over one month old), but he was not so old that his tendon would not regrow. In their therapy, they used mare placenta to wrap his wound to promote regeneration.

Early in his recovery, one of our friends mentioned that sugar and honey are natural anti-bacterials and I found a link for Dr. Radke to read regarding this topic. On our very next call she was very anxious to share that, prior to getting my email, they had decided to try Medi-Honey. While the price would indicate it is made of gold, not honey, it did the trick. We used both the tube and the infused pads and would give it a high recommendation. 🐾

PAY IT FORWARD

by Uli Schnabl

Some time ago a friend of mine, who is a Morgan breeder, told me about this great idea. She includes a free membership for a year to their association with every horse she sells- as a gift to the buyer. This is a small gesture that can go a long way. Not only will it increase membership and help promote the breed, but it will also reflect positively on you as a member of the Fjord Horse community. To take this thought further, why not send your new Fjord owner a friendly, maybe aesthetically pleasing, reminder in the form of a nice card, to renew their membership? I am sure some of you are doing this already. In fact, I visited the NFHR website recently and noticed they are even offering a discount to sellers who want to purchase a membership for buyers, provided transfer papers are sent in to the registry. Just some food for thought...