

Putting a horse to Sleep: A worthy end

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Introduction

When companion animals die, their death is often at the hands of their keeper. Imagine that. Humans have the power, or rather, are supposed to assume the power to decide upon life or death for a dear companion. For many of us, this is difficult. There are several *Facebook* groups for people who have lost their horses in this way, and the membership of many of them reaches into the thousands. In various blogs people also report mourning their loss to the extent that they need psychological help from counsellors and require medication.

Equine-welfare researchers find these difficulties worrying, among other reasons because horse keepers may delay euthanasia to the detriment of their horses. In a four-year research study of the welfare status of horses in England and Wales, Sue Horseman et al. (2023) report delayed euthanasia as a serious animal-welfare problem. However, there are currently no objective criteria for defining timely euthanasia. It is left to horse keepers themselves to decide when the welfare of their companion animals is so impaired that euthanasia is called for.

Several studies have investigated horse keepers' perceptions of what such impairments might be. Focusing on the concept *wellbeing*, Rebecca Smith et al. (2022) found that wellbeing assessments are complex, nuanced, and dynamic, and their study showed that they varied from one horse keeper to the next as they were individually constructed. Moreover, the respondents' understanding of wellbeing differed from how it is described in the academic literature. This is also a concern of Catherine Bell and Suzanne Rogers (2021), who found that subtle factors that could mean a horse should be considered for euthanasia were overlooked. The term "quality of life" was used by horse keepers in a colloquial, generalized sense, and not clearly defined to also include other aspects than physical health. Adding to the difficulties that caregivers perceive is the fact that horses are often family members. This is a concern of Harriet Clough et

al. (2021) who focus on how horse keepers' relationships with their companions affect their decisions regarding euthanasia. The authors point out that the relationships are often strongly felt, and this implies that there are complex interacting issues that affect decision-making. Emotions such as guilt, responsibility, grief, regret, personal blame, and distress are specific concerns that horse keepers mention.

My article will add to this research on perceptions of horse welfare and euthanasia by being open about and discussing an honest case of lived experiences. In 2022 I euthanized Assa, a sweet and wise Icelandic mare, then aged 22. I had to go through a process of deciding whether to opt for euthanasia or let her live. I also had to find out about the ways euthanasia is conducted, for example how, where, and should I be present? I was put in an overwhelmingly burdensome decision-making position and had to rely on the knowledge I had. Revealing my thought process, I will detail how I judged wellbeing, balanced physical and mental health issues, and how emotions were ever-present in the decision-making processes. Jane Duckworth (2019) provides some advice to horse keepers when considering euthanasia, saying: "Be practical and not entirely emotional when addressing the situation. Let your head, not your heart control your actions." As supportive as this statement is most likely meant to be, I think it is less helpful in overcoming the problem of delayed euthanasia. I believe that we need to cultivate acceptance for and ways of handling how emotions coalesce around grief, sadness, guilt, and distress when horse keepers decide what is the right thing to do for an animal they love and care for. In my experience, head and heart need to be resilient partners when dealing with these issues. The heart must acknowledge the head's perspectives on wellbeing before the caregiver can follow through in ways that the human head and heart can continue to live with.

I will present my case study as an autoethnographic analysis (Wall 2008, 2016; Sparkes 2000; Karlson et al. 2021). Sarah Stahlke Wall (2016, 7) advocates that as a self-focused analytical approach, autoethnography can tap into "legitimate and unique sources of knowledge and insight that come from a particular view of one's place in the world." My case study is unique. I speak from positioned knowledge, produced in, and with relevance to my particular place in the world – which is northern Norway, where since 2008, I until Assa's death have had three horses in my care. I am also a published academic with great interest in human animal studies with special focus on horses. I also have some riding school experience that dates decades back – my admiration of horses, in other words, has a long history.

Even so, my emotions and decisions for enacting euthanasia will have umbrella-like similarities with what others have felt. That is the promise of autoethnography.

It can link personal experiences to wider issues, and capture meanings and events in ways that promote collective thinking. More specifically, Sarah Stahlke Wall (2016, 7) states that the personal experiences derived in autoethnographies can “illuminate those small spaces where understanding has not yet reached”. As read from the references to equine well-being referred to above, there are many issues where understanding needs more focus. We do not yet have a clear understanding of this issue. Through my autoethnographic analysis I believe that researchers, as well as welfare officers and veterinarians who may assist caregivers, can learn more about the dire problems that end-of-life decisions present.

The text that follows is a storyline that starts with my finding out that Assa was losing weight – not dramatically, but still – it was a concern I had. I will talk about how I dealt with this, and the many more concerns that were to come, in due order, from the detection of weight loss, through the consultancy with the veterinarian, until I eventually had placed the horse at a depot for dead animals.

Detecting a welfare issue

Assa came into my life in 2008, when she was eight years of age, together with a gelding, Ivan, aged eleven. Five years later came the mare Nótt, then aged fourteen. In coastal northern Norway, where the horses and I live, the average winter temperature is minus 4 degrees Celsius. I keep the horses on free range. They are seldom blanketed, only when there is sleet for several days. They have heated water during winter, and they have a shelter where they are fed good quality hay four times a day. Three of those meals are from automatic feeders, I provide the fourth myself. When I am there, I muck out and ride the horses, often one, but sometimes two a day. I also have four other riders that come individually, once a week, to ride with me. There are days when I do not ride. Instead, I play with the horses in an outdoors arena, rewarding them with heaps of carrots for doing little tricks. I provide extra feed when it is cold. Given this handling, the horses are neither fat nor lean.

My explanation places me as one who, according to my knowledge, provides reasonably good care for my horses. I have learned about this, as many other horse keepers also have, through reading magazines, searching the internet, talking to veterinarians, and, as I am a researcher, reading research literature (Visser and Van Wijk-Jansen 2012). From these sources I have developed an understanding that free range is seen as far better than standing boxed, where horses have far too little contact with other horses. Moreover, I have also learned that heated drinking water and several

meals a day, is looked upon as care that helps horses maintain a sound mental health and good physical body condition.

When Assa started losing weight in late spring last year, I initially did not worry as her physical condition would allow her to lose some weight. She had, however, been diagnosed with periodontitis some years back, an illness that is a leading cause of tooth loss in horses. It is not easy to treat, but regular dental care is important. I did not think of dental issues at first, but as her weight loss continued, I began to worry, and I asked the veterinarian to come earlier this year for Assa's annual dental check-up and vaccinations. The veterinarian asked if it was an urgent matter, her calendar was full this week, but she could come the following week. However, as I was traveling then, we decided on a later date.

When the veterinarian came and examined Assa's teeth, she found that two molars, on either side of the lower mouth, were loose to the extent that they bent outwards. It was awful to see, and it was awful to realize that this was the reason for her weight loss. She had not been able to chew properly, and thus had not gotten enough nutrition.

I felt guilty for not having called the veterinarian sooner. I had watched Assa chewing hay, and noticed that she both chewed and swallowed, perhaps at a lower speed, I was not sure, but she ingested food. Being fed four times a day, I reasoned that she was taking in food, not enough, as she was losing weight, but she seemed to be able to manage until the veterinarian could come. As it turned out, I should have called earlier.

It assuages my guilty feeling a little to know that my actions and reasonings are in line with what other horse people do. In a study of a lay understanding and management of equine colic among horse keepers from the north-west of the UK, Claire Scantlebury et al. (2014) found complex elements in the respondents' decision-making. Investigating the specific relationship when it came to how the horse keepers recognized, assessed, and responded to horses' colic, the authors found three main management strategies. Colic in horses is an unpredictable and often unpreventable illness, and painful for the horse to endure. If detected early, it can be healed, but death is often the outcome. In Scantlebury et al.'s study, some caregivers used a wait-and-see-strategy, others tried various lay treatments, while others sought veterinary treatment. Respondents also listed disorders they would not rush to call the veterinarian for, among them weight loss, in addition to back pain, diarrhea, the horse being out of sorts, box-walking, and pawing. Moreover, the threshold for when a caregiver considered there to be a significant change in their horse's health differed from one individual to the next.

Although it eases my guilt to know that my delayed call to the vet is shared by other horse keepers, I will not justify my actions. Instead, I see this online study, as well as Rebecca Smith et al.'s findings, referred to above, and my confession of why and how I did not call the vet immediately after discovering weight loss as testimony to the need for further qualitative studies into this aspect of the horse human dynamic. What are caregivers' various reasons for not calling the vet? Do more people, like me, think that well, the horse is eating, she is not too thin, the veterinarian can wait? How are such elements as financial costs, availability of veterinarians and the caregiver's knowledge of horses balanced? And finally, how pertinent is this issue? Should horses see veterinarians more often? These are all issues that euthanasia researchers have addressed, finding that horse keepers vary with respect to how they deal with such decisions. I strongly agree that further research, and more in-depth studies into reasons for actions and variations, are necessary. The same holds true for my next topic, that of deciding what to do with Assa's dental problems.

Surgery or euthanasia

The veterinarian suggested surgery. That would imply taking Assa to the horse dentist, a two-hour drive away, to have the molars extracted. I was sceptical, not about the long drive with her, but about pulling the teeth. I asked the veterinarian what this involved. At best, as I understood it, this meant surgery with a three-week recovery time, with, of course, some pain during this time, but recovery was possible. There was also the possibility of a slower healing process, given the age of the horse. There could be inflammation, and that would have to be dealt with by a new trip to the dentist.

The question that my head and heart now had to deal with was about pain and quality of life, physical as well as mental quality. Summer-pasture season was coming up, and although I ponder about what horses feel, and am in a constant quandary (am I doing the right thing when I do this and that), I firmly believe that we both agree, horses and I, that summer pasture, which offers walking around in large green areas, eating as they please, on not too rich grass, is "quality time". It was this that now was an issue for Assa – would she, following surgery, be able to graze this summer? And would she be in pain? There are a few painkiller options for horses, but none that could keep her on her feet while addressing severe pain.

I was inclining towards no surgery. There was perhaps some pain involved in keeping the molars. I knew they impeded her chewing, but I did not know how, or if, pain was involved. I had discussed the issue with my dentist. Periodontitis is a disease

that also affects humans. He had patients that had opposite experiences. Some had pain while chewing, other just noticed that their teeth were bent over and felt nothing. Whether that transfers to nonhuman animals, and if so, what category Assa would be in, was hard to tell. I had to envisage, with head and heart, what could come. I could see that things could easily get worse; it could be a painful summer. Assa would at least lose the first month. She could lose more – healing well was not a guaranteed outcome. The risk of whether she would be able to enjoy the summer, standing there with the green grass, wanting to eat, but with pain for every mouthful she took, lacking those molars and being sore after surgery, was something I wanted to spare her. With summer-pasture time only lasting around three to four months in my region, the prospects of her having a nice summer were not good. I decided against the surgery.

This was a life decision. A positive outcome of the surgery could have been a horse that had a good summer and ate hay well the next winter. The negative outcome was a poor summer, perhaps healed by the winter. The worst scenario was poor summer, not healed by winter, and euthanized then, after months of agony. I went for the worst scenario. I thought that she could manage with her mobile molars through the summer, she could have painkillers that would help her through. I deprived Assa of the option of successful surgery and a further life without molars.

All these possible outcomes are heartfelt concerns that I, the person responsible for the horse's life and well-being, had to consider. No one could instruct me and give me a clear solution as to what was best for Assa. Such instructions did not exist. I had to reason with head and heart. I went through the options, in my head. But it was heart-breaking to think of Assa spending her last days of life troubled with discomfort and pain, and that was the critical deciding factor. She deserved better.

The decision to let her have the summer, with grass and painkillers, was soon to change, however. I learned from the veterinarian that horses that do not chew well may have digestion problems, one possible consequence is colic. As mentioned above, colic needs to be detected early for proper healing. But even so, it can be detrimental and very painful. A friend of mine experienced her horse in agony during a long day. At the end of the day of pain for the horse, but surely also for the human, my friend asked the veterinarian if he thought the horse could improve during the night. When the veterinarian answered that the chances were small, my friend opted for euthanasia.

With this, and similar stories in mind, I feared that colic could strike Assa. Detecting colic in its early stage would be difficult if Assa were out on the pasture unless someone followed her closely. I did not have that option. I work for a living, my horses are a half-hour drive from where I work, and I did not have the means to pay someone

to keep watch over her throughout the summer. Moreover, detecting colic is one thing, curing it is another. Where I live, there are no surgical options. Should she get colic, the hope would be that it would be the milder kind, the one the veterinarian could cure immediately.

With the colic scenario added to the possibility that she was in pain with bent-over molars, it took me two or three days to come to the decision that I could not live with these risks. I could not let Assa live with them either. Assa had to die before anything really bad happened. As incongruous as that might sound, bad had already happened, the really bad event would have been that Assa was stricken with colic because I did not let her have her dental surgery. Better to die now, before irreversible problems set in. I told the veterinarian that I wanted to put her down before the grazing season ended, actually now. "If you're ready for it," she said, in a considerate, passionate tone, showing great understanding. While I answered in the affirmative, I thought to myself that no, I am not ready, but Assa is.

The grieving starts

Having decided in favour of euthanasia, the days that followed were difficult and strange. I looked at Assa with great sorrow and concern, but I tried not to grieve too openly in her presence. She was still alive and deserved some happy time – grieving could wait until she had passed. As horses know their people well, and as body language reveals more than we are aware of, Assa probably realized my anguish. I had a sense that she was more aware of my presence. She seemed to pay more attention to where I was, coming up closer more often. I did not, at that time, think that this was due to my anguish. I thought it was her own problems that were bothering her. I thought she was seeking my comfort. In retrospect, and as I write these pages of reflections on the event, I am more open to understanding her readings of me. Perhaps she was also seeing my attempts to distance myself from knowing she was to die soon. That is, after all, what I was doing. As soon as I had decided on euthanasia, my grieving started; if not openly, at least inside of me. And I was trying to protect not only Assa from seeing it, but also myself, from experiencing it too much. I distanced myself from my horse.

When reading blogs and listening to other people talking about losing a horse, they often state that they spend time crying, burying their face in the horse's mane. I did not do this. I saw it as my job to control my emotions. However, on the second day before the veterinarian was to come, I suddenly found myself crying my heart out while driving to the stable. I phoned a friend, the one who had lost her horse to colic, and

found comfort in talking with her. In retrospect I think this was important for maintaining a proper focus. I composed myself, but I also needed to vent my emotions. More so, however, I think it was important for my being able to continue in the process and stay somewhat calm during the rest of it.

The last evening that Assa had at the stable, one of the other persons that she had in her life was there to say her goodbyes. I appreciated that and decided not to go to the stable myself. I thought that my friend could have that occasion for herself. Not being there was also a kind of relief, an emotional relief. I allowed myself a day away before going through with the hardship of putting Assa down the next day. I knew my friend would be perfectly able to deal with the horses' care on her own. She had done so many times before. My friend told me about her experiences afterwards. She had brought carrots with her, and fed all the horses with them, but particularly Assa. She had also brushed her and been with her until, as she told me: "Assa said to me that it's okay, you can go now". I am glad my friend got to have these last sensations and experiences with Assa.

June 29

Next morning, I was at the stable early. I wanted to make sure that all preparations had been made. There was not much to prepare, though. I fed the horses as usual, had some coffee with the farmer who I rent the stable from, and discussed some last details with him as he was going to help me afterwards. I haltered Assa, took her to a place where the grass was good, and decided to await the veterinarian's arrival in peace and quit.

Standing there with the farmer and Assa, I suddenly thought about bringing her two companions, Ivan and Nótt out there as well. I had read about letting other horses be present on such occasions just the evening before. I dreaded then that I had not thought about investigating this more – there was far too little time that last evening. I found very little information on this – one source warned against doing it. As I felt I knew too little I had decided not to bring them out. However, now, being there, I decided to do this anyway. I had the farmer continue grazing Assa and put up a small fence around where Ivan and Nótt could graze. And they did. All three horses were there, all grazing, two horses fenced in, one in a halter.

Then the veterinarian arrived. She looked at my arrangements. I sensed a scepticism when she saw the other horses present, but she made no remarks. She was calm, sincere, and composed. We talked a little, she explained what the syringes filled with blue liquid that she had prepared in the back of her SUV were for. Assa got her sedatives

first. I fed her apples. She loves apples. The sedative did its job, she stopped eating the apples. The first syringe was injected into Assa's body. It was awful. This stream of blue liquid was going to kill her. Assa was going to run out of time in a few seconds. And she did. With the second injection she fell to the ground. She did not move at all.

I sat down with her, stroked her head. Her upper lip was pulled slightly back over her teeth, and I could see a little piece of apple in her mouth. She had not been able to chew them all before the sedative took effect. I sobbed a little and tried to close her eyes. The veterinarian said that it is often difficult to close horses' eyes when they are dead. We talked a little, about death. I sat there for some time, talking to an understanding veterinarian. She went about her business, checked for a pulse a few times, and made sure the horse was dead. I was comforted by her professional, calm, and understanding presence. She did not hurry on to the next job. She took the time that was necessary.

As we were standing there Ivan, the gelding, suddenly stretched his head in Assa's direction. Who knows what he was thinking. In an attempt to find out I put on his halter and led him to her. He bent down to sniff her back, starting in the middle of the horse and continuously sniffing along the spine towards the rump. He placed a few sniffs there, at the top of the tail, and then he lifted his head away and started grazing. As the area could be contaminated with poison, I could not let him graze there. I wish I could have done so, to see if he had more reactions. Instead, I led him away and got hold of the mare, Nótt, so she could also meet Assa. She did not sniff or pay any particular attention. She started grazing immediately.

I am glad I did this. I of course have no idea what the two horses thought and felt here, but I am glad I presented them to the dead Assa. Next day, when let out in a different pasture, Nótt stood looking outside the fences. Ivan just started grazing immediately. Whether these reactions are to be read as Nótt asking where Assa was, while Ivan knew, is a mystery to mull over.

Handling a dead horse

I could stop the story here; the horse is dead. Choosing to euthanize the horse in the pasture, however, leads to another issue; disposal of the dead horse. I had investigated options beforehand. Burying a horse that is euthanized with poison means digging a very deep grave. It requires that a permit is obtained from the local authorities, and it is not likely that it will be granted. From internet sources I read that such permits could be granted if the horse died in terrain that was very difficult to reach. That was not my

case. The other option was “destruction”, and this is just as awful as it sounds. This is a decision that needs to be thoroughly dealt with by both head and heart. It can be as difficult as the actual taking of the horse’s life. The life you once knew is not there. The body is.

For humans, burials have well-established rituals. That is helpful. People know what to do and have things to do. For my dead horse, I had to figure things out for myself. I had to make my ritual. As it turned out, I realize that I made a ritual that my heart could live with.

One option was to let a transportation service come and get her. It said on the website of the only firm in my region that a cadaver vehicle could come to my area within five days’ notice. I checked with the driver. On the phone he told me that he could be at my place the day or second day after the euthanasia had taken place. Then she would be lifted and put in a container together with other dead animals to be taken to a designated area. At the time, I thought that having her lying there for days, left alone, was a sad fate. Not just sad, I considered it an awful end. More awful, however, was the thought of her being lifted by a metallic claw and thrown into the container, like garbage. I wanted a worthier end. My heart would not let me choose this option.

Friends I have talked to, and the veterinarian, suggested the most common solution was to put the horse down while on my horse trailer. I could then drive her to the depot myself. People who had done it this way had mentioned problems I was not comfortable with. One was that the horse could become distressed on the trailer. It is not common for the horse to stand on a trailer with a veterinarian around. Moreover, when euthanizing a horse with poison, cramps can occur, and as there is little room for that on the trailer it would be distressing to watch. A third image to deal with is that at the depot, the dead horse would be dragged out by the feet. While this makes sense, it is not a good image to hold onto afterwards.

In retrospect I find it interesting that dealing with the dead animal is not just practical thinking with the head. The heart also has a lot it wants to mediate. This is understandable, that is why we have rituals for dead humans. Rituals help us do things the right way, to have a worthy end and a worthy memory of the end. I do not think I was consciously considering this at the moment, it was just the heart-driven process that instilled these concerns in me. My heart chose for me, I planned for better images than having the cadaver vehicle coming to the farm.

My solution when having discarded the easy ways of transport may sound a bit crazy. Perhaps, in retrospect, I think so myself. I decided to drive Assa to the depot myself. I have a Hilux with a truck bed that actually fits a dead Icelandic horse. To get

her onto the truck, however, you need a willing farmer with a tractor. I had both. The farmer helped me tie her feet so that we could lift her onto my Hilux. He did the tying. However, I made sure that Assa would not dangle, head down and tongue out, like a slaughtered animal. I kept her halter on and tied it to her feet so that in her upside-down position she still looked like a horse, only upside down. That to me, was a worthy image. I did not spend too much time looking at her though, dangling from the tractor, but the brief glimpse I took assured me that this was okay.

Perhaps okay is not the right word. I was very distressed. No one I knew had done this before, driving for hours with a dead horse on the truck bed. I saw, however, no other option that could keep me sane and be worthy of Assa.

On the truck bed, the farmer wrapped her tightly in a tarpaulin. He used a lot of rope and many knots. No horse foot would be popping out during the one-and-a-half-hour drive.

Having told friends that I was going to take the horse to the depot myself, alone, many of them worried for me. Would I manage on my own? Should I have someone with me? Had they been available I probably would have asked someone, but this was daytime, and my friends have jobs. I drove alone. I had imagined that I would cry my eyes out during the drive, but I did not. On the contrary, I felt good. I felt that this was Assa and me, on our last journey. I think it was then, or in retrospect thinking about this trip that I realized that I was partaking in a ceremonial killing of a horse. I was following a ritual I had created myself, and that gave me some comfort. I had done things I thought were right. Assa had not suffered. And now, in the vehicle, we were about to finish our journeys – the ones in her life, and the one in her death. I was glad I was alone. There was no one to engage with. There was more room for dealing with the actual event – driving Assa.

At the depot

I was told that the people at the depot would be very helpful and understanding. I was surprised then by what took place next. I was told to drive down to a place where a huge truck was parked. I did and talked to the young man in charge of it. He left it to me to unpack the horse, which I suppose was wise. Perhaps he did not want to bother or disturb me. But I was not prepared to do the unpacking. Taking the tarpaulin off her feet, untying the knots only to find the dead Assa underneath, was more than I could bear. I had to stop, and let myself cry for a bit. It was a devastatingly sad moment, as I realized that now she had become a cadaver. Her next place would be among other

dead animals in a container. It said so in writing, cadaver was written in big block letters on the container. Right then, I thought that she might as well have been collected by the cadaver vehicle from the farm. Her destiny was the same.

I had to finish crying; I unpacked the horse. The young man lifted her gently off my truck and laid her to rest on the ground. That is when I left.

I spent a day, or half a day, thinking that I would not repeat this way if there was another time. But then I realized that the ritual aspect of driving her myself, and the ritual aspect of not storing her at the farm for days, dead, outweighed the sadness I felt at being there, at the depot. Now I feel that this is a process I might follow again if that time should come.

Afterwords

I entitled this article “Putting a horse to sleep: a worthy end”. The idea of a worthy end has constantly guided me in how I wanted Assa’s death to be: she deserved respect. I put her in a number of situations, where in some she was a dead body, but they all had to be worthy. As I lived through the processes, planning for the worthy end, I came to realize that it was also my own worth that was at stake. I had to make plans that my heart could endure, plans that my head and heart could live with. In retrospect, and reflecting through the process of writing this article, I see how my focus on a worthy end eased my deep sadness, and all the other complex emotions that having to put her down entailed.

As prescriptions for how to euthanize a beloved companion are lacking in the research literature, I believe that my autoethnography here is an important contribution to future research. It is important to acknowledge that not only do we lack procedures for how to carry out and experience a euthanasia process, but we are also ill-equipped to make decisions about life and death. When people we love are ill, they can express how they feel, and we can provide pain-relieving medicine. That opportunity is rare or non-existent for horses. Extending their lives when they are suffering may come at the cost of what equine welfare experts call “delayed euthanasia”. Understanding motivations for and barriers to euthanasia is, however, about more than educating caregivers about welfare impairments. It is also about extending human perspectives on animal death.

We must accept that this type of death is a human responsibility. When we take a horse into our care, a horse that we come to love and make a member of our family, we must also accept that we may have to euthanize this horse. Preferably we should

also prepare ourselves by thinking through our responsibility. My autoethnography has provided a closer look at how the rational head, when collaborating closely with the heart, can make it easier to deal with the dire emotions that euthanasia entails. There is a lot to be endured along the way.

The autoethnography has also opened for being more aware of the little things, such as reflecting more over what actually happened between Assa and me in those last days before she died. If I had been interviewed by an ethnographer, a more traditional way of obtaining ethnographic knowledge, I am not sure that the one special little nuance would have come to the surface; her perhaps acknowledging my feelings, while I thought she was concerned over her own, in pain, and me distancing myself a bit from the horse that was to die. Realizing that distancing is an emotion that can arise in the euthanasia process, is important to me, and I assume it also brings about a greater understanding of the processes involved.

Moreover, autoethnography has allowed me to include not only emotions, but also all the practicalities. It is a lengthy process, as it should be. It should not be easy to euthanize an animal. Regarding further research into barriers and motivations for euthanasia, my focus on practicalities and emotions can help to point the way to more targeted research on perceptions of and impairments to euthanasia, as well as on the people who find themselves in these difficult situations. We need to understand more about the many emotions that come to the surface. Anxiety, uncertainty, and bewilderment may characterize the first part of the process of detecting a welfare problem and deciding whether euthanasia should be considered. After this, sadness, guilt, and despair may enter the arena. All these emotions may then coalesce and also change in the process. They are subjectively felt, and can change from the caregiver being anxious about being wrong, to acknowledging that one is right, only then to be overcome with guilt, or to be conflicted; it is the right thing to do, why I am feeling guilty? Euthanasia can be a long journey through emotional turmoil, deeds, and thoughts. I hope the informative narrative I provide here can give other researchers ideas for further research into these matters, as well as be supportive for people who assist and advise horse keepers when it comes to making euthanasia decisions.

As time has passed, I feel less guilty. I know what choices I dealt with and have forgiven myself for any mistakes that might have been made. I hold on to the thought that I have done what I thought was best for Assa.

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