



# Rocco's 'Tail'...

...the story of how our loveable mascot came to Blackpool Carers

by Jacqui Morley

## When Rocco was a little donkey he knew just where he wanted to live when he grew up - Blackpool!

He had heard all about Blackpool from other donkeys. He knew it had a Tower, lots of sand, three piers, a huge fun fair and a Winter Gardens, although he wasn't sure what a Winter Gardens was.

He knew that since 1890 donkeys had worked at the seaside. They came out each summer and let people ride them on the beach, so long as the sea wasn't in, of course. The donkeys worked very hard because Blackpool had the longest holiday season of any seaside resort in Britain because of the 'Hallucinations'.

Rocco didn't know what the 'Hallucinations' were but knew people came from far and wide to see them. He knew horses helped because they often trotted along the Promenade pulling pink and gold carriages - like something out of a fairy story.

Some of the horses, in all their finery, looked down their long noses at the donkeys. But the donkeys had the last bray ... because some of the horses had to wear nappies!

The donkeys were tucked up at night so didn't see the 'Hallucinations', but his grandmare told him they were like pretty pictures lit up. Rocco wanted to see the 'Hallucinations' for himself. He told Grandmare who was the best donkey storyteller: "I shall go to Blackpool when I grow up and take my coolest hat and my special Donkey sunglasses to shade my eyes from the Lights of the 'Hallucinations' and all that sunshine Blackpool gets every single day."

His grandmare laughed and said he should take an umbrella too - one of those you can wear like a hat (because it's hard for a donkey to hold an umbrella).

Grandmare told him donkeys loved Blackpool because it had been the very first place in the whole of Britain to

have its very own **Donkey Charter** - back in the days when more donkeys worked on the sands carrying riders.

The Charter stopped the donkeys being overworked. They were given Fridays off and regular breaks, and there was a ban on anyone weighing over 8 stone riding them, or others who had too much to drink.

Grandmare said it stopped Stags and Hens riding donkeys. Rocco laughed because hens only sat on donkeys' backs on farms ... and the only stags he'd ever seen were Santa's reindeer and they could fly.

His grandmare even told him that the darker strips of hair which looked like a cross down the middle of a donkey's back were said to have been caused by standing in the shadow of a cross long ago - and it meant donkeys were loved.

That very day he got a seaside postcard from Blackpool Carers inviting him to come to Blackpool - and not just for a holiday but to help them. The picture showed carers who lived in Blackpool. They looked kind. In fact, just the sort of people to give him plenty of hugs, maybe a carrot, an apple or even a mint.

A nice lady called Terry Hodgkinson, who helps run the charity, told him **carers had to carry heavy burdens** and needed all the help they could get.

Rocco knew that donkeys were called Beasts of Burden. In fact that had been his name once until a very nice carer named him Rocco in a competition. He much preferred Rocco.

He knew some donkeys worked much too hard and didn't get rest breaks or shade from the sun, or clean dry bedding, nice food, or their coats groomed or their hooves trimmed.

Rocco had heard of a place called 'Abroad' where some donkeys worked so hard their feet, mouths and backs hurt. Rocco also knew some people tried to rescue donkeys - but he had never really heard of a donkey trying to rescue people.

**He was shocked to find out that thousands of people in Blackpool were so busy looking after family and friends they loved, they didn't look after themselves too well. He found out that it was a real treat for carers to get a few hours away from home and meet other carers.**

He was pleased to hear that some places in Blackpool, including Sandcastle Waterpark, gave them treats. Rocco knew all about Sandcastle Waterpark, as two of his mascot friends, Bling and Balula live there.

So when Terry asked Rocco to join Blackpool Carers' friendly team he was happy to give them a helping hoof and he didn't even want to take Fridays off!

His new boss said his job would be to:

- Give lots of hugs and pose for pictures
- Visit schools and meet people at charity events
- Take part in lots of fundraising events
- Help raise money to keep the good work going
- Most important of all, make all carers happy.

On Rocco's very first visit to Blackpool he took the lift right to the very top of the Tower, to see all of Blackpool laid out before and below him, the beach, the sea, the Comedy Carpet (hee haw!), the attractions and all the people.

**Terry told him the charity helps more than 12,000 carers, including 1,000 young carers, but she knew at least 10,000 more carers lived in Blackpool who may not even know about Blackpool Carers.**

They were out there, not hiding but getting on with their lives as best as they could, not knowing they could get help, perhaps not knowing they even needed help, or were too proud to ask. They were carrying that heavy weight alone.

Rocco's chest swelled with pride because he knew he could do what donkeys through the ages have always done - help people carry their burdens and make life better for them.

## Mini Roccos

Rocco thought of an idea to sell cuddly Mini Roccos, to raise funds for respite activities for carers, so they could enjoy themselves whilst having a break from caring for a short while and 're-charge' their batteries.

Mini Roccos and a huge selection of specially made clothes including dresses, uniforms and football kits, can be purchased from Beaverbrooks House or from our online shop: [www.blackpoolcarers.org/shop](http://www.blackpoolcarers.org/shop) - you can even request bespoke outfits too!



## Find out more

If you would like to find out more about Blackpool Carers, make a donation, or come and visit us, please contact Terry Hodgkinson, Head of Business Development & Fundraising on 01253 393748 or email: [terry.hodkinson@blackpoolcarers.org](mailto:terry.hodkinson@blackpoolcarers.org)

**Blackpool Carers Centre**

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