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Dear Friends,

Could this be right? The December newsletter is just arriving after the New Year? Yes, it's true. But I am only one person these days - as I am sure each one of you feels after a hectic holiday season.

Just a quick note to fill in for December and please expect the newsletters back on track from early January - which it almost is!!

News updates

From December - Carol's visit was fantastic. We had a nice group in Palm City for the lecture and demonstration. Everyone filled with questions afterwards as usual. Carol will be back sometime in late February or early March for those of you who were not able to attend this time.

BALANCE has offered for me to carry their line of pads and "non-saddle" products. I have my first order in and will be shipping out the complete line of BALANCE pads, EZ-Reins and so forth upon request. I will get them listed on my website, but am only just getting things in order for that. Contact me directly if you are in need! I am not a saddle consultant, so Carol or

the BALANCE office is still the best source for that. I am only filling the need for pad supplementation! (This is also one of my excuses for not having the newsletter out in December).

I personally had a fantastic time with Carol as well as with her friend Terry Wright. I had my choice of free tickets to Grand Prix day at the National Horse Show in Wellington or the day having a private lesson with both Carol and Terry on each one of my three horses. I chose the lesson! What an opportunity to share ideas, be given feedback and have my riding skills improved with two fantastic trainers. It was a very special visit. Their attention to the correctness of movement and the feel of correct movement is so specific that I have yet to find more arduous instruction. I think that is the most additive part of horsemanship - there is always a challenge no matter how much you have devoted to studies. No one person can ever know it all.

Carol Brett's friend, Terry Wright, is located in Bushnell, Florida - just South of Ocala. If anyone is interested, she is a dressage trainer and available for local lessons in that area. I

will also try to host her down here in Southern Florida for those in this area. Let me know if you would like her contact information emailed to you. (email me at kirsten@wexfordfarm.com)

Training notes

This journey of learning about horses is such a fascinating one. There is so much to learn and experience and it just keeps getting better the longer I do it. Since there is so much to learn and experience, horsemanship seems to keep a person in a learning frame of mind, open to knowledge and curious enough to search for answers. Once we "know" something our minds seem to harden and we develop habits. To be good with horses a person has to sort of chuck that right out the window and rediscover flexibility in mind and body - rediscover what it feels like to be learning and changing and developing all the time instead of knowing.

True to form as a horsemanship addict, I spent Christmas morning in my pajamas with Tom Dorrance's book, "True Unity". It was a great luxury to sit and read for a while with no schedule for the day. The first time I read his book years ago it seemed like cryptic cowboy speak to me and although I could

read the words, much of the meaning was lost. This reading however I got so much out of that small book. There it was in front of my eyes, an explanation for the magic I saw between Tom Dorrance and the horses he touched - and I understood much more of what he was trying to get across.

For those who may not know, Tom and Bill Dorrance were brothers who rekindled this type of horse training we currently call natural horsemanship or the vaquero style of training. They have both written books and were teachers to Ray Hunt, Buck Brannaman and Pat Parelli. Although they have both since past away, they spawned the whole culture we now have of clinics and clinicians, rope equipment, horse psychology and all the novel ideas we associate with natural horsemanship or working cowboy type training.

I first met Tom Dorrance at a Ray Hunt clinic in California back in 1992. He had to have been in his 80's when I met him and yet he took the most difficult horses from the clinic and would help the owners on the side. He was a small, weak man and yet had the most amazing presence with a horse. Horses would simply do what he asked even though it never looked like Tom was ever doing anything! As soon as you saw Tom with a horse, you knew that he had something very special going.

So for this month I thought I would share a few things I got out of the book on Christmas morning and offer a bit of perspective.

Chapter 1 - "Feel the Whole Horse"

- The older I get the more it's beginning to dawn on me how most people seem to have so little feel of the whole horse - of what's going on in what part.

- When I observe people and horses, it often seems to me that when the horse is trying to avoid something, or maybe is not doing what the rider asks of him, it is because the horse's sense of self-preservation is immediately taking effect. This may seem as though the horse does not want to cooperate. But the rider needs to recognize the whole horse: the horse has a basic need for self-preservation.

- I will mention the need for self-preservation; this to me includes the physical and the mental - and a third factor. I've been trying for some time to think of words to get this third factor to where it comes to light; to show how it blends in with the other two - the physical and the mental. It is the least mentioned, but I am beginning to believe it is the most important factor to recognize: the rider needs to recognize the horse's need for self-preservation in Mind, Body and, the third factor, Spirit.

- The best thing I try to do for myself is to try to listen to the horse. I don't mean let him take over. I listen to how he's operating: what he's understanding or what he doesn't understand; what's bothering him and what isn't bothering him. I try to feel what the horse is feeling and operate from where the horse is.

Chapter 2 - "Responsive and Right On"

- The rider needs to get to the point where he realizes how important the hind quarters are; if they aren't working just right, he may notice it more in the front end, but they both have to work, and each one has to complement the other.

- This is the goal: when you reach, or you let him know, he shapes up and the whole horse is all together- balanced. It seems to me, until a person gets this, he is going to be struggling with a lot of things. This is basic.

- The rider will wait for the horse to get balanced. He may be getting alive but not be getting his body weight balanced, to where if he started, the one end would be ready to complement the other. You want them to move off free. If you have them under too much, or if they are out too much, it seems as if it is hard for them to balance themselves, to position - so they can balance themselves right, to get the weight off the foot they need to move, they get the first step.

- Trying to help the horse find it, the easiest for the horse, and with the least effort for the person and the horse, is the thing that you try to keep in mind.

When you put the horse first and try to work from where the horse is, back to the person, it makes it easier for the horse to find.

- This is where I began to realize that straightness in a horse is one of the most important things to keep in mind, right from the time you start riding him. The horse doesn't have to be straight, especially the first ride. The rider needs to be aware of the importance of where the horse is going to need the help, in order to learn to develop straightness, instead of just going along until something gets established and it gets in the way.

- From then on it is a matter of learning the importance of the body's balance. I began to recognize the feel of the horse when I began to realize the importance of working with that body balance.

So there you have some of my favorite excerpts. The road I took to realize that Tom's magic came from a complete understanding of the horse's thoughts, feelings and physical balance was a bit crooked and crazy, but it seems I have managed to learn many things that were important to him. This is the exciting part of learning. No matter the path one takes, it must lead to the same place because it always involves a horse and a rider.

- Until next month -

My best regards,

Kirsten

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