

The Horse Listener

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Suddenly alone and disoriented at 54, I floundered about trying to find an anchor in this strange land called Singlehood. It's a fact that most women will live out their lives alone past the age of 55 and die in their late seventies and early eighties dependent on only themselves for company. What to do with this perhaps 30-year stretch of single living? Time to reinvent oneself. This brings up huge questions for women who have spent their lives in service to their families, friends, relatives and co-workers. I went into therapy briefly looking for answers to these questions and experienced EMDR, a fast-acting stress therapy that allowed me to clear a path back to sanity after the emotional rollercoaster of divorce. How this therapy experience and horses intersected is miraculous, ironic, laughable and all somehow fitting.

Finding Victoor

I had attended an auction in Calhan with the intention of purchasing a few PMU foals, the byproducts of pregnant mare urine factories, weaned early and typically sold at slaughter auctions for the few dollars they bring. Wandering through sale pens on that cold January day, a very tall chestnut-colored Arabian stood out among the crowd of anxious horses awaiting their fates. He seemed to "stand like a prince". As he was later led into the sale ring, he seemed to "own" it. The announcer barked his name "Victoor PF", and divulged he had once been a champion Arabian halter stallion in Arizona. My arm "went up and down like it was pulled by a string" and only after hearing the words "SOLD TO..." echoing over the loudspeaker did I realize I had somehow purchased the royal red horse for a song without even a bidding number.

Once at home, we discovered he was afraid of everything. Not always the same things, not always predictably. His responses were hair-triggered. He pulled, he got loose, he jumped fences, he was even afraid of the sound of his own hooves on the ground. Some days he was calmer than others, so we started thinking of him as Victoor 1 and Victoor 2, never knowing which horse would show up. We tried most of the standard methods to work with spooky horses but ended up with "a beautiful garden ornament." Studying the fear cycle in humans made me realize that Victoor's responses were identical to those exhibited by people with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. The only element missing in his fear was language. Since humans and horses are both mammals, I decided to try adapting human treatments like the one I had experienced to help Victoor. Within one hour I had positive results and I called it Equine Stress Control Therapy or ESCT for short. From this, a protocol was developed and tested on 16 horses and 14 responded favorably. The remaining two turned out to have behavioral problems which were not fear-based and seemed due to permanent brain damage, something no method can overcome.

ESCT to the Rescue

For five years now, ESCT has healed many spooky, troubled, anxious and fearful horses and has developed into a useful training tool, speeding along normal training by reducing resistance of all types. All of our volunteers here at Harmony HorseWorks learn how to do it using only their

hands. A book, video, slide presentation, and brand new hand-held ESCT pulser are available for purchase and proceeds benefit the horse rescue. An ESCT certification program either with us here at Harmony or a self-study course are available, too. Clinics for people interested in an intensive immersion into ESCT can be scheduled with any Colorado barn or equestrian center just by calling us.

An equine holocaust of sorts is occurring today in our country. Vagaries of the economy, strange weather patterns and a decrease in the use of Pregnant Mare Urine (PMU) in human hormone replacement therapy have resulted in an endless stream of abused, neglected, and unwanted horses heading for kill auctions. In an effort to mitigate this tragedy, we founded Harmony Horseworks, a 501(c)(3) corporation dedicated to rescuing and rehabilitating horses for adoption. As of this writing fourteen horses are awaiting adoption and they can be seen on-line at www.harmonyhorseworks.com.

An Artful Life

Single no more and head volunteer and office organizer at Harmony HorseWorks, this life has changed in ways nobody could have scripted. This cozy log home is filled with my equine art work, ready for sale to help support the sanctuary. Now sixty and unable to do the hard work, I supervise the volunteers that show up to groom, train and ride the horses, helping in their rehabilitation, and do the clean-up and pasture management. Vic is still with us, the mascot of our 14 member herd.

Show me your horse and I will tell you who you are. Horse problems are created by people most of the time and the horse is the innocent victim of stupid or bad practices by their owners, handlers and trainers. Each horse reveals his “person’s” sensitivity and awareness of life. Many people ask us to heal them the same way we do the horses, but that is up to each person. In healing the horses’ bodies and minds, I have helped heal my soul – the real work of living, be it alone or as a couple. I am not comfortable being identified as a hero. At Harmony Horseworks we are conduits for healing and the best part is seeing the healing in the horses, the real heroes.

I urge singles to get out and volunteer and recommend animal non-profits because of the immediate response and feedback given by these deserving creatures. They are just like us. They are happy in their skin, feathers and fur and are joyful in life. Only two differences exist between us – they do not speak and they do not know their origin. Otherwise, “mitakuye oyasin” – we are all the same.

For more information about ESCT and volunteering at our horse sanctuary, visit www.harmonyhorseworks.com or call (303) 816-0766.