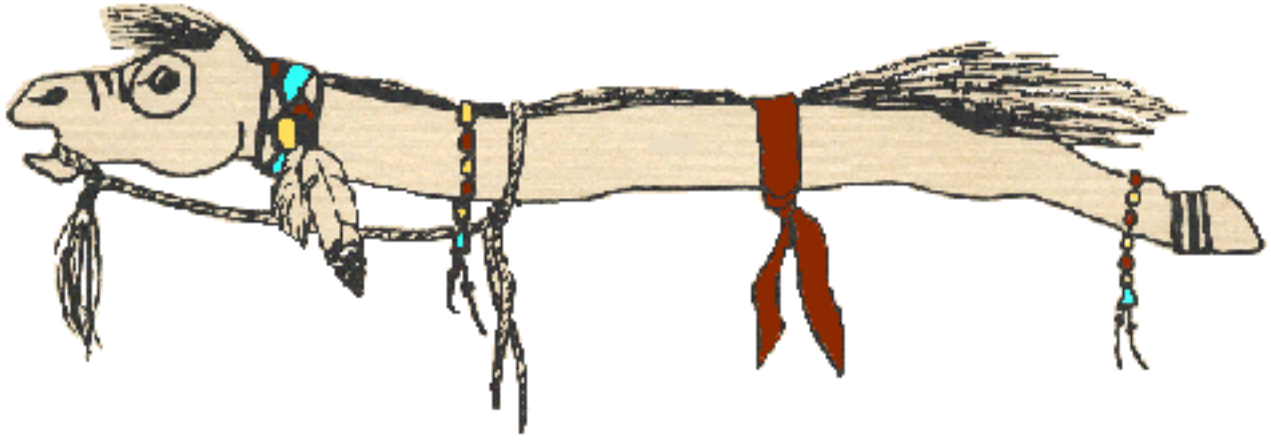




## FUSION: The Merging Of Spirits

By Donna Azzato



A light breeze blew softly against her cheeks, gently brushing the long dark spirals of hair from her face. She breathed deeply of the warm summer air. Sounds of Nina Simone drifted out into the night, as she gazed up at the stars. The music brought back memories. Her brown eyes sparkled as her thoughts drifted back in time... to the summer of 1975.

She was young then, all of fifteen years old. Her passion for life, her wild heart, and her untamed spirit were contagious to all who knew her. She lived life to the fullest. Each day was an adventure, a gift from God.

She had done many things most girls her age would never do. To her, hopping a train with no destination in mind was exciting. She would sneak out at night and make her way to the Blues Clubs downtown, where her smile and magnetism would allow her to gain entrance with ease. She thrived on conversation with all types of people, soaking up their experiences like a sponge. Her love for life and everything in it extended to animals as well. She loved horses, and likely so, for she was just like a horse in many ways.

On one of her many train hopping excursions, she met a family on the Navajo Reservation who owned Spanish Mustangs. She fell in love. To her they were the most beautiful animals she had ever seen.

Mr. Nez, the owner of the ranch was an older man. His skin was dark and weathered by the sun. His eyes told a story of hard life on the reservation. His experiences with man and prejudice had hardened him in many ways. As he saw it, a disrespectful and unkind generation, with a total disregard for life and tradition was evolving. The world he once knew was slowly slipping away.\

When the girl ventured into his life, neither one had any idea how drastically their lives would be changed.

The hot desert wind blew whirlwinds of dust into the dry air. The girl leaned up against the fence, watching as Mr. Nez led the new horses out of the trailer and into the corral. Seven beautiful Spanish Mustangs had arrived. They were beautiful, small, and full of spirit.

One horse in particular caught her eye, a beautiful chestnut mare. The mare hesitated and spooked as Mr. Nez led her out of the trailer. The girl couldn't help but notice the frightened look in the mare's eyes as she stomped and jumped about tossing her head wildly. As the girl watched the mare bolt into the corral, she couldn't help but feel the fear and mistrust she saw in the horse's eyes.

This must be the one that was mistreated she thought. Her heart went out to the horse. She knew all too well the cruelty that man could inflict on animals as well as humans. For this reason, she felt drawn to the horse. It was as if God had brought this one especially for her.

She had prayed for a Spanish Mustang for a long time. Again she prayed, hoping that God was answering her prayer. She had a deep relationship with God and he always brought her what she needed, but she knew it would be in his timing, not her own. Maybe this was the reason it took so long for this particular prayer to be answered. She had great strength and a loving spirit, and God always seemed to bring people and animals in need to her.

The one thing that she knew for certain was that this beautiful, fragile creature would need a lot of love if there were to be any hope of rebuilding the trust and love that she had been robbed of. She thanked God for not allowing man to completely break this horse's spirit. To her, a horse could be trained, but to break its spirit and remove all of the wildness was the worst crime a man could commit.

Mr. Nez interrupted the girl's thoughts, "That one is going to need a lot of work," he said.

"May I work with her?" the girl asked, eyes pleading. Mr. Nez hesitated, he did not want the girl to be thrown from the horse or be injured in any way. Something in her eyes told him that if anyone could ride this horse it would be the girl. After all, she had an unusual way about her. He consented, and the girl knew that her prayer was to be answered.

She jumped from the fence and slowly approached the mare, speaking softly, in almost a whisper. She began to stroke the mare's forehead and mane. The horse tossed her head and snorted, but the girl continued to whisper softly. It was as if the two understood each other. In some strange way, it was as if there was a conversation taking place that no one else could understand.

Mr. Nez brought the saddle out and gently placed the woven Navajo blanket on the mare's back. The mare flinched and jumped, and the blanket fell from her back into the dust. There was no way that the horse was going to allow anything on her back. She tossed her head and with a loud snort she bolted away.

The girl shook her head and smiled. Then she did something unexpected. She dropped to her knees in the dust and prayed. She asked God to heal the horse and to let the horse feel God through her hands and in her ways. Then she climbed up on the fence, and as the horse ran by, she jumped and landed on the horse's back, quickly pulling herself upright and grasping the reins. The horse was just as shocked as Mr. Nez was. She stomped and jumped about and reared up, but the girl held on tight. As the horse reacted, she quickly brought the mare under control. Mr. Nez watched in awe as the girl and the horse rode around the arena. The horse seemed to trust and sense her kind manner.

Mr. Nez had nicknamed the girl "Sassie" because of her strong Italian nature. She wasn't sassy in a rude sense, just full of determination and spirit. He decided to name the horse "Sassie" after her rider, for the two of them were very much alike. Days passed and Mr. Nez watched Sassie and the girl form a bond, a symmetry that seemed to flow endlessly, as the two spirits merged and trust was restored.

Soon the girl would be leaving. Mr. Nez had contacted the girl's father. Her father had allowed her to remain on the ranch, hoping that when she returned home this time, her lust for wandering would subside.

As Mr. Nez watched the girl work with the horse he realized it would be wrong for the two to part. It was clear to him that both the girl and the horse had been brought together for a reason. The girl had been a lifeline to him and his family. Her unusual arrival brought back a sense of love, caring, and faith in a world where such things were quickly fading. She had given him hope. He would give her the horse as a gift in return for the richness and faith that she had restored in him.

As they made their way up the driveway of the girl's home, the smell of anise and garlic filled the air. A small Italian woman in a flowered dress came running from the house. She grabbed the girl and hugged her tight, speaking in Italian as tears of happiness streamed down her face. This must be "Nonni", the Grandmother that had instilled these unusual ways in the girl.

Mr. Nez stayed long enough to assist the girl in getting "Sassie" settled. He watched one last time as the girl and her horse rode around the corral. He smiled sadly. He was thankful that he had the chance to witness such a beautiful metamorphosis.

A loud clap of thunder broke out as lightning ripped its way across the sky. The girl, now a woman, jumped startled by the noise. Sounds of Nina Simone still drifted through the night as the memory faded. She stood up as the wind whipped at her hair and the rain burst forth in a fury from the black clouds that concealed the stars. As the woman began to walk toward the house, she stopped and dropped to her knees in the pouring rain. She asked God to once again bring the beautiful horses back into her life. The memories had stirred something inside of her that she thought had been lost. As she rose from prayer and made her way into the house, a feeling of joy and warmth overcame her. It was that familiar feeling one gets when God speaks to the soul. He seemed to be saying "Yes, my child, your prayer will be answered, in the right time, in the right place when another injured spirit needs to be restored."

About the Author: My life has been, if I go not a day longer, quite extraordinary. Looking back at the difficulties I experienced growing up in a strict Italian family, some would have considered my life more of a curse. These difficulties were met with a deep trust in God, a strong will to overcome obstacles, and an uncontrollable urge to seek out the good in life. The result was a richness and a fullness of life that would never had been achieved if I had not been challenged by these obstacles. The people and situations I encounter are what ignite the passion with which I write. Each one a treasured memory documented with great love and care, before the years become to clouded to remember what an incredible experience my life has been. Fusion is only one of a collection of many stories based on these experiences. The purpose of my writing is to invite the reader to enter my world and become part of my life, experiencing them fully, and in this way developing a love for the Native American Culture and our special breed of horses. If you enjoyed “Fusion” and would be interested in other stories, or using my stories elsewhere to promote our horses, please feel free to contact me at [dmazzato@yahoo.com](mailto:dmazzato@yahoo.com).

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