

## **Are you a Warrior?**

This may be showing my age but I remember back in the '70's & 80's when owning a horse was considered a luxury. Up until Covid hit you couldn't sell a horse unless you just about gave it away.

So, why have we seen such a jump in the price over the past few years? The same horse that sold for \$500 a few years ago is now selling for \$1,500- \$2,000.

Maybe more folks are staying home since Covid and they have more time to spend with their animals.

Nope.

Maybe there are fewer horses in the U.S. so it is a matter of supply and demand.

Nope.

Maybe those in the racing industry have cut back on their breeding practices.

Nope

Then what could it be?

In my opinion, from what I have witnessed over the past 35 years working in animal welfare, it is the ole sleight of hand trick. Let me explain.

Individuals involved in "serious" equine welfare are in it for the right reason. It's not about the money or the name they are making for themselves. It's about the actual wellbeing of the animals they are fighting for. They aren't "tree huggers", PETA wanna be's but open minded individuals who understand what equine mean to this country. They understand what attributes that equine bring to our society and are fighting to preserve their past, present and future in our nation. We understand equine that once served, as warriors and transportation are now athletes and pleasure animals with some still as working animals. Equine, more than any other animal in our culture deserve our respect and humane care for all they have contributed to us.

As I've watched the horse industry try to take great strides in protecting them I've also witnessed great down falls.

To preserve our wild mustangs the BLM started adoption options over 50 years ago. However, by not implementing a controlled breeding program they have never made the impact they could have. Now many still find their way onto slaughter bond trucks.

Closing down the slaughter plants was another one of those strides but by not following through with stopping transport and offering other options, it made it worse on them. By not offering affordable means of disposal through humane euthanasia, we have prolonged their suffering.

So now that I've finally decided I've spent enough time on my soap box let's get to the question at hand. What is causing these price increases?

I feel it has to do with the latest craze of equine rescue called "Horse Broker's"

Horse Brokers are perhaps one of the more controversial aspects of what keeps the horse slaughter system going strong in the United States. Because I focus mainly on Tennessee equine, I'll use them as my observing reference.

Twenty some years ago I would frequent a local auction and try to **purchase** a horse in need of intervention. There wasn't a lot brought in but every now and then a couple would show up. After about 6 months of going, I noticed more and more started arriving in deplorable conditions. Traders realized really quick if they brought in those horses that they usually turned away people wanted to give them they could make a quick buck because some kind hearted soul would be there to **purchase** it. It didn't take long before they even figured out if they had someone bid me up they could make even more money from my **purchase**. Once I realized all I was doing by **purchasing** that horse from auction was padding the Traders pocket, which in turn gave him a new avenue of revenue I stopped. It didn't take long before they stopped bringing them because their patsy was no longer there and it was no longer a profitable gamble for them.

I'm sure by now you've noticed I've highlighted a certain word above. Here is why

**Purchase:** *acquiring or obtain by paying money to the person who is selling it.*

Other need to know definitions:

**Horse Trader:** People who make a profit selling horses. (Not all Traders are Kill Buyers)

**Kill Buyer:** People who make a profit by purchasing healthy horses at a cheap price to

later sell to meet their quota for meat production, because they are paid by the pound. **Bail Money:** Money paid to keep a horse from going to a called kill buyer. The kill buyer takes the bail money, turns around, and purchases several more horses to fill his shipment of slaughter animals. So, while the bailed may have saved one horse, several others are now being purchased with the bail dollars. A never-ending cycle that continues to grow to the kill buyer's advantage.

**Broker:** a person or firm who arranges transactions between a buyer and a seller and becomes a principal party to the deal.

**Rescue:** save someone or something from a dangerous or distressing situation. No exchange of money is involved.

I am proud to call myself an Equine Rescue Warrior and I work and collaborate with other Equine Rescue Warriors across Tennessee. None are Brokers. Even though Brokers may have their hearts in the right place they are still Brokers. Are they a Rescue or a Broker? Think before you support.

Nina L. Margetson  
Equine Rescue Warrior

*The best explanation I have found comes from Alex Brown:* His last paragraph says it best.

The Horse Broker program is typically run by a **rescue organization** which has a relationship with a kill buyer. The rescue organization will promote the horses that have been acquired by the kill buyer, to help those horses find a home, before they would be shipped to slaughter if no home is discovered. This all occurs in a compressed timeframe.

This is the last chance for these horses. For that reason, many people will support these programs to try to help place these horses, either by supporting fundraisers, sharing the fundraisers, or offering homes.

Some of these horses were purchased by the kill buyer at a kill auction. Some were surrendered by owners who determined that they had no other option, due to a variety

of circumstances. Some were culls from a variety of situations, some of which went directly to the kill buyer.

The kill buyer is the option of last resort.

So why the controversy ?

There are five broad reasons why some people consider the broker program bad for horses and the anti slaughter movement.

1. The number of horses slaughtered remains constant

A kill buyer, that enables a broker program, now has access to a new market for his horses. Thus, the kill buyer can purchase more horses, knowing that some will now be purchased through the broker program. The broker program is not reducing the number of horses that enter the slaughter pipeline, but is increasing the business opportunity for the kill buyer.

Because the broker program is not reducing the number of horses that the kill buyer is shipping to slaughter (that number is determined by the contract the kill buyer has with the slaughterhouse to which he is contracted), the broker program is essentially determining which horses go to slaughter. For each horse saved, another horse is swapped into his place.

2. Emotional buy

The broker program typically operates in a compressed timeframe with a certain outcome. The kill buyer purchases the bulk of his horses at a kill auction (New Holland, PA or Sugarcreek, OH for example) and will ship those horses to a slaughterhouse, or the slaughterhouse's feedlot, a week or so later. It is within that timeframe that the broker program needs to take pictures, and promote the horses through social media and other outlets.

The sense of urgency is real, the images are real, the "kill truck is coming" is a popular refrain. This creates a situation of drama, that inspires people to do things that they might not do under ordinary circumstances.

It also deflects money and effort from other types of rescue programs, and the broader horse slaughter issue.

### 3. The Price is High

Oftentimes the horses are surrendered to the kill buyer, or purchased very cheaply at the auction. Because the community is trying to “rescue” these horses, there is a sense that they should be able to purchase the horses at close to what the kill buyer pays. In some instances this will happen, if you have a relationship with the kill buyer, and make an offer to him at the auction, after the sale of a horse. At that point the kill buyer can simply purchase another horse to replace the one he has bought.

Once in the broker program, this is no longer the case. The kill buyer’s main customer at this point is the slaughterhouse, so it is that price point, the price that the kill buyer can earn at the plant, that should be used to compare the prices offered by the broker program. This may be 50-100% over the purchase price at the kill auction for example.

Added to that are costs associated with the broker program. It takes time and work to make these horses available online, that time and work also needs to be rewarded.

### 4. Selective Access

The method of deciding which horses are available through the broker program also creates controversy. It is not always all the horses that the kill buyer has in stock. Why? The kill buyer has horse dealers with whom he works. Sometimes those dealers do not want to be exposed (someone hussling racehorses from the local racetrack for example) so the horses that that dealer brings to the kill buyer will not be part of the program.

Because the broker is typically the only “rescue” with access to the kill buyer’s pens, and understands which horses can be made available and which cannot, many consider that they are simply complicit in the entire slaughter system.

### 5. Working with a Kill Buyer

Can someone really be considered a rescue, if all they do is offer a broker program and work directly with the kill buyer? Some argue no, some of course argue that absolutely they can.

The relationship with the kill buyer is controversial, especially if there is a lack of transparency in terms of how that relationship works. Broker programs that have been controversial in the past include CBER (Washington State) and AC4H (Pennsylvania).

**In Conclusion...**

**This is a controversial aspect of the horse slaughter system, of that there is no doubt. Broker programs have done some great things, especially for the individual horses which have been saved, but there are always consequences to these transactions.**



***Equine Rescue Warrior***