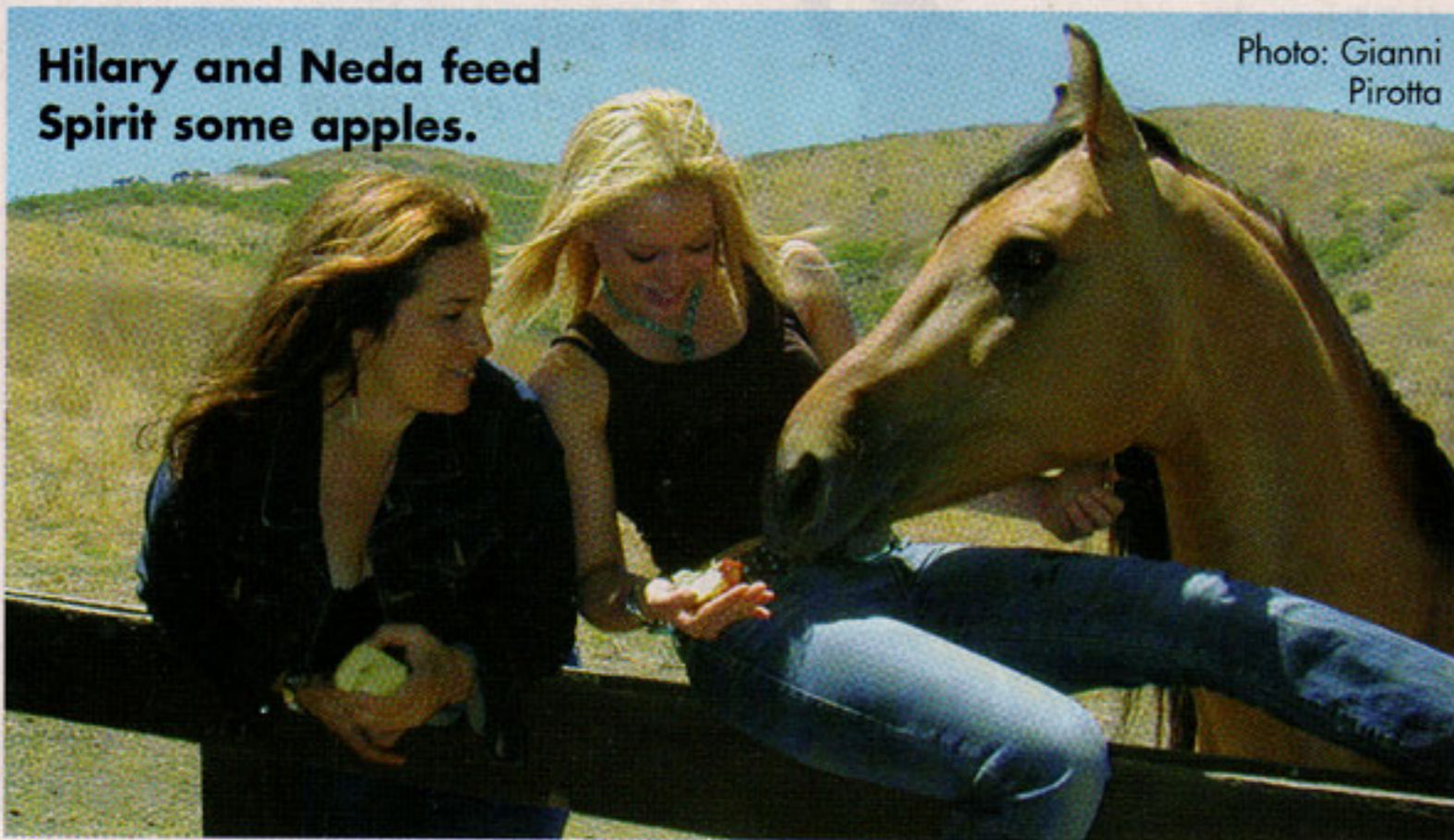




RETURN TO FREEDOM

A Sanctuary That Keeps Wild Horse Families Together



Hilary and Neda feed Spirit some apples.

Photo: Gianni Pirota

Return to Freedom is an equine charity that works to keep bonded, natural herd groups of horses together in its sanctuary—just as they were found in the wild.

As you learned in the last issue of *Young Rider*, wild horses tend to live in herds. Often, when they are rounded up they are separated from their close pals and this can cause a lot of stress for the stallions and mares. Some horses panic and can injure themselves.

Return to Freedom tries to keep groups of wild horses together and lets them live on its ranch in Santa Barbara County in California. So far six original family groups of stallions and mares and several bands of young, “bachelor” stallions have been relocated to the 310-acre ranch.

After the wild horses are checked out by veterinarians, they are set free to re-establish their family bonds. Occasionally, the charity adopts out younger, sociable horses to suitable homes.

Founded by Neda DeMayo in 1997, Return to Freedom has given a second chance to more than 110 wild horses and burros. These horses and burros arrived

at the charity by a variety of ways: some were captured on the range (to reduce herd numbers), some were rescued from auctions where they might have been bought by “meat men,” and others were removed from homes when their adoptions didn’t work out.

Return to Freedom is a charity that encourages visitors to its ranch. It offers regular tours where young horse lovers can observe wild horses and learn all about them. It also offers Wild Horse Walking Adventures where you learn about wild horse families and then walk around the hill ranch and observe the wild horses close up.

Return to Freedom has a famous resident: Donner of Steens Mountain—the Kiger stallion who was the inspiration for lead character in the animated movie, *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*.

The company that produced *Spirit* looked all over for a horse to be a living model for the movie’s 380 artists, animators and technicians and Donner, a dun-colored mustang living on a ranch in Oregon, fit the bill. He was shipped down to a Los

Angeles-area ranch so the artists could study him.

After the movie was completed, seven-year-old Donner (re-named Spirit) was given to Return to Freedom. The charity hopes that Spirit will be an ambassador for the wild mustang breed.

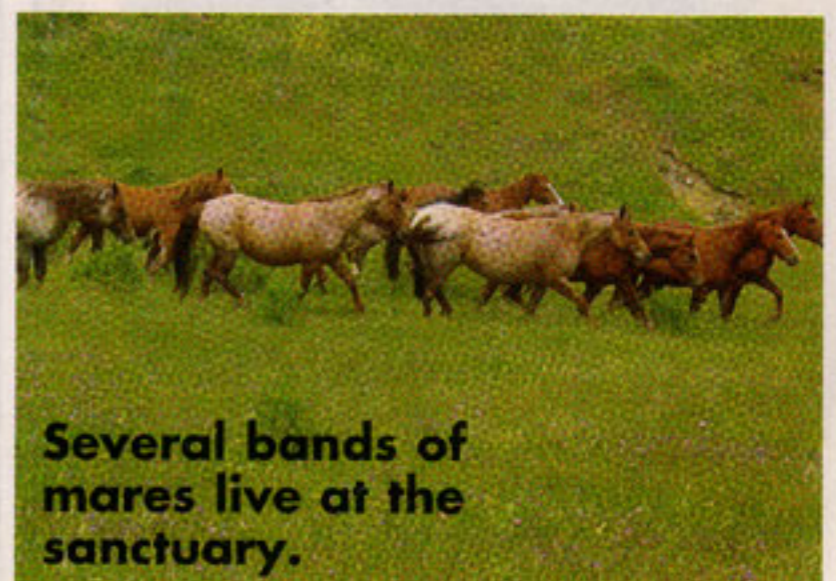
Return to Freedom has another famous ambassador—teen star Hilary Duff. Hilary grew up on a ranch in Houston, TX, and has always loved horses.

She recently visited the ranch to meet Spirit and posed for pictures for a book about celebrities and their horses.

If you’d like to help Return to Freedom, go to its website, www.returntofreedom.org to find out how your school class can sponsor one of the wild horses. Your donations can help feed and care for the charity’s horses and help buy additional land to save more horses in the future.

Contact the charity to receive a sponsorship packet. If your class raises \$100 for the charity, the class will receive a video hosted by Hilary about the horses at the sanctuary and a photo of *your* sponsored horse. Raise more and you’ll get thank-you gifts and tee shirts.

Return to Freedom
P.O. Box 926
Lompoc, CA 93438



Several bands of mares live at the sanctuary.

Photo: Mark Masterson