

## Misadventures with Mirkos

By **Kim Abbott**

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As Mirkos and I neared the end of our ride one afternoon, I noticed a skunk waddling his way toward the arena. Although I was debating continuing our ride a little longer, that clinched my decision to stop for the day.

I didn't worry too much about it until we entered the barn and saw another skunk--he couldn't have been the same one because they don't move that fast--in one of the stalls (which luckily was empty). I stopped dead in my tracks, caught like a deer in the headlights as I stared into the eyes of the skunk, for a split second before I hauled Mirkos to his stall. I waited for the offending stench to fill the barn aisles, but fortunately the skunk had not felt threatened enough to spray.

I constantly glanced over my shoulder and peered out from the stall doorway while untacking Mirkos, afraid that the intruder would attack after being discovered. Images of what would happen if we were to be sprayed flashed before my eyes, but the animal did not come for us. Then it hit me--I had to pass the stall to put away the tack and get Mirkos' dinner. I quietly inched my way toward the feed room and peeked into the stall that had been occupied by the trespasser, my heart racing. But the skunk was gone. I breathed a sigh of relief and mustered up the courage to check every other stall in the barn. He had vanished completely. I was still on guard as I went to get Mirkos' feed, waiting for the skunk to jump out from a dark corner.

I don't know where he went, but I did not see the skunk again that afternoon. However, as I drove away from the barn, I spotted three baby skunks near the garbage can that sat right outside the doorway of the house where one of the barn workers lives. I honked my horn in hopes that the guy would come to the door, but when he didn't, I resolved to put myself in the line of fire to save someone else. As I approached the front door, the young pollutants scurried into a drain, but I could still see them watching me. They were adorable, obviously a ploy to lure unsuspecting prey. I worried that mom would lurch from the bushes to attack, but she must have been away gathering food for her offspring. I knocked on the door, but no one came, so I ran for the cover of my car and dialed the barn manager to alert him of my experiences. The next day there were trap-and-release cages set up in the barn. The skunks have been elusive to this day, likely waiting for us humans to get comfortable before they strike again.

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