

**The Bank Robbery
By Pete Dillingham**

At first it was just an interesting news item...."Woman Robs Bank!" When the second and third robberies occurred, the event was starting to get the public's attention....and "tweak" the nose of law enforcement. By the time the fourth theft happened, she was being compared to Robin Hood. The lady's folklore image came to a "screeching halt" on her fifth and final bank heist. Law authorities had been tipped and the local's "most wanted" was brought to justice. When her identity was unveiled, I nearly fell out of the saddle.....the bandit and I had crossed paths three years earlier. "Elaine" and her husband had bought a good-looking quarter horse from me named "Carmel". I had delivered the mare to an attractive rural farm not far away.

"Now that's a real neat story Pete," you say "but what in God's great creation does an 'Anne Oakley' have to do with horses!?" Soon after Elaine was nabbed, her husband came to my barn wanting to sell Carmel back...something about lawyer's fees. Well "shoot", the mare was a darn good horse and I was tickled pink to buy her back. That's how a felony turned into a lesson in horse psychology.

I brought the little mare home and put her into a large pasture with approximately sixty horses. For the first few minutes, normal introductions and bickering took place. A welcoming committee of about four horses started letting the "newcomer" know where she stood in the herd's pecking order. Just about the time hooves were being exchanged, a large draft horse named Gretel stepped on the scene. Gretel was not only big, but she could be mean.....not many horses ever want to exchange blows with the mare. The draft lumbered up to the "pint-size" quarter horse, they touched noses, and then moved away from the crowd together.

It didn't make sense, where were the fireworks? Suddenly I "saw the light." The two mares had been best friends before they were separated. The pair rekindled their friendship after a three year sabbatical. For the next several days, I watched Carmel closely. There was no confusion about where the dinner table was, she knew all the old trails, and she quickly stepped into a routine she learned several years earlier. Her recollections were flawless!

The Carmel "lesson" was a learning experience. Since then I've been lost on foreign trails, and used my horse's memory to guide me home. By knowing that a horse uses its past memories to survive, I can better anticipate problems (detours to the barn, horse eating bicycles, etc.). When I've trained problem horses, their reactions (unnatural allergy to whips, reins, spurs, or being head shy) are a record of the mistakes their past handlers made...and provide the solutions to make them better riding partners. In short, a bank robbery taught me about a horse's memory!