



Between the Reins

Forum for the Narrow-Minded and Opinionated

Photo by H. Whitney

This newsletter is an all-volunteer effort designed to reflect the horsemanship approach taught by Harry Whitney. While Harry will offer his thoughts and ideas, he does not take personal responsibility for the interpretations of the contributed student writings. The goal of this publication is to provide students with additional insights into the principles for creating meaningful relationships with our horses.

Around the Pen with Harry

Harry, during this time of year, lots of us are just starting to be able to work with our horses again on a regular basis. What are your thoughts about how we should deal with “unexpected behaviors” that come up? Is it “Spring Freshness” or what and what should we do about it?

It doesn't matter because if it's a behavior or some kind of response, you just need to respond to that. If it's just freshness of the season, then that behavior or that response should disappear somewhat quickly. You don't totally ignore it -- you would address it a little but don't harp on it. Move on and then, after several times of work, if it keeps happening, you might address it a little more aggressively.

“Springtime Freshness”, is that phenomenon real?

I think that it's rare that they come up with something new but it might feel new to us. They are falling back into old patterns without reminders from us. Like us, if we don't work on something for awhile and then we start doing it again, we fall into our old habits. “So they're started, so they go”. So, if some of those things are in there, the horse is apt to fall back into their old pattern.

Be aware of the behaviors but do address them if for no other reason than we don't want to create a new habit. This is how some of these things sneak up on us. Whether it was the last thing in the fall or new in the spring, they show a quirky behavior or response and the first thing we know, it becomes a new habit.

Okay, Harry, what inspires you?

The guarantee of a nap.

What inspires you related to the horse?

Seeing the changes that can come in a horse never ceases to amaze me and the desire to perfect that -- to see if I can become even clearer in my presentation so the horse can make a better change. As bad as I don't want to admit it, seeing the changes in the people inspires me, too. At that moment, you know you've truly made a difference in the life of the horse.

What does that change look like or feel like when you see it happen with a student?

Sometimes there are lightbulb moments, that's true. But just as often they don't even realize they've shifted but you hear it in the way they are talking. Sometimes, they might not even consciously realize they've made that shift. These times are as exciting and as profound as the lightbulb moments. Actually, the lightbulb moments can be pretty easy to come about but the more profound the understanding, the subtler the response might be because it's deeper. The more refinement that person is working on -- not necessarily when working on a large concept -- when they make a change, it has more meaning in the horse. So, maybe not a huge “aha” but it's a shift in the reality of how it should be and that's the profound change in what they are going to present from then on.

Upcoming Clinics

April 12 – 16 Salome, AZ
April 19 – 23 Salome, AZ

Contact: (765) 339-4826

May 17 – 21 Rogersville, TN
May 24 – 25 Rogersville, TN
May 31 – June 4 Rogersville, TN
June 14 – 18 Rogersville, TN
June 21 – 25 Rogersville, TN
June 28 – Jul 2 Rogersville, TN

Contact: (423) 235-0559

July 24 – 27 Mankato, MN



For example, 4,400 children go to violin lessons. They all learn gross maneuvers and basics of playing the violin. One or two end up refining the little things. The little things they discover in that process make the difference between what is excellent and what is not.

If you watch somebody work with a horse on a problem or a colt, progress tends to come about in a few hours. But, the more you get into with the horse, the less you see as the more profound but subtler changes occur.

Next Page: Comments from Libby Lyman

Libby Lyman Comments on Three Years in Arizona

Libby has been a longtime student of Harry's and spent many years as an instructor at a training facility she owned in New England. Several years ago, she decided to strike out and expand her horsemanship education and experiences. As often happens in life, an unexpected turn of events in Libby's horsemanship journey landed her at Harry's newly-purchased ranch in Salome, AZ. She spent three years living there, helping with property upkeep, and training horses on her own. She is now preparing to travel - starting in New England - where she will work until November. We were glad for the opportunity to hear about her time with Harry before she heads out for the next leg of her adventures. For more info about Libby: www.libbilyman.com

What has this experience been like for you?

It has been a fantastic experience on so many levels. First, it's just a wonderful place to be ... in the desert, where it's quiet. It's a good place for reflection and learning how to be more "in the moment" without the commotion of everyday life. I've been living without TV or radio and only intermittent internet connection. It's like going back in time in a way but that has been a wonderful thing. We're right up on BLM land and I've been able to ride out for hours.

But the best part of being here has been watching and being a part of so many of Harry's clinics on a day in and day out basis. I've had the better part of six months of clinics and then six months on my own to work on all that I've seen. I've also been blessed with having a variety of training horses from my clients. Some have stayed for years, which is unusual and wonderful. I've been able to put them in clinics and to get Harry's advice to work through issues. How often does someone have the opportunity to have that kind of experience?

What positive thing(s) did you learn about yourself?

It has been such a growing experience. I think that if I had to pin it down to one thing, it would be the ability to let go of all the mental chatter when I'm working with the horse. Whether I can provide everything that horse needs is another subject but to be able to let go of all the distracting thoughts and really be available to the horse and aware of his environment... that has been truly important.

Harry talks so much about helping the horse let go of a thought. But it also parallels an important aspect of my personal growth – the ability to LET GO. To let go of things that are bothersome, negative things, things that are not under my control, thoughts and feelings that get in my way. I'm quite a bit better at that now in my own life. I'm very thankful for that part of my personal growth.

In what ways has your horsemanship changed during this time?

Well, my power of observation has dramatically improved and that helps on so many levels, of course. Something Harry said to me about a year ago made a huge impression on me. He said he wished that the little things were more important to me. That took me aback because I thought I was doing that and addressing the little things. It definitely caught my attention in a big way and I started looking at my interactions with the horses and I realized I needed to start to address things from the very smallest areas ... from feeding to haltering to leading as well as every moment within every interaction. I started to see that I was skipping over so many details so I started working on that. I still find myself allowing things to slide by because they are so much better than before rather than continuing working on how they could be. By not leaving things as good as they could be, I still leave the horse not feeling as good as he can -- not really turned loose and settled inside.

The other thing that has been present in my horsemanship journey but has gotten much clearer is the concept of allowing the horse to search. In order to really feel that they are participating in the work,

they need to feel like they have options. I've been experimenting with that a lot on a very fundamental level with the horses loose so that I can really see what searching looks like when the horse has the freedom to experiment.

I've had some colts to start and as well as some rehab horses. I've found that the rehab horses, while in the presence of a human, don't even believe that searching is an option. The process doesn't always look pretty because they are learning to express themselves, but once they learn that they have options and don't need to just comply, the changes are dramatic. It is fascinating. Harry is very good at helping people see what that can look like and slowing the search process down so the average person can start see what it looks like.

What do you feel you will be bringing back to Maine and your students that will be different than before?

All of that above, of course, and I feel a lot clearer in my understanding of the horsemanship philosophy. I'm more sure of my ability to help a horse which helps me be more confident that I can help the person. I've had to work so hard at this myself that I think I can relate to the struggle of others.

How has this horse experience been different than your horse life before?

It's kind of like going back to graduate school. I've been blessed with having clients send me horses for training which has given me fresh horses to work on. During the time here, I've done very little teaching. This has been primarily an opportunity to just work on myself without worrying about being able to explain it to another person. There has been tremendous freedom within this arrangement to learn and grow in myself. Having months at a time to work without anyone looking in on me gave me real courage to experiment.



What things have you observed with the students who've come to AZ that have moved you?

I love to see people changing in themselves. For me the horsemanship is about more than the horses. It's about life. I see a lot of people come here and it gets them thinking and that overlaps in the other parts of their lives. That thought process is fun to see and very moving.

What would you like to say to Harry about this experience for you?

Of course, a huge thanks. I cannot thank him enough, not just for the opportunity to be here but for the TIME he has spent and the space I've been given with this opportunity. He has been incredibly supportive of my learning process. I've never felt that I could not go to him for help. I've tried very hard to be respectful of his time off, yet he has always made me feel that he is available to help me. And I am so very, very grateful for that.

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