

My Horses Taught Me How to Listen

Before I knew what was happening, a 2-year-old Thoroughbred named Cassie plowed right in to me. Scared by something, or pushed off by another horse's pressure, she barreled down the fence line just as I was exiting the gate. In a split second I was knocked off my feet and landed face down on the hard ground.

The result of those few seconds of chaos and confusion was a broken left shoulder. My bad luck was compounded by the fact that I had no health insurance, having just lost my only consulting client and all the benefits attached.

The physical discomfort and emotional uncertainty were each extremely daunting. I'd never felt such intense and relentless physical pain. Sleeping more than an hour or two at a time was impossible in the weeks and months to follow.

I felt both the weight of the accident and the wait of my prognosis highly disturbing.

My Story

At some point during each day, I wandered down to the field where 23 horses roamed, grazed and played on the land. It was impossible for me to feel anything but awe as I watched them. They were so present with each other, each horse with its own distinct personality and push into the herd. They didn't live in their stories. If a horse got into a scuffle with another horse about something, they squealed, kicked, sometimes bit - and then it was over. Five minutes later they were eating next to one another as if nothing had transpired.

Humans, I reflected can live in stories about themselves and others from birth to the grave. I began to see how important the story I was creating about my healing would be.

After reviewing my CAT scan, the orthopedic doctor pronounced me "not able to have full motion in my left arm again." Even with the \$30,000.00 surgery he was willing to perform, it was such a bad break and delicate surgical procedure that he couldn't say more. But, as I was leaving the office, he managed to suggest that throwing a saddle over my horses back and riding were probably things of the past.

On the drive home that morning, I cried for all the loss and sadness my body was feeling. Then halfway through Petaluma, something snapped back. I felt really angry with the doctor for giving me such little hope and even more disgusted with myself for giving him all my power to do so.

I drove the winding, two- mile paved road towards home and found my horse Sage standing all alone at the top of the hill by the barn gate. I pulled my truck over and rolled down the window. Looking up at her beautiful face, I said softly, "I believe it's a good day for a ride. What do you think?"

She licked, chewed and bopped her pretty head up and down a few times and she seemed to be the best counsel I'd had all morning.

By Feel

On a beautiful, bright, cool afternoon we rode on the hills and in the valleys of the land we both knew so well. A red-tail hawk circled above us and called.

I became increasingly aware of my thoughts. What do I really care about? How do I make a contribution from this place? I didn't want to react to the pressures I was currently facing. I wanted to respond from grace and create something new. My energy, resourcefulness and life force were precious currency. I had traded on it every time I indulged myself in worry and fear. I vowed I wouldn't do that anymore.

From that day forward I noticed a new rush of creativity and synchronous moments.

Necessary Journey

In retrospect, I realize it was my life that had a limited range of motion. I'd been comfortably stuck, content to inch along. The accident, job loss and all that came bundled along with it wasn't penance. Instead, I know this was a necessary journey to reconnect and reinvigorate my life's purpose and me. I'd been off course. The accident was a course correction.

In those precious and unforgettable days of wandering aimlessly through the summer fields with my herd of horses, I learned to take my cues from them. I finally settled something in myself that called out for reconciliation.

My horses taught me how to listen deeply from my heart. Sage reminded me to answer the call from my spirit. I'm forever grateful to each of them. They're noble teachers who have put me on my path.