

My Horses...My Teachers...My Friends

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October 2006
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I have been waiting to write this article all year. What could be better than having the opportunity to pay tribute to the horses that have made such a difference in who I have become as an individual! They have influenced my perceptions on the world, how I think, how I react, how I feel about myself and how I look at others – both horses and humans. They have been my best teachers. They have comforted me to the very depths of my being when I needed someone to cry with, and shared joy and freedom unimaginable. Here are some stories about my best friends.

I was blessed to be raised on a ranch in eastern Oregon, where cattle, dogs, and horses were always a part of my growing up. With five brothers, I was well protected from any external adversity, but when it came to ranch chores, being female only doubled my duties. There were all the outdoor activities, as well as the dishes, ironing, and gardening with which I helped my Mom. But as soon as possible, it was off to find my 'ol friend Token, to ride for endless hours, of course bareback, through all kinds of imaginary happenings. Token was an older gelding that definitely had some Percheron draft horse in his background. Along with my human friends, Robin and Cris, we rode the mountains and meadows of the Elkhorn Mountains, with not a worry in the world, except maybe keeping our horses from enjoying the lush grass on occasion. Token, along with the guidance and freedom afforded by my parents and brothers, allowed me to discover my imagination, the joy of sharing the environment with God's creatures, and to recognize that sometimes you have to put in a little work before you get the reward!

In my later growing up years, I had the opportunity to start several young horses. Mitzy, Flicka, Poco, and others gave me new insight to the individuality of each horse. Of course, in my high school years, I knew just about everything there was to know about starting horses, and I was still kinda of the mind that I was to show them who was boss and "make" things happen. A testament to their wonderful nature, the horses never seemed to hold any of that lack of understanding against me, and in their gentle way they each taught me a little something. Mitzy was an easy keeper! My sister-in-law and I were convinced that she slipped off to town each night for strawberry milkshakes. Flicka was just a dream. Her willingness to accomplish what was being asked never failed. Poco taught me that God is always watching out for you. He was a buckskin, that had no fancy breeding, was rather lanky, but I

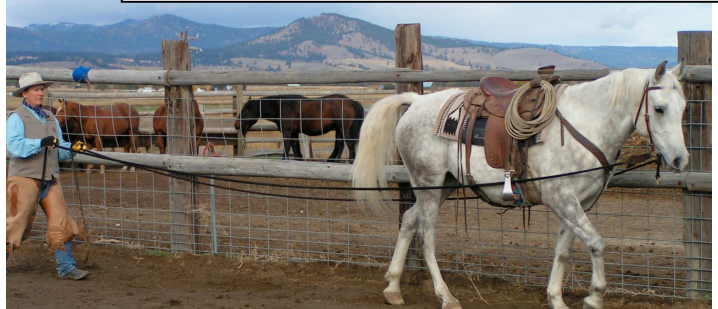
thought he was beautiful. The little guy was also very willing, but physically something just wasn't quite right. He would lose his impulsion, and become unstable in the hindquarters. While riding him in the steep country along the breaks of the Snake River, he gave out on my Dad. The fall could have killed my Father, but someone was protecting him. I learned from Poco that sometimes horses belong to heaven, where they will be whole, rather than suffering here on earth.



Over my life I have had the great fortune to work and play with a number of wonderful draft horses. We fed with a team as I grew up, and now we use them to feed the elk in the winter time. This is our old Percheron friend, Pat, who helped us with his partner, Mike pulling wagons through Historic Baker City, and past many elk.

A little horse named Jump really set things up for me to pursue a better, more thoughtful approach to working with horses. He was a fine Doc Bar bred gelding, that from the very beginning I did not realize what he was trying to tell me. Jump had been scared and he just wasn't sure that humans had anything to offer him. I didn't help that situation too much. I sent him off to a "trainer", who had even less feel for the horse. Oh he got him so he could be ridden, but there was no trust, no understanding, and certainly no feel. When I got Jump back home, I believe I did a few good things in trying to start over, but it wasn't enough for this exceptional horse. How I wish I had known a little of what I understand now, and could have applied them to little Jump. He taught me to search for a better way!

Susan's horse, Chance, showing off his driving skills!



In the late 1980's I had the good fortune to be introduced to that "better way". My farrier suggested that I drive a few hours to John Day, Oregon to see Mr. Ray Hunt. For perhaps the first time in my life I witnessed a horseman. His effortless abilities to work with the horse he was riding, and his guidance to the human students awakened in me a deep, perhaps innate, desire to learn and understand more. Later I was influenced by Pat Parelli during several clinics here in eastern Oregon. Then I met a long-leg cowboy named Dennis Reis, and saw for the first time in my life an effortless dance between horse and rider. I didn't know how he was achieving these flawless movements, nor what they were called, but I knew that it was a dance I would forever be pursuing. In 2001 I met another mentor that ultimately has shaped my limited knowledge, and heightened my desire to understand more. Bettina Drummond, a renowned student of Nuno Oliveria, came to little 'ol eastern Oregon. What a treat to watch and listen to this woman who knew and understood every movement, every muscle, every nuance of what we were asking of the horse. I learned how the principles of classical dressage are so important to what ever discipline we are pursuing with our horses, and she instilled in me a desire to share my limited understandings with other aspiring horsemen and their horses.

Today, I can hardly believe the daily blessing that come into my life because of horses. The people I have met, their horses, and the life-long friendships that have been formed. It is an ever growing journey. My current teachers, such as Riddle, Tilly, and Gabby are here as part of my family, and remind me that they too are never to old to learn. My new Andalusian friend, Encantador, reminds me that if I listen he will teach me about Doma Vaquero traditions and his magnificent Spanish heritage. I can't wait for tomorrow...Continually learning from the horses on how to live my life with patience, forgiveness, and respect.



Our scholarship girls and our friends...Sarah, Lindsey, Jessica, and Dorothy. They have taught US so much!



Heather on Bettina, a Lippizan mare that we recently had come to live with us in Oregon. New Friends!

Susan and Skip. They have been together as friends for about 18 yrs.



My wonderful friend and best teacher...Riddle. Playing with cows at the Haines ranch. We raised Riddle from a foal, out of a great mare named Moon.



My new friend, Encantador, who is teaching me the ways of the Doma Vaquero!



My pal, Tilly, who is continually giving back to me so much more than I asked. She touches a place very deep within me.



Another scholarship student, Erica, plays with cows on our mare, Gabby.



Our newest pal, Sabio, which means SAVY in Spanish! He is an Hispano-Arab, and totally full of himself! His sire is Encantador, so of course he will be magnificent! He is about 1 1/2 in this photo of August 2006. This is the oldest and the youngest. Hopefully Skip is passing along his knowledge to the little fella!