



photo of Slick - Lisa Mercer

# A Year of Inspiration

Essays & Quotes on Leadership & the Horsemanship connections

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Essays & Quotes on Leadership & the Horsemanship connections

Six years ago I decided to reinvent myself.

I left an excellent job to pursue work I loved. Launching **The Natural Leader** introduced me to the world of an entrepreneur. I created a business based on leadership with a method of delivery that is anything but conventional. The learning curve has been steep. Advice comes from all directions sifting through to find what fits is part of the challenge.

The decision to launch a business introduced to me something I never thought I would do. Write. The weekly inspirations and monthly essays have become a vehicle to express the connection and the possibility that learning from a horse offers. Producing something weekly has stretched my learning, tested my mettle and combines everything I have learned to this point in life.

Seth Godin suggests you have to do work that matters - to connect; be generous, make art, acknowledge the lizard, ship, fail, learn. I love it when what matters to me makes a difference for someone else, horses just do that.

Included are a few of my favourite quotes, photos and thoughts.

Nancy Lowery  
[www.TheNaturalLeader.ca](http://www.TheNaturalLeader.ca)

February 2010 - Balzac Alberta Canada  
images of the herd Chris Bryon & Nancy Lowery except where indicated



## The Natural Leader

Maddie & Me - the Whaleback



*"The rider can be missing by so little, but it makes a big difference to the horse."*

*Tom Dorrance*

# Building on What Works

*once you find it!*

*"The first thing you need  
is the last thing you'll learn." Tom Dorrance*

I love the opportunity to hone my horsemanship skills by riding with folks who are better than I. This year's trip from Calgary to Bozeman, Montana to ride with Buck Brannaman took on new meaning as I was able to see last year's explanations from a different perspective.

For years riding instructors stood in the middle of the arena and yelled out what not to do as you walked, trotted and cantered around the arena. As a teen I was no doubt more concerned with what others may have thought I looked like than listening, fortunately few of those experiences stuck. I now understand why. I learn best through a combination of inputs which explains the university lectures that went in one ear and out the other, just listening isn't my forte.

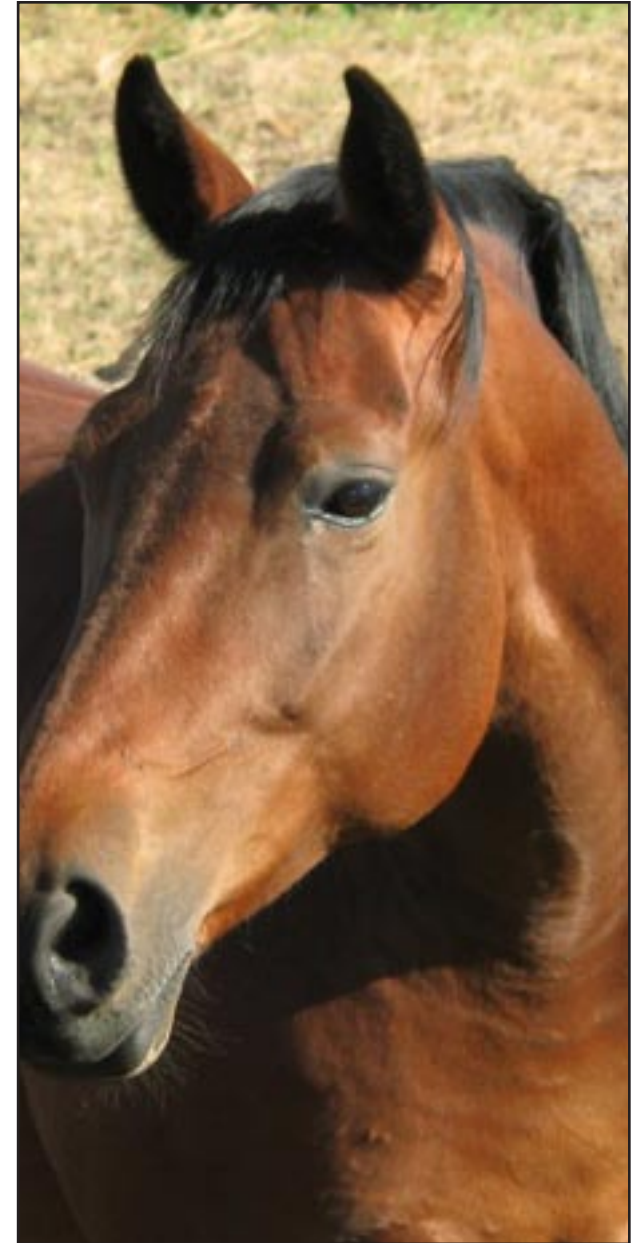
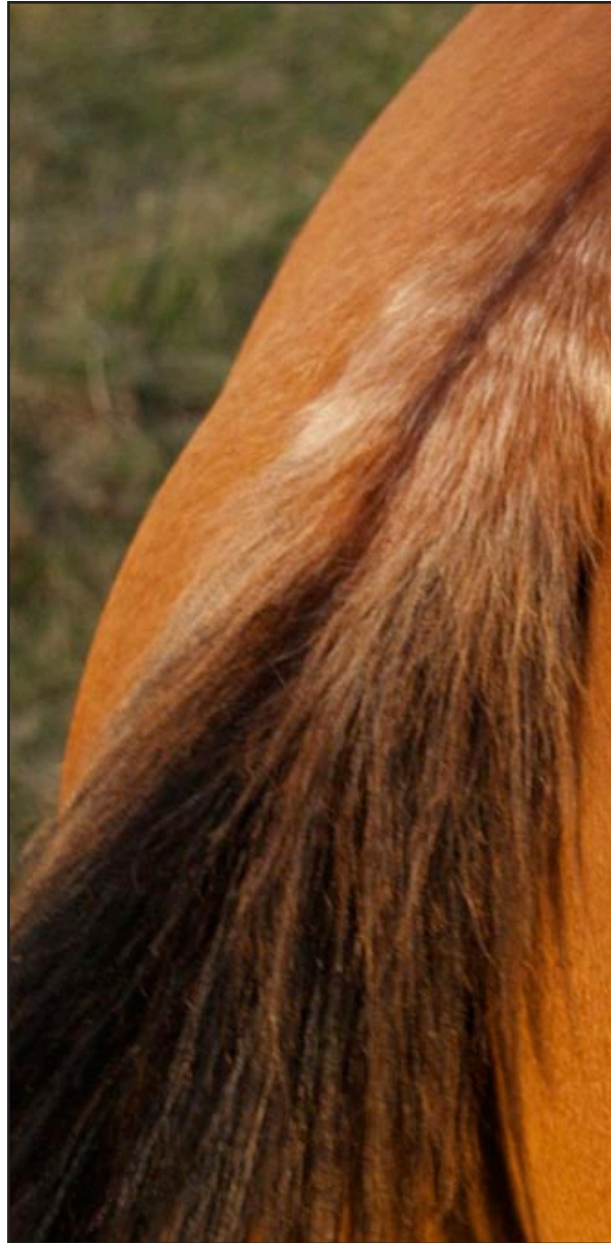
The mentors I now choose best reflect my learning style, someone on their horse explaining what they are going to do and why, showing me how they do it and then letting me do it. Horsemanship, like leadership is about why. It is about knowledge through experience, timing and balance. It is about recognising what shows up. It is about feel.

This year's clinic included a number of competitive tasks. However, what became clearer this year is horsemanship is about being fair, but effective, through simple, consistent and clear communication. Like all aspects of leadership understanding why is often more important than how, being focused on the outcome and being ready to support no matter what shows up.

Competition magnifies the expectations we place on ourselves. It was interesting to watch where the desire to win got in the way of success. Reflecting on the successful outcome of some of the more complex tasks, when my focus was on the time, Maddison became increasingly resistant, when I was more concerned with Maddison than winning, we worked better together.

We have used competitive elements in our programs and it is so easy to observe where task versus relationship tips the scale. Those of you who have participated know the hands-on learning with horses is a far cry from a powerpoint presentation with simulations. The programs are about executing a series of relatively simple tasks through explanation, demonstration and then experience. The links you personally make from the horses to work, home or life in general through the facilitated discussions or reflection moments you share with us, is where the real learning happens.

We recognised early in our program development that we don't need a whole new set of leadership principles but we found people are ready for is another way to view relevant and common ideas. Leadership actions and practices that become habits in our bodies instead of just our heads.



*"A good horseman has to acknowledge the tough horses are often the best teachers."*

*Chris Cox*

*“Horses are only afraid of two things,  
things that move and things that don’t.”*

*Tom Dorrance*

... wisdom imparted by Tom Dorrance when asked why horses are afraid of everything. Good horsemen are great at simplifying a question, a horse fears what he might see, hear or feel. Whether it moves or not, what a horse perceives as scary, is tangible.

Humans on the other hand fear what we see, hear, feel, imagine and believe. When it comes to something scary we are quite capable of creating it. What we don't create we certainly feed with what we listen to, read or who we hang out with. Humans, are a pretty tough act to follow.

In his New Year essay, Michael Enright of the CBC Sunday Edition referred to the past decade as one of *“adding and subtracting, of lost purpose fogged by confusion”*. It was ten years that captured our worst fears beginning with worldwide computer chaos to uncontrolled viral contagions. From Y2K to H1N1, it is a decade exhausted.

When we learn from the past, live in the moment and plan for the future we not only do well, we excel. 2010 hold promise for a decade of optimism, hope and opportunity. Let us take advantage of our ability to reason when something is outside of our comfort zone and manage our emotion when we sense, feel, think, want or act fearful, then figure out what to do with the information.

The Awareness Wheel<sup>1</sup> is a tool we use in our programs to help people through a perceived fear of horses, injury or failure. It provides a guide to question the source, of the emotion we feel welling up, to take stock of the moment and determine whether

# A Decade for Puzzles

*with the right pieces*

our emotions are working for us... or against us.

The rock that doesn't move or the plastic that blows in the wind may not be what scares us. The what if's, could be's or might happen's however can paralyze us and the reasonable is quickly clouded by the irrational.

I was busy matching the shapes, colours and textures, of a Christmas puzzle, when Mom remarked how good I have always been with puzzles. The comment made me think, I can easily lose myself in a puzzle, I guess that is why I stuck with Rhys. He has been my puzzle. Rhys' colour even reflects the candy coated, chocolate covered peanutbutter candy and I have described our progress as having discovered another Rhys' piece.

I worried so much about the what might happens with Rhys, that I missed what was going on. When I let go of the what if's my whole perspective on him changed. I can honestly say I lifted the fog of my own mind so I could see the potential Rhys held for me.

2009 may have been a tough year - but don't let that hold you back. Treat this next decade as a whole new puzzle, one with many pieces, new textures and a rainbow of opportunity. It is simply a case of fitting the pieces together based on what shows up.

1 - adapted by Fred Jacques from the work of Miller, Wackman, Nunnally, and Saline.



*“don’t be so proud that you don’t go back and change something”*

*Buck Brannaman*

# It's Your Behaviour

*"Titles are granted, but it's your behaviour that wins you respect."*  
Opening words of the first practice of The Leadership Challenge.

Model the Way; Inspire a Shared Vision; Challenge the Process; Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart are the Five Practices of The Leadership Challenge™ and have proven to be a great reference for The Natural Leader programs. In a recent clinic Buck Brannaman capably demonstrated that the five practices of leadership apply equally well to the pursuit of horsemanship.

*"to gain commitment you must be a model of the behaviour you expect of others."* Model the Way is about demonstrating behaviour, it is about being clear on what is important to you and prepared to set the example. Clear on his commitment Brannaman's presence demonstrates he is prepared to help others in their horsemanship journey.

The words and topics he uses are not often heard in the boardroom, but the concepts couldn't be closer. Brannaman talks about having a picture in your mind's eye of what you want to do before you start. *"Do less than what you think it's going to take and then do what it takes to get the job done."* Through stories of his own struggles, his admiration for his mentor Ray Hunt and humorous interpretations of his teachings Brannaman created and Inspired a Shared Vision.

His words don't simply inspire, but they Challenge the Process engaging people into action. By sharing and demonstrating activities where a person learns from their failure, or as

Brannaman puts it *"an opportunity to get better"* he sets it up for the horse human relationship to improve. The goal of attending the clinic was to improve to horsemanship skills, but as his website claims *"horses and life it's all the same to me."* Brannaman creates possibility, he Enables Others to Act limited only by the level of commitment each is prepared to make. The art of horsemanship is to make the horse look better.

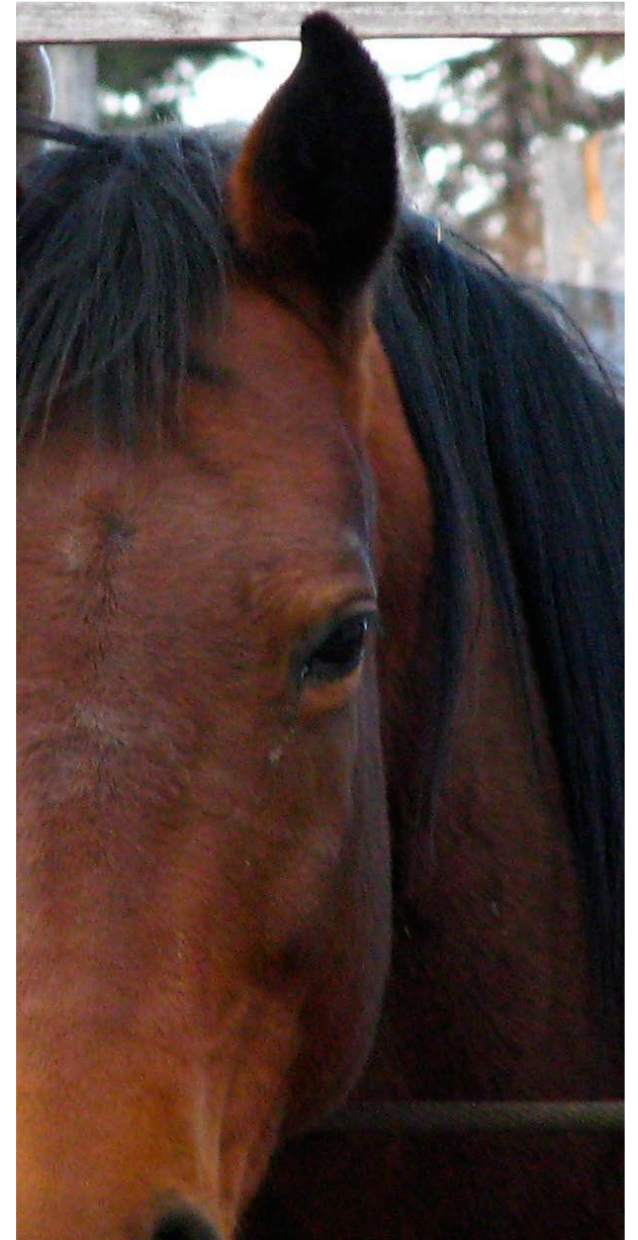
Through his skill Brannaman is able to foster collaboration and build trust, so others believe they too can achieve something they previously thought unattainable, he Encourages the Heart.

Working through the challenge of making my horses look better has taught me, horsemanship and leadership ..... it is all about my behaviour.



The image is a Garcia Spade Bit, an example of the finest in silver, copper and steel bit craftsmanship. Bits always raise controversy in the horse world, but it is rarely the bit and always how they are used that is the problem. To Brannaman the spade represents the ultimate in trust and communication based on respectful relationship. As mentor Ray Hunt said *"Anyone can ride a horse bridle-less but only those with the highest level of commitment can ride a horse with a spade bit."*





Zoe, Maddison & Sydney

*“feel, timing and balance. I still can’t improve on those three words,  
but there is so much that goes on within that.”*

*Tom Dorrance*

*“you can ask a stallion, tell a gelding  
but you have a discussion with a mare”*

*Cowboy Wisdom*

With Spruce Meadows on our doorstep and the annual Calgary Stampede, this part of the world is an international hub for top competitors and horses. In these elite levels of competition one can't help but notice the number of mares in the final round of cattle work, that famous eight second ride or the jump-off. A gender parity that puts the business community to shame.

While women may be present in a greater numbers in both the workplace and the stables, there continues to be a higher representation of males in senior management and geldings in the barns. I made this observation on an equine related discussion board and the thread quickly drifted to typical gender stereotypes, hormones, personality preferences and dominant versus passive behaviour. Similar reasons as to why mares are relegated to brood herds and women left out of the board room.

I seem to waller<sup>1</sup> around for a while before I decide what it is I really want to say. Sydney helped me gain that clarity this morning. The most confident horse I've ever owned, she has never questioned her own ability. Those who have had the opportunity to work with her have remarked “that scanning the herd she hadn't caught their eye, but her personality is one you cannot ignore.” What I am fairly confident about is in other hands she would be labeled a difficult horse.

Just as men and women view the same problem from different angles, a mares perspective differs from that of a gelding. Horse clinician Julie Goodnight suggests that *“working with mares requires that we develop a meaningful relationship in order for them to bond with us as they would a herd mate.”*

# Gender Parity

*it's about dialogue*

It is coming to understand this different perspective that has helped me grow in my horsemanship skills. A mare asks more of us as a leader and it is their questioning style that often puts us at odds with them. Many horse owners have the mindset that the horse should just do as I ask but, as we've seen time and again in our sessions, what we think we are asking and what the horse reads are often two completely different requests.

Thinking about how mares have been stereotyped what surprises me is how often I have heard from a women “they would never ride a mare.” A participant of a recent session couldn't have framed it better when reflecting on his experience with Zoe “she was clearly allowing me to lead her”; holding no illusion on his role simply because he held the lead rope. Every horse has learned behaviours but each has their own unique personality and background bringing that to the relationship. It is the differences in the gender dynamics in the playground, the workplace and the stables that maintains a dynamic, growing and caring environment.

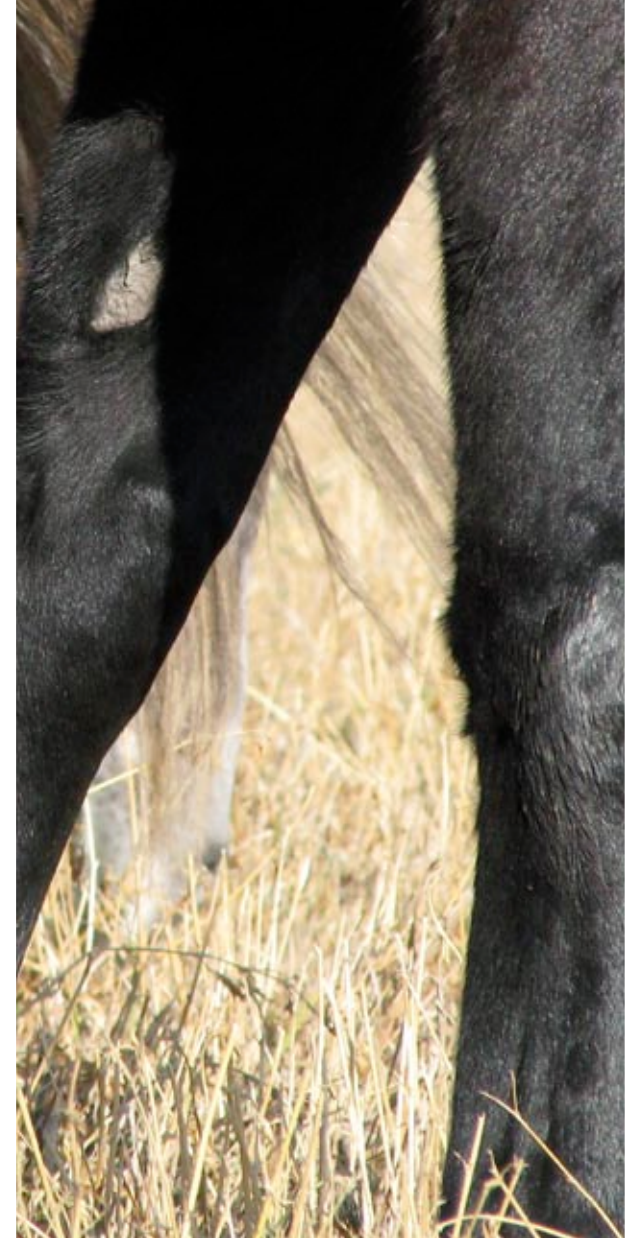
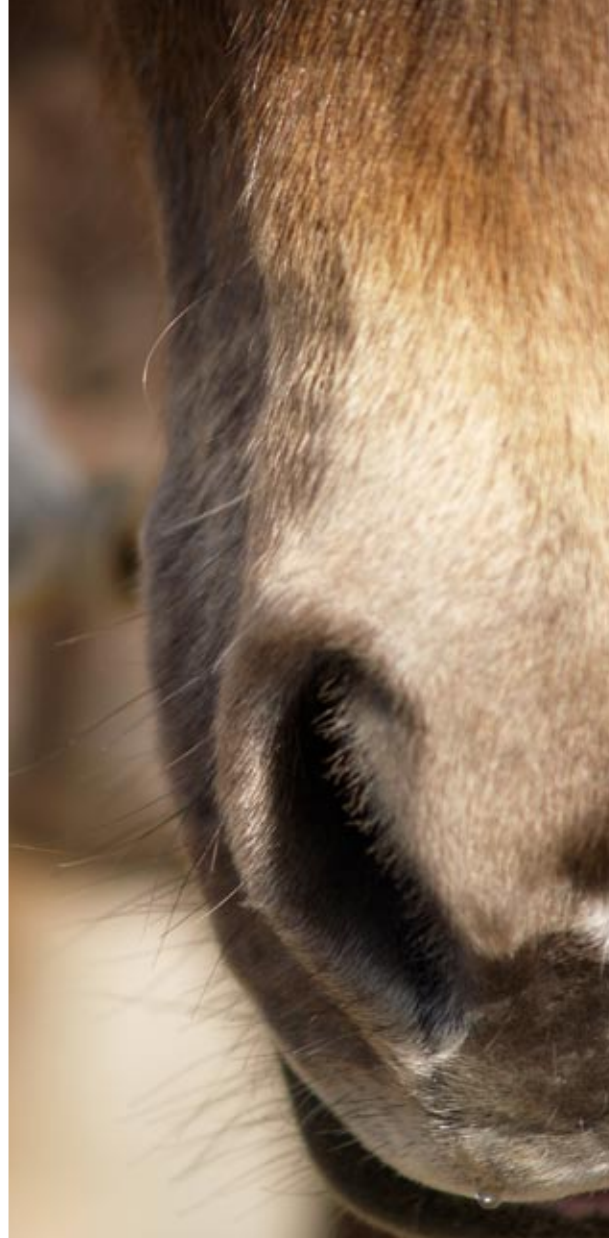
To update that cowboy saying I'd prefer to suggest *“you need to engage in dialogue with a mare.”* a discussion too often ends up being one sided. Being open to a dialogue with Sydney or any of the other mares in the herd has allowed me to see what each excels at. Dialogue requires that we not only express our opinion but we that listen to other perspectives. When you find that area of common interest a mare's loyalty is unquestionable they will truly put their heart and soul into getting you to the final round.

1- waller in this context is in reference to the aimless and sometimes purposeless requests we make of our horses, to the point they simply shut us out.



*“Let your horse leave at the pace that he wants, he’ll come back at the pace that you want.”*

*Cowboy wisdom*



Maddison, Zoe's nose & Amy's legs

*"It only takes a couple of minutes of sorry riding a day  
to make a dull horse."  
Buck Brannaman*

# It's a Matter of Trust

Like many of the members of The Natural Leader team, Rhys, came from the horse pens north of us. Selecting a horse from that environment requires a bit of knowledge, a little luck and a degree of risk. Aside from observing the horses' behaviour in the herd and through the process of sorting you don't really know what will show up.

The colt I'm getting to know is a 4 year old faded red dun, or a colour reminiscent of peanut butter. What I am confident about is that he has a soft eye and a curious demeanor. It is my job to retain that curiosity and convince him his new home is the best place to be, call it workplace incentive.

Born with the instinct to survive, horses are designed to flee threat within 48 hours of birth. This ability comes with a heightened sense of awareness and for the moment, from Rhys's perspective, I appear to be a threat - I need to convince him otherwise and the only way I can do that is through my actions.

If trust is the foundation of leadership then everything I do must reflect my intention to gain Rhys's trust. Rhys isn't the first colt that I have started, but each colt is different and while he is proving to be a clever problem solver his trust level for humans remains low. We could speculate on his past experience and suggest this is an expected outcome given his age and possible history, but horses live in the moment so what I do now is far more important.

In The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, Lencioni suggests that knowing the history doesn't necessarily prove an advantage "as

*desirable as this may be it is not enough to represent the kind of trust that is characteristic of a great team." He goes further to state "trust requires team members to be vulnerable and be confident that their respective vulnerabilities will not be used against them."*

As it stands we both have a high degree of vulnerability, when it comes to sheer power Rhys has me hands down. His greatest fear is in being trapped, so I work with that in mind and demonstrate that he can find comfort in my presence. This is where a round pen is brilliant - the horse has the ability to move without fear of being trapped and the space I hold in the centre can be the calm.

Regardless of what experience I lack, I must focus on the job at hand - be aware of how I present myself, recognize effort and reward the slightest try. Chances are I'll make mistakes and I'm confident Rhys will let me know, but each failure provides the opportunity to start over, applying the experience gained for a different result. Always recognizing the reward is for him - not me.

Working with a number of horses over the past years has taught me there can be many pieces to a part and starting a sensitive horse like Rhys is showing me how important recognizing effort is. I have a new appreciation in watching him try, I have gained a better awareness for the importance of timing and I recognize the impact of what he learns when he fails.

We have achieved first contact, so now it's simply a matter of trust as we work toward creating a partnership where we both feel comfortable with our vulnerabilities and confident that they won't be used against us.

Rhys - first contact



*“What happened before what happened, happened?”*

*Ray Hunt*



Monster, Spider & Noah



*“Horses don’t care about what we think we should do or even why we think we should do it. They listen to the energy and intention.”*

*Ariana Strozzi*



Seth

*“if you don’t take the time at the start, it’s going to catch up with you on down the road.”*

*Bryan Neubert*



# The Natural Leader

## about the author

Nancy Lowery – lives with husband Chris, canines Mandy, Zack and Danny, cats Damien, The Princess and the Orange Girl, chickens - referred to as The Ladies and now one Gentleman, the donkey Mikey and the herd of horses: Zoe, Maddison, Seth, Sydney, Slick, Jack, Dixon, Rose, Noah, Spider, Monster, Gabriel, Amy, Rhys, Rain & for now Nick who is here for some riding.

It is important to me that I:

**Connect** - Let me know what you think! Was this worthwhile, interesting, enjoyable?

**Be Generous** - I am blessed with many talents & I truly enjoy sharing it; design, art, horsemanship, helping where I can . How can I, help You?

**Make Art** - I finally started sketching again; my husband is thrilled. But working with horses, people, writing, sharing & laughter are also art.

**Acknowledge the Lizard** - It's the voice that sense I can't, don't, what if.... if I'd listened I'd never made it this far.

**Ship** - is the promise to myself. That I finish something, that I hit the send button. That I live up to what I can deliver.

**Fail** - in failing I've learned alot, even how to do it gracefully.

**Learn** - is something I Never want to stop doing. I've read, listened, tried, changed, experimented more than ever before. I love learning!

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# The Natural Leader