

Over the millions of years horses have evolved as prey animals they have fine-tuned the ability to seek out another's weakness. By reading the body language and intention of predators they choose when to flee and when they can relax. Through sparring with other herd members, horses sort out the very best leader of the group and then attentively tune into that horse's emotional state and focus.



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Dear Friends,

Happy New Year officially! It is off with a bang as the EHV-1 virus has been contained and life is getting back to a normal winter in South Florida. Pi continues to show signs of improvement, so I am hopeful although the progress is painfully slow. Thanks to everyone for your exceptionally kind emails and phone messages. They are very appreciated!

Calendar updates

-Sunday, January 28

Sarasota, FL

Private lesson day: Individual slots available for lessons, shared lesson time also available.

Contact: Tabitha at 941-232-4458 or Leslie at 941-378-2974

-Sunday, February 4

Daytona, FL

Clinic: Groundwork basics and riding in balance

Contact: June Hannabass at 386-451-0884 or saddle-creekstable@yahoo.com

-Saturday, February 10

Palm City, FL

Riding Club Clinic: Dr. Gretchen Nelsen will be here to give the hands-on

first aid clinic. Bring your practice horse and first aid kit for great information and hands on help with techniques.

Contact: Kirsten at 561-252-3235

-Sunday, February 11

Myakka City, FL

Private lesson day: Individual slots available for lessons, shared lesson time also available.

Contact: Chris Koch at 941-917-5092 or christine-koch@smh.com

-Saturday and Sunday, February 17 & 18

Baltimore, MD

Riding clinic with individual slots for each rider

Contact: Nancy Philip 443--799-5668

-Sunday, February 25

Williston, FL

Private lesson day: Individual slots available for lessons, shared lesson time also available.

Contact: Lynn Lawrence at 352-558-4036 or adopt4u@aol.com

-Sunday, March 4

Brooksville, FL

Private lesson day: Individual slots available for les-

sons.

Contact: Paige Cool at 352-754-1759 or viking13@bellsouth.net

-Saturday, March 17

Baltimore, MD

Clinic: Individual clinic slots for horse and rider, open topics

contact: Sarah Wengerut at 410-977-7835 or Sarah@kwlandscaping.com

-Sunday, March 18

Middleburg, VA

Clinic: Individual clinic slots for horse and rider, open topics

Contact: Contact: Connie Hudson 703-206-0556

-Saturday and Sunday, March 24 & 25

Atlanta, GA

Clinic: to be decided as group or private slots, if interested please contact Nancy with your personal needs.

Contact: Nancy Falconer at 239-777-6670 or nsf@cloud9.com

Clinics in the works

-Heber, UT

Continued ==>

Riding clinic from Friday, June 15 through Sunday, June 17. Private lessons near Ogden on Monday, June 18 and Tuesday, June 19.

Contact: Sandy Smith at 801-560-2661 or sandra.smith@nurs.utah.edu

News updates

-Carol Brett of Balance Saddles is planning a trip to Palm City sometime in the near future. The original date had to be postponed and I am waiting to hear about an updated schedule for Carol. If you are interested in Balance Saddles or coming to the incredible lecture she gives, please contact me in advance so I can start a list.

Training notes

The Price of Horsemanship

This is, in a way, a carry over from last month's story about my relationship with Pi. As you may be able to tell, I think a lot about my horses, various dynamics between us, my students, their horses and a huge variety of training theories and applications. OK, I am obsessed - but this is because I find horses, horse people and horsemanship to be challenging and interesting. It is an endless journey in education and personal growth for me. My last article about Pi was a very personal way of expressing how even the professionals don't get things right all the time and it is a tough journey of mistakes and learning. Although people still try to buy perfect horses, magical techniques, equipment or gadgets and miraculous supplements or medical treatments, the real key to the dream lies somewhere between the horse and the human who loves him. It is there we pay the price with various emotions, patience, compassion, commitment, mental efforts and calloused hands. True horsemanship, much like the love and respect it is based on, cannot really be purchased for any price. It must be earned.

Over the millions of years horses have evolved as prey animals they have fine-tuned the ability to seek out another's weakness. By reading the body language and intention of predators they choose when to flee and when they can relax. Through sparring with other herd members, horses sort out the very best leader of the group and then attentively tune into that horse's emotional state and focus. These are the instincts that have helped the survival of the species. Domesticated horses have not lost this ability but it has adapted to the relationships that they now have with humans. If the horse views the human as a predator (which we inherently are), then the horse's fears are heightened and unsafe "behavioral" problems are the result. If the human has managed to build trust and cross the prey/predator line then the relationship becomes one that is based on herd instincts and the sparring or leadership tests begin.

As a teacher and trainer, I often step in and teach the horse the specific skills he needs to manage and cope with being a ridden horse. I can help the horse become a bit more tolerant of rider error and understand better what is required of him in the human world. I can guide the human with information, various experiences and a watchful eye. But ultimately the long term success of the horse/human relationship is up to the owner.

Since recognizing weaknesses is a part of the horse's survival mechanism, even if the horse knows what is expected of him he will test the human's ability to be a good leader. His instincts require it. The horse will not be able to remain a calm and confident follower unless the human is able to offer the leadership he needs. What is this leadership? Firstly, I think it is mental work for the human. The human must have a good understanding of what the horse's real needs are and be willing to put personal agendas on the shelf until those needs are sorted through. The needs encompass the horse's emotional, mental and physical nature and must be worked with instead of subdued to ensure a successful and healthy partnership.

Expect that your horse will pick on your personal weaknesses of character and play on them. It will be frustrating at times because we often don't want to look at or even admit that we have personal weaknesses. Without understanding, education, patience and a sheer determination to take responsibility for your own emotional state, you will continue to run into the wall preventing progress or feel trapped in a cycle of frustration. In other words, we humans must grow, change and strengthen our own weaknesses, becoming better people in the process to solve those "problems" that our horses present to us. All the mistakes, failures and frustrations you make along the way are really an opportunity to look at things from a different perspective. Sometimes, simply changing our perspective can make all the difference!

Becoming a better communicator, compassionate teacher and focused, clear leader is what horses require of us on many levels. This is the real price of horsemanship - and can only be earned. The very last line from the movie "Seabiscuit" sums it all up really beautifully. Red Pollack says, "Everyone thinks we found this broken down horse and fixed him, but we didn't. He fixed us. I guess we needed each other in a way."

Until next time

My best regards,

Kirsten

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