

MARIA AND RIOJA BEST FRIENDS FOREVER

Born years and miles apart in dusty deserts of Wyoming and Nevada, during a turning point in wild horse history, the two mustang mares, Mariah, a blood bay, and Rioja, a red roan with scars on both sides from a previous encounter with a mountain lion, found themselves in the same place at the same time.

In the equine world shared experiences often create strong and lasting friendships.

In 1971, Congress passed the FREE ROAMING WILD HORSE AND BURRO PROTECTION ACT. In 2004 the BURNS AMENDMENT changed the act to allow the Federal Government to dispose of unwanted and unadoptable wild horses.

White freeze brands on the necks of captured BLM mustangs give a timeline of the life of the horse, indicating the approximate age of the animal and when and where it was captured. After 2004 a large U was added to the brand to designate that a particular animal was unwanted and was termed a “three striker”. Mariah and Rioja were both branded with the U and were shipped, along with three hundred other mustangs to a private ranch in Nebraska, ironically called THE THREE STRIKES RANCH.

Two years later, in what has been termed “the worst animal abuse case in Nebraska history”, some eighty mustangs had lost their lives. Newspaper and TV reporters flocked in and the mustangs were seized and moved to the local fairgrounds once more awaiting their fate. Thin and starving yet still alive, Maria and Rioja ended up in Minnesota. With the loving care of two veterinarians and animal rescue unit, the two mustangs survived. Perhaps it was because they had each other and friendship brings all beings hope. After months of rehab, the two friends were ready for a forever home.

During the summer of 2012, seven year old Mariah and twelve year old Rioja were loaded into the vet’s trailer to begin another journey together, this time back to a life of freedom at the Black Hills Wild Horse Sanctuary in South Dakota. Shared experiences keep them bonded together despite freedom to run on thousands of acres. We see them often and never cease to wonder if the U brand is just body art or a reminder that no living being should be considered unwanted. All life is beautiful and precious as are the lovely mustangs Mariah and Rioja. Wherever you are, they are asking you to be their special friend.

ALPHA ANGLE CODE FOR FREEZE MARK INTERPRETATION

