

CASE STUDY To save a filly

When complications from a contracted tendon destroyed the circulation in his 3-week-old filly's lower leg, Jim Perkins thought all was lost. "The hoof just came off and a few days later, the fetlock joint fell away," he says.

The Amarillo, Texas, horseman worked to prevent the stump from becoming infected. He also devised a crude prosthesis for the foal, using PVC pipe. "She was getting around on the prosthesis, but I could tell she was in pain," Perkins says. "I wanted to give her a chance, but I was preparing to make the tough decision to put her down." The filly's grandmother was a champion cutting mare and both Perkins and his wife had hoped that the youngster someday would be an important addition to their large breeding program. They understood that their plans for her might

never be realized, but their emotional attachment to her made it extremely difficult for them to consider euthanasia. "To my wife and myself, these horses are like children," Perkins says. "We brought her into this world, so we feel it's our responsibility to take care of her while she's here and do everything we can to help and not give up."

Then the Perkins' daughter saw a televised segment about veterinarian Ted Vlahos on "Good Morning America" and immediately called her father. Vlahos is one of a few surgeons in the United States who outfits horses with prosthetic limbs. Within days, the filly and her dam were on a trailer for the 900-mile trip to Vlahos' clinic in Sheridan, Wyoming.

Amputation wasn't necessary, but Vlahos performed skin and frog grafts to fashion a protective stump, and he put pins in place to support the filly's bad leg on a temporary prosthetic while the grafts healed.

After surgery, the foal stood without pain for the first time in her life, and within days she was running and playing with her dam.

The filly was weaned at Vlahos' clinic when she was 5 months old and returned home at 7 months. She was named Dulces Vlahos, says Perkins, because "When it was time to name her, Dr. Vlahos had had her longer than we did."

Now on her second prosthesis—she will have several more made as she grows—the filly lives a typically equine existence on the Perkins' ranch. "She is turned out with other horses and can trot and gallop and will even kick at you if she puts her mind to it," says Connie Perkins. "She is just thriving."

The Perkins know that Dulces will never be a "normal" horse and will always require special care. "I don't have a problem taking care of this little one every day for the next 25 years," says Perkins, who has spent nearly \$80,000 on all the combined veterinary expenses for Dulces and about \$4,000 more for each prosthetic limb. "There's no question in my mind that she is worth it."