

HOW HORSES HEAL OUR HEARTS

By Cesaltina da Cunha - Beginner learners instructor and G1-3 facilitator



The deep soul connection between horses and humans has long been celebrated in song and myth.

I worked with two boys, respectively aged 13 and 16 who benefitted from accepting and appreciating the 'horse' more as a teacher than as just a ride. The younger boy showed signs of aggression at first but during lessons became tearful and consumed with fear of falling and getting hurt. I structured the lessons differently and walked beside him as he led the horse in hand. This triggered deep-seated emotions and memories, feelings of sadness, and confusion. As our conversation progressed, buried fears of incompetence, failure and unworthiness surfaced and he broke down sobbing uncontrollably.

The horse encouraged him to acknowledge his vulnerability and human limitations and gave him courage to admit to his behaviour at home which caused him and his family considerable pain and stress.

When I started teaching the 16 year old, he acted depressed. He lacked confidence and energy. He shuffled around and it looked as though he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. Everything about his demeanour suggested he had given up on himself. Lessons started only at a walk getting him to feel the movement of the horse under him and letting go of the tension that was evident in his body language. Feeling emotionally bruised, and in pain, it was difficult for him to believe he could feel any other way. As he continued to voice his feelings, I watched as the horse, without a single word, spoke truth into his life and heart. A love without judgement or terms, a love without strings or conditions.

More recently another little boy tugs at my heartstrings like no other. Only 10 years of age, he has already endured much physical, psychological and emotional trauma due

to cancer which has left him different from who he was before being diagnosed.

A loving little soul who gives without asking for anything in return - horses are his passion. Putting effort into coping with learning disabilities in the classroom, he comes alive when around horses. The day he trotted a dozen times around the lunge arena off lead, and managed to steer the horse on his own, was the day I couldn't hold back the tears. "Yee haw Cowboy!" I clapped and laughed as I went up to congratulate him. "Way to go. You did great." His little chest released a huge breath that was quickly followed by a nervous giggle and a smile so bright it was contagious. His smile radiated all the good cheer any heart could hope for. And I thought, if sunshine could skip, it would look like him.

In modern society "stress" seems to be the new buzz word, but the debilitating effect of "stress" are extremely real. When using horses to work with individuals, whether children or adults, we learn three important lessons: First, we learn who we are, NOT who we think we are. Second, we discover what we might be doing that limits or hinders our interactions. Third, we see alternative ways in which we can improve how we relate to the world.

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