

# Farewell Booklet

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A Guide to the Humane  
Euthanasia of your Equine



PROJECT HOPE

**HORSE**

WELFARE VICTORIA

# The Horseman's Prayer

*Dearest God in heaven.*

*Give me the strength to guide my horse.*

*Make my hands soft and my head clear.*

*Let my horse understand me and I him.*

*My heart you have blessed with a special love of  
these animals, let me never lose sight of it.*

*My soul you have gifted with a deep need for them,  
let that need never lessen.*

*Always let my breath catch as the sun gleams  
on an elegant head.*

*Always may my throat tighten  
at the sound of a gentle nicker.*

*Let the scent of fresh hay and a new bag of grain  
always be sweet to me.*

*Let the warm touch of a warm nose on my hand  
always bring a smile.*

*I adore the joy of a warm day on the farm.*

*The grace and splendour of a running horse,  
the thunder of its hooves makes my eyes burn  
and my heart soar, let it always be so.*

*Dearest God grant me patience, for horses are  
harnessed wind and wind can be flighty.*

*Let me not frighten or harm them,  
instead show me ways to understand them.*

*Above all, Dear God, fill my life with them.*

*When I pass from this world,  
send my soul to no heaven without them.*

*For this love you have given me graces  
my existence and I shall cherish it  
and praise You for it for all time.*

- Unknown

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## about PHHWV

### **Project Hope Horse Welfare Victoria Inc.**

PHHWV is an incorporated, non-profit organisation committed to providing hope for Victorian equines through rehabilitation, education and advocacy.

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### **For More Information and Contacts**

Please visit our web site [www.phhvw.org.au](http://www.phhvw.org.au) where a full, up to date listing of knackeries and hunt clubs in Victoria can be found.

# introduction

Euthanasia is by far the least discussed topic of horse ownership, and yet the most difficult and sensitive.

The majority of owners will one day be faced with the upsetting situation of having a horse put down.

It is an important topic to think about and be prepared for. Your equine friend may become seriously ill, diseased, injured or of such an advanced age that he/she no longer has any quality of life. Or it may be that you are unable to provide them with a quality of life in retirement. To protect the welfare of your horse and avoid any unnecessary suffering or distress you need to be aware of all available options so that you can make an informed decision.

Your veterinary surgeon should be able to help assess the situation and to advise whether the time has come for euthanasia but ultimately the final decision will lie with you.

This booklet has been based on a similar one published in England by the Humane Slaughter Association.

It sets out the various questions you may need to consider in order to reach the right decisions about when, where, how and by whom the horse shall be euthanised, and also how to dispose of the body.

In the interest of your horse's welfare, it is very important to give the issue some thought now before distressing decisions are forced upon you.

***"It is the most difficult of choices,  
but euthanasia is a means of  
honouring your horse's life by  
preserving the dignity of his death"***

# difficult decisions

Owning a horse or pony can be a highly rewarding experience giving many years of enjoyment. As a result you may not like to think of the time when your companion is seriously injured, ill, very old or when you may be unable to provide it with a good quality of life in retirement.

However, it is most important to be prepared and think ahead, because in an emergency the horse may have to be euthanised immediately to prevent further suffering. It is important that you are aware of all options available, so you can make an informed and rational decision to protect the welfare of your horse.

There may be occasions when the decisions are taken out of your hands, such as an accident whilst out riding. However, it is still better to plan ahead and be aware of all options available, in order to minimise the distress caused by the death of your horse and the subsequent removal of its body.

Elderly horses need as much, or perhaps more, care and attention as young animals, without the rewards of riding. As a responsible horse owner you must be prepared to make very difficult judgments, often under pressure, to protect the welfare of your horse.

Once you have decided the time has come to put your horse down there are four main questions you need to consider:

1. Where is the best place for this to occur?
2. How should you put your horse down?
3. Who should carry out the task?
4. What arrangements are needed for disposal?

***"All insurance companies will require confirmation of the need for euthanasia.***

***A veterinary certificate and/or postmortem may also be required.***

***Make sure you are familiar with the terms of your policy"***

# suitable location

***In an emergency, such as an accident or sudden illness, your horse may need to be put down without delay. If immediate euthanasia is needed, you may not be given the choice where to have your horse euthanised. In a non-emergency situation you must think carefully where best to have your horse put down. It is much kinder to keep your horse in familiar surroundings if at all possible.***

## **At Home**

If your horse is elderly, has a chronic condition or recurring ailment, you may have time to consider where you would prefer to have your horse put down.

Make sure that suitable access to the paddock or stable yard is available for removal of the body by the knackery truck or the burial site is prepared. Move other animals away from the place where the horse is to be put down. If necessary tell neighbours what is happening and when. This will ensure that the procedure is carried out quickly, quietly and easily.

## **Away from home**

If it is not possible to have your horse put down at home, you must decide if your horse is fit to travel and if there is any doubt, seek the opinion of your veterinary surgeon.

## **Remember, it is illegal to transport an unfit animal.**

Once you have determined your horse is fit enough to travel you can arrange for your local knackery or hunt kennel to transport the horse, or you may take the horse yourself.

Make sure you communicate clearly that the horse is to be put down immediately upon arrival – as any delay may cause unnecessary distress. If you have doubts wait until the task is carried out.

**Please note it is an offence for the knackery to sell your horse if you have taken the horse there to be put down.**

***It is much kinder to keep the animal in familiar surroundings if at all possible.***

# appropriate method

***You must consider whether your horse should receive a lethal injection or be shot. Your decision will be governed by who is available to perform the task, the circumstances and whether the horse's welfare will be compromised if immediate euthanasia is delayed.***

## **Lethal Injection**

Your veterinary surgeon is the only person to possess, and administer the drugs used for a lethal injection. The horse is generally injected with a sedative, which is followed by a lethal overdose of anesthetic drugs given intravenously. The horse will fall to the ground and lose consciousness. It normally takes a couple of minutes for the body systems to completely shut down and for the horse to die. It is worth considering that when an animal has been killed by lethal injection it may limit the options for disposal of the body. This may also be the case if your horse has been ill and receiving medication.

## **Shooting**

Shooting can be performed by your vet, a knackerman, a hunt kennelman, or an experienced person with a firearms license. A bullet is discharged into the brain via the forehead, killing the horse immediately. Generally the horse is dead before it falls to the ground. There is likely to be bleeding from the bullet hole and the nose.

With both methods there may be some involuntary movement of the legs, muscle tremors, jerking, and an exhalation or gasping sound. The horse's eyes will remain open and will not blink once the horse is dead. It's quite important that you are prepared for this, as it may be distressing to watch.

***Many owners are not sure whether they should remain with their horse when it's put down.***

***Whatever your feelings are about this, it is important that you listen to any instructions given by the professional who will perform the euthanasia.***

# identifying a skilled person

***If you are unsure whether to stay with your horse while it is put down, seek the advice of the professional performing the euthanasia.***

## **Veterinary Surgeon**

The vet will generally be the first person called out in the case of an emergency and will advise if euthanasia is necessary. Either a lethal injection or shooting may be used to put the animal down immediately and avoid any further suffering. Only a vet can administer a lethal injection. It will also be your responsibility to make arrangements for removal of the body, although your vet should be able to give you advice.

## **Knackermen**

Knackermen, licensed by law, have long provided the traditional service of euthanasia and disposal.

The knackerman will come out to your premises, often at short notice, and generally conduct themselves in a quiet, caring and professional manner. In order to locate an experienced knackerman in your area you should talk to other horse owners or your vet.

## **Hunt Kennelmen**

Hunt kennelmen may not always be licensed slaughtermen but they will hold a firearms license and be experienced in handling horses. Their services are generally available to all, not just hunt club members. These days not all hunt clubs have slaughter facilities, but most clubs will accept elderly or injured horses and arrange for their euthanasia. Prior arrangement is necessary.

***"A horse doesn't care how much you know until he knows how much you care." - Pat Parelli***

# arrangement for disposal

***It is a good idea to find out what facilities are available in your area for cremation, incineration or burial and then consider the costs involved.***

## **Knackermen/Hunt Kennelmen**

Knackermen and hunt kennelmen provide a service to owners needing to put down a horse and then have the body removed. The knackerman will usually provide a collection service, at a cost. The hunt kennel and the knackery may not take your horse's body if it is diseased or drug treated.

## **Animal Cremation**

Cremation for horses and ponies is a relatively new service and companies will accept and collect most horses, which have been shot, received lethal injection or died of disease. Cremation can be very expensive for large animals. Sometimes there can be a delay and it may be distressing to have the body of your horse remaining on your premises.

## **Burial**

Due to rules and regulations burial may not be an option. You may like to contact your local council before considering this option as position from waterways, drains etc. may cause a problem. Moving a horse can be difficult and should not be attempted without suitable machinery.

If equipment needs to be hired, remember that this will add to your costs. If a suitable site can be found and equipment is available, burial is a convenient option. Many people make "memorial gardens" at the burial site.

***The wind of heaven is that which blows between a horse's ears."***  
**- Arabian proverb**

# saying goodbye

*The following steps often make it easier to say goodbye to your horse and ease the grieving process.*

## **Say goodbye**

Ask to be left alone with the horse for as long as you need to bid farewell.

## **Memento**

Keep a memento of the horse in life, such as a wisp of mane or a halter; this can be comforting during the grieving process and in the years to come.

## **Grief**

Go ahead and cry. Grief must be expressed for the mourning process to start and talking about the horse to someone understanding can be a big help.

## **Memorialise**

Memorialise the horse. This can be as simple as hanging a photograph or planting a garden which you can remember your horse by. There are many internet sites for bereaved owners to submit pictures, stories and poems. There is a page on the PHHWV website that can provide you with an up to date listing of these websites.

# conclusion

The death of a horse or pony is not a subject that most people like to think about.

However, it is important to consider what you will do and plan ahead so that you are able to cope with any eventuality.

Always remember that the horse depends on you to make rational, informed decisions, often in difficult circumstances and you must ensure that the horse's welfare is always put first.

# As he slips away

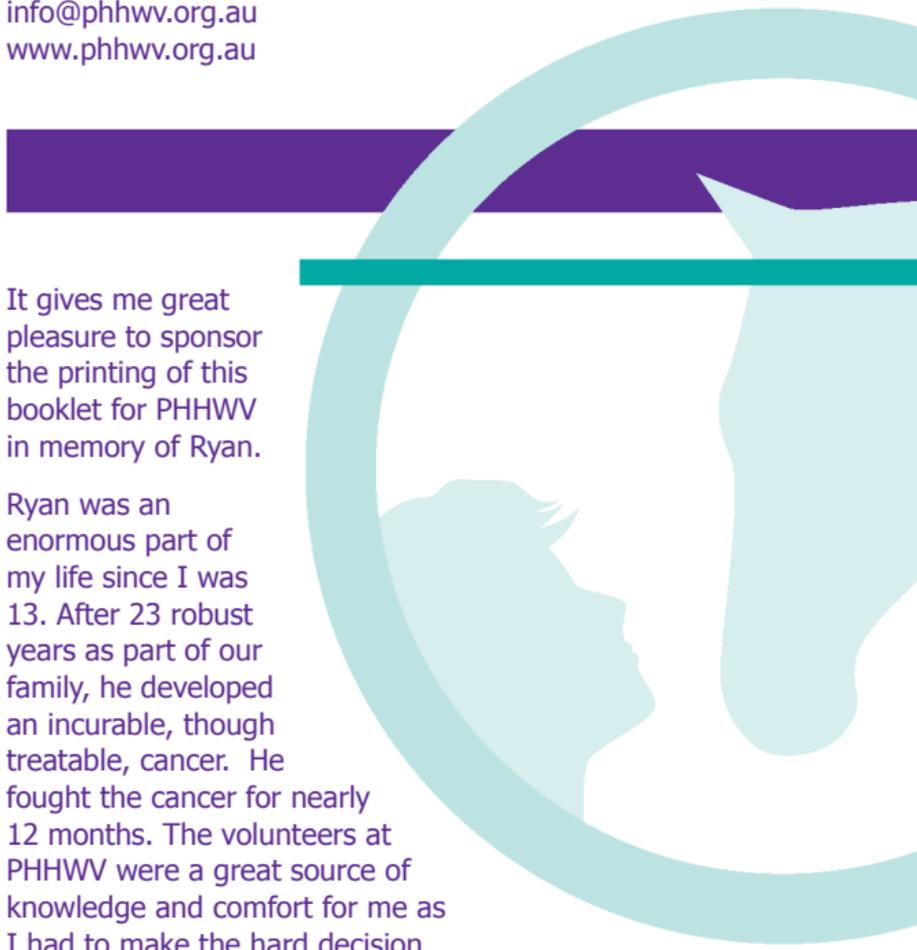
*I held him in my arms so tight,  
Through the darkness and fury of the night.  
I pushed a lock of hair into its place,  
I knew that he would not win this race.  
All of the years that he had been my friend,  
The long journey had finally come to an end.  
As I brush my tears away,  
I remember those special days.  
We would gallop through fields  
from sunrise to sunset,  
We knew that both of us would never forget.  
All day and all night,  
We would gallop on without a single fight.  
As he took in his final breath,  
I knew that it meant he had an easy death.  
As I shut his eyelids tight,  
He disappeared into the stormy night.  
I saw his soul gallop off happy and content,  
As I whispered into his ear "Goodbye, my friend."*

- Natasha

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It gives me great pleasure to sponsor the printing of this booklet for PHHVV in memory of Ryan.

Ryan was an enormous part of my life since I was 13. After 23 robust years as part of our family, he developed an incurable, though treatable, cancer. He fought the cancer for nearly 12 months. The volunteers at PHHVV were a great source of knowledge and comfort for me as I had to make the hard decision of euthanasia.

Ryan painlessly left me on a clear bright sunny day in his home paddock.

I hope this brochure helps you in preparing and making your choices.

~ Kerry Buckley, PHHVV Member

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*This publication may be of assistance to you but it does not take the place of any advice given by a qualified veterinarian.*