



Ressort: Special interest

How natural horsemanship influenced my life

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Natural horsemanship can help you to develop your skills. It supports you in becoming more tolerant and open-minded. It is not only for horse riders but for every person who wants to work on itself. In general it is some kind of personality training.

I was around 19 years old when I stopped horse riding. Among others, there were two main reasons for it. One was that the horse I trained and was supposed to buy was sold to someone else. The other reason was that I disagreed to some training methods and I asked myself if people do have the right at all to force horses to carry them around. I loved to see the horses running around in freedom.

When I was in the middle of my 30th, my doctor advised me to start riding again. My first horse turned out to have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and therefore had to stay at the sea. After a riding participation I got my second horse, a Haflinger who was a well-bred broom mare who gave birth to five foals and successfully carried the breeder and his daughter through driving, dressage and jumping competitions.

It must have been very hard for Myrielle to not only lose her herd and her familiar territory but also the people who took care of her and trained her. She was used to live among broom mares and foals of the same horse breed. Due to different circumstances we had to change the stables a certain times until we got a place in the current one where we are since years now. During this time, she had to get used to geldings and different breeds.

Probably because of this and because of my first horse trailer ride on the highway with an old trailer with canvas cover and no experience so far, it must have been a nightmare for the horse. Since then, Myrielle refused to get into the trailer again. And like it is with many things in life: everybody else knew it better! ?You have to whip her.? or ?You have to put more pressure on her.? and ?If she won?t go in, force her.? were some of the statements I received.

This did not feel right! I did not like the approach. She is very cooperative and willing to work. The more she was forced, the more she refused. Something definitely went wrong. The horse refused for a reason. I had to listen to what the horse was saying. ?To understand the horse you?ll find that you?re going to have to work on yourself.? said Ray Hunt the legendary, deceased and well-known horsemanship trainer.

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My thinking changed from "What is wrong with the horse?" to "What do I do wrong?" First thing: The longer it took, the more nervous I became. The reason behind it was not that I easily get nervous but pure time pressure! We were supposed to start at the Equitana Open Air for a world record and it took us one and a half hour to get her into the trailer! I planned for not more than the utmost maximum of one hour! Before we even started to put her in I thought: "What if we could not load her duly?" She just fulfilled my expectations. Finally, we got there in time but with a lot of needless pressure.

I was missing the so called "neutral attention". This is something I learned through my psychology, coaching and journalism studies: "Do NOT evaluate, just listen and perceive. To any situation, go with neutral attention. This is the only way to turn-off your inner filter systems and see things in a most objective way. Then, see it from all perspectives, a 360 degrees." My horse taught me not only to remember this, but to DO it!

Myrielle made me more relaxed and less impatient. I heard me listen to myself: "A horse is very sensitive. It can feel your anxiety. Let go off any negative thoughts. Watch how the horse reacts to its surroundings. Be open to learn. Get into her perspective. Be ready to see the world differently." What must the trailer have meant to her? "It brings me to an other place and I lose my herd again?" or "Another horror-trip?" My old trailer was a one-and-a-half. It is much more difficult for the horse to balance herself during the ride than in a usual one. I was definitely too quick on my first try!

We do not use a trailer a lot anymore but if, I have a better time-planning and I do not get upset if it takes its while. I have others helping me to prepare the trailer thing and I can just concentrate on the horse. Mostly, she goes in at once and if not, it does not take longer than half an hour to get her in without pressure. This is a great experience but by far not the only thing you can learn from natural horsemanship. My horse taught me much more than this and it helped me to communicate more clearly and not only to understand myself better but also how I appear to others and where my growth potentials are. A horse reflects your personality.

In order to get respect, you have to give respect. Myrielle is a very proud and ambitious horse. I kept her pride and respected her dignity, motivated her with a positive reinforcer and thanked her for letting me ride on her back. I tried to be as reliable as possible, calm and relaxed. Patience was never one of my strengths but meanwhile, I do not mind anymore if something does not happen right away.

From Steve Halfpenny, the famous Australian horsemanship trainer I learned how to conciliate "timing, feelings and balance." What he does in his clinics is more a people training than a horse training. I think, to train a horse is buy far easier than to educate their owners. What all famous horsemen seem to have in common is some kind of "invisible mental connection" to the horse. The horses trust them and follow them

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by their own free will.

Mark Rashid thinks it is more the whole attitude towards life than only pure techniques. You might have experienced some kind of connection to other people yourself. Have you ever felt when someone who means a lot to you is not being well? Did you ever suddenly think of a person you did not hear from for a while and it calls right away? Or did you even feel something happening to someone on the other side of the world and it is exactly what is going on at that moment?

The difference with a horse is that we assume it does not think the way we do. A horse is supposed to live in the NOW, its senses are far more sensitive than ours. It needs to flee when in danger. It needs to communicate in less obvious ways than we do in order not to awaken predators. Therefore, they are believed to have very special mental skills. If the horse trusts you, it is willing to open this connection. It is not about power, it is about partnership. When Myrielle decided to trust me, she obviously decided to support me.

When I was hardly able to walk, she easily went away from her herd, sometimes even galloped to me when I whistled, stopped eating grass and let me patiently get on her back in an ungallant way, so that I did not have to walk back all the way from the meadows. We have no training schedule, no fixed methods and no duties. I just follow my heart. Sometimes there are weeks or even months in between we do almost nothing and it is like no time has passed by. She is just amazing. Ray Hunt once said when asked about his methods: ?There?s no rulebook on this and it?s damned hard to grasp because it comes from deep down inside.?

Because of all the great horsemen, we know that it works. You can benefit, even if you are not quite sure yet how to do it. You need an open mind, the desire to understand and the willing to let your horse teach you. To build a relationship of trust, you have to give trust first. Respect your horse in order to be respected. Your horse is you mirror. It reflects you. Trust your horse to do the right thing. What you get back is a miracle.

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