

FADE IN:

SCROLL TEXT:

In 1972, in an effort to control the overpopulation of free-range wild horses, the Bureau of Land Management implemented an adoption program. Wild horses were captured off the open range and shipped to adoption centers across the country.

A mustang's bloodline follows a lineage not only from the Spanish barb, but also from horses freed from the Calvary after the Civil War, horses taken from Native Americans forced to live on reservations, and horses set free from homesteaders unable to maintain their land.

These horses stand proud as living figures of our heritage, our melting pot of people and cultures from all over the world.

This story is about one mustang stallion, captured from California-Section 2 in 1973.

EXT. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HIGH DESERT -- DAY

A low RUMBLE fills the silent desert. A cloud of dust rises. A herd of wild horses runs through the mustard colored valley. A BLACK HORSE leads the group of equines, surfing the cloud of dust floating above the ground.

SUPER: BASED ON A TRUE STORY

A group of HORSE WRANGLERS, riding chubby Quarter horses, chases the herd, yelling and screaming at the top of their lungs, lassos in the air - hats in hand.

A FAT COWBOY watches the herd move across the land from a ridge above the canyon. His ASSISTANT trots up.

SUPER: SPRING 1973

ASSISTANT

There looks like 20 head there.

The Fat Cowboy parrots the information into his walkie-talkie.

FAT COWBOY

Home base, we got a herd of about 20 head on California section 2 comin' in your direction.

MALE VOICE (V.O.)

Copy that. Ready for the cargo.

EXT. CANYON

The Horse Wranglers push the herd through the valley, weaving and twisting through sagebrush and pine trees. A make shift barbed-wire corral waits at the end of the canyon.

The horses head straight into the corral and stop short of the barbed wire ahead.

EXT. HOLDING CORRAL

Captured, the horses dance - squeal - and kick in the holding corral. The Fat Cowboy and his Assistant examine the goods.

The Black Horse emerges from the herd. He eyeballs the approaching men. The horse stands his ground between the men and his mares. He paws the ground and snorts.

An eighteen-wheel cattle truck pulls up in the background.

FAT COWBOY

It's a gold mine, I tell'ya. An absolute gold mine. All these half-breeds out of the way and money in the bank.

The TRUCK DRIVER leans out of the cab.

TRUCK DRIVER

That all you got?

FAT COWBOY

What do you mean, is that all I got?

TRUCK DRIVER

I thought you were some hotshot horse wrangler. My kid coulda done better. My boss ain't gonna be too happy.

FAT COWBOY

You can tell your boss...

ASSISTANT

Relax. Just get the money and let's go.

The Truck Driver reaches into the cab. He pulls out a manila envelope and tosses it to the Fat Cowboy.

TRUCK DRIVER

Okay. Let's load'em up.

The Truck Driver backs the trailer up to the holding corral. The Fat Cowboy and his Assistant enter the corral. They herd the horses into the trailer.

The Black Horse paces back and forth between the mares and the men.

FAT COWBOY

Look here. We got us a young stud colt. Well, ain't that cute?

The Black Horse turns and rears-ready to take on his challenger.

FAT COWBOY (CONT'D)
Wanna fight?

ASSISTANT
You better watch yourself.

FAT COWBOY
Stupid horse. What can he do to me?

The Fat Cowboy pulls out a small caliber gun and waves it in the air. The Black Horse doesn't flinch.

FAT COWBOY (CONT'D)
Come on. I ain't afraid of you.

ASSISTANT
Hey. Whadda doin'?

FAT COWBOY
Just assume shoot'em as round'em up.

The Black Horse drops his head, backs up and studies the man. He paws the ground and charges.

FAT COWBOY (CONT'D)
What the?

The Black Horse breezes by his opponent, causing the cowboy to stumble backwards. The gun goes off. The Truck Driver steps in and grabs the gun.

TRUCK DRIVER
You idiot. Don't damage the goods.

FAT COWBOY
Did you see that? He attacked me.

The Assistant turns to the horse and squats in front of him. The two eye each other.

ASSISTANT
I know you're scared and I know don't want to go. But I betcha somebody real special is gonna adopt you and take care of you. It'll be all right. I promise ya.

The Black Horse studies the man closely. He drops his head in submission and turns and walks into the trailer. The Fat Cowboy waddles ups.

FAT COWBOY
He acted like he understood what you were saying.

ASSISTANT
Of course he understands me.

FAT COWBOY
Stupid mustang.....

MORE.....

EXT. WOODS -- AFTERNOON

SUPER: TENAFLY, NEW JERSEY

Young JOSEPH DONOHUE wanders through the thicket of trees behind his home. The crunch of dead leaves echoes through the trees. The sunlight peaks around the trunk. Joseph, a waif of a teenager, he is dwarfed by the size of the maples and birch trees. He stops and absorbs the warmth.

A bird sings in the distance. A whiff of a breeze brushes the boy's face. He continues - his pace faster, focused as he follows a well-worn path. His footsteps pound and his breathing becomes quicker. He breaks into a jog - never looking up - holding his breath - squeezing his eyes holding back the tears.

He stops.

His tree - the tree etched with the initials "JOE D" stops his progress. The young boy collapses and breaks into tears.

A blue jay lands on a branch above his head and breaks into song. The bird take flight and lands on the boy's shoulder, but can't bring him back from his sadness.

A squirrel scurries up and chatters away - darting left and right in a hyperactive dance. Joseph laughs ever so slightly at the rodent's antics between the sobs and stream of tears.

A doe steps up and watches from the background. The winds stirs and the shadows of the trees dance across young Joseph's body. The animals inch closer and closer, watching him weep for his mother.

INT. JOSEPH'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Joseph slams the drawer to his dresser. His wide eyes of hazel green and curly black hair, frame his face, as he hides his emotions.....

MORE...

EXT. RAVINE

Joseph leads his father to the plateau and down into the ravine. Thomas struggles to keep up with his son across the unfamiliar terrain.

He reaches the feeding spot. The food is missing and the foot prints look fresh.

JOSEPH

Here.

Thomas walks up.

THOMAS

You tracked him here?

JOSEPH

Yes sir. This is the first place I saw him. I figured this would be a safe place for him to eat and drink.

Thomas examines the area and picks through the evidence.

A NOISE.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Shhh.

The sagebrush moves and a shadow emerges.

Joseph and Thomas back away. The Black Horse appears in the clearing. The rope swings from around his neck.

He inches toward Joseph.

THOMAS

Careful Son.

The Black Horse sniffs the air.

Joseph steps forward. He pulls a hand of oats from his jacket. The two eye each other.

JOSEPH

It's okay. I'm not going to hurt you. I promise.

The Black Horse looks at Joseph, and then looks at the food.

Joseph steps forward again.

The Black Horse tosses his head and paws the ground, begging for the food.

The horse stretches his neck as far as he can, licking his lips for the oats.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Come on. Come on.

With one last stretch, the horse eats out of Joseph's hand.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

See, it's all right.

Joseph moves forward again and drops more goodies on the ground. A thick, raw gash oozes blood as the rope rubs. Joseph inches in to touch the cut.

THOMAS

Don't.

The Black Horse flinches. The knot tightens.

JOSEPH

Easy.

Joseph takes a deep breath. He puts out his hand. The horse stops eating and watches.

Joseph strokes his neck and fidgets with the knot. He loosens it enough to slip the lead through the loop. The rope falls to the ground. The black Horse shakes his mane, enjoying this freedom.

Thomas shakes his head and wipes away a tear.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

We're gonna be buddies forever.

MORE...

INT. MAIN ARENA

The audience CLAPS to the beat of the music. Joseph pushes Myriah into a full gallop. Myriah does flying lead changes to the beat of the music.

Joseph laps the arena one last time. He waves to his father in the crowd. He guides Myriah into the center of the arena. Joseph tips his cowboy hat to the crowd. Myriah rears.

P.A. ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen. Joseph Donohue and Myriah, last of the C-2's.

MUSIC swells.

EXT. RED ROCK VALLEY

Joseph and Myriah gallop across Red Rock Valley.

SUPER: JOSEPH DONOHUE STILL LIVES IN RENO, NEVADA

THE END