

Human Fear...Part 2

By Tim Hayes

In last month's article; Dealing With Fear: Part One, we learned that what frightens horses does not frighten humans and what frightens humans does not frighten horses.

The one major fear that will cause our horse to react in a way that can cause serious injury to him and us is the fear of being eaten by a predator. The predictable stimuli that will trigger this fear in all horses are new or unfamiliar predators, places, objects, changes and movement.

Humans are similarly afraid of death or serious injury. However we're afraid that our horse will be the cause of our injury fatal or otherwise. Therefore our fear can arise whether we're on their back or on the ground.

There are two primary responses we must learn and master when our horse's behavior frightens us. Allow what is acceptable. Cause him to change what is dangerous.

Both must be handled passively without fear, anger or frustration. We must understand that punishment as a means of behavior modification is not only ineffective but will often create a more dangerous outcome. And finally we must know and recognize the difference in whether our horse's behavior is being caused by fear, pain, confusion or disrespect.

ON THE GROUND

Natural Horsemanship teaches us how to see the world as if we were a horse. We learn what acceptable behavior is for other horses. We watch horses interact and play with each other. We see them bite, kick, run, rear, buck and chase each other. This is all carried out by them without any fear.

Physical contact is part of the language horses use to communicate with each other. It tells them who is stronger, faster, and braver. Who is the better horse and therefore who has earned the right to be the leader. This is true whether it is a herd of 100 horses or a herd of 2 (you and your horse). Once the pecking order is established and accepted, physical contact is reduced to affection, friendship and mutual grooming. The number two horse however will always return at some point to challenge the number one. ("My horse is great but today when I was leading him out of his paddock, he stopped for no reason, looked at me and wouldn't budge.")

Horses, unlike humans, will always warn each other before they make physical contact (pinning their ears, lifting a leg). If the warning goes unheeded, then they will make powerful contact. However because they are of equal size and weight, there is rarely serious injury. Death is certainly never a result.

Humans are not of equal size and weight and therefore physical contact unless initiated by us (i.e. we invite our horse to come in close to rub his nose) should be considered unacceptable, dangerous and immediately eliminated.

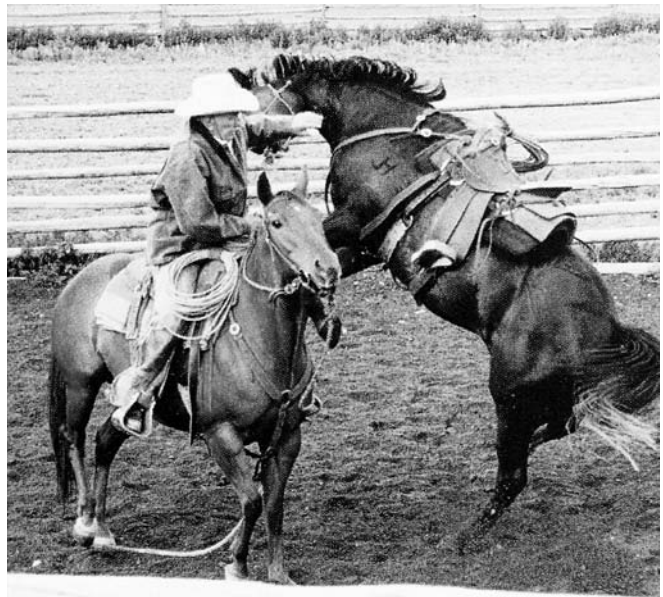
Groundwork establishes safe physical boundaries and gives

us the opportunity to either passively allow the horse to continue his acceptable behavior (act like a horse) or initiate a change that eliminates the dangerous behavior. We cause the desirable behavior to be comfortable and the undesirable behavior to be uncomfortable.

When we're on the ground with our horse and he runs, kicks, bucks or rears, as long as it's not directed at us and we have established a safe physical boundary, we allow him to continue to be himself; a horse. This can either be at the end of a long line or at liberty in a corral. Keeping a safe distance and realizing he is just a horse acting naturally helps us to relax and become comfortable in his world. This in turn helps to eliminate our fear, build our confidence and improve our horsemanship.

When our horse kicks, bites and rears up at us, this too is natural and appropriate behavior, however he has mistaken us for another horse. Because we are human and not of equal size and weight, it is very dangerous. If we become afraid we will usually react aggressively. We will use force instead of communication. Our horse won't understand why his partner has turned on him. We will lose his trust and respect. We will cause him to become fearful, even more reactive, damage our relationship and thus make the situation extremely dangerous for both.

Natural Horsemanship teaches us how to use our superior human intelligence to be a better horse. We know that in horseville the horse that causes the other horse to move its feet is the better horse and therefore becomes the leader. We know that we can control horses by administering comfort and discomfort.



Therefore we take the energy our horse has been using for his idea of fun (kicking, bucking, rearing) and redirect it into something that is our idea of fun that will also eliminate the danger of injury; groundwork.

Understanding the nature of our horse, staying calm and relaxed, demonstrating our leadership by causing our ideas to become their ideas without force or pain is the key to keeping everyone safe by working through our fears both on the ground and on their back.

ON THEIR BACK

Human fear that develops when we're on our horses back is caused by the thought of falling off or being thrown off. Part of learning to ride includes how to stay on the horse while we ask them to execute a multitude of different athletic maneuvers.

Unless you've elected to get involved in racing or rodeo, sitting on your horse and allowing him to rear, buck and run is not advisable. Hopefully by the time we get on their back to ride, we

Continued on page 36

Club & Barn News

BROOKVILLE FARMS

Brookville Farms structurally has existed since the 1700s and this history must help increase longevity for owners, boarders and workers. The current owners, Paul and Edie Brown have been associated with the barn since 1979; the current manager has been at the barn since 1988 starting as a boarder and became manager around 1992. Ray has worked at the Barn since 1992 and several boarders have a long history with the barn. I have been there since 1984. Ellie has been at the barn 16 years total and Janine, 13 years.

Following a tradition since the late 1970s, Brookville Farms celebrated the holidays with food and drink provided by the Browns (including home-made specialties by Edie Brown) and a Christmas tree trimmed with carrots and apples for the horses. The horses seem to remember the annual event, as the first trip to the tree is sometimes a hesitant one, subsequent trips the horse grabs for the treats!

Wrap-up news for 2004 includes a new horse for Regina. She retired her quarter horse "Leo" to a farm and acquired a Peruvian Paso Fino. Other gaited horses at Brookville include two Kentucky Mountain Horses; "Pardner" owned by Ellie and "Danny" owned by Kathy. Liz is doing well with her adopted PMU foal. "Jill" is now five years old and a large young lady working at low level dressage and trail riding. Congratula-

tions to Nancy and her Lippizaner "Fritz". Over the past year, Nancy and "Fritz" have begun cantering, trail riding and trailering to Muttontown Preserve. "Fritz" is taking it all in stride.

Lorraine wants to let folks know that "Domino" is still enjoying life. Five years ago he foundered very badly but good vet care, love and determined nursing by Lorraine through many treatments kept him alive and walking. We all wish Mary and "The Black" a good recovery from lymphodema. Mary's love, care and nursing efforts helped "The Black" recover.

Brookville Farms also has a boarder who teaches. Dr Beverly Gordon concentrates on movement performance of the horse and rider and works with a number of boarders who feel their horses and they have both improved under her tutelage. — *Barbara Palm*

CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION OF SUFFOLK COUNTY

The Animal Sciences staff at Cornell University Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County is pleased to announce that they have been awarded a Small Farms Grant from Cornell University. This grant will bring the resources of Cooperative Extension and Cornell University to the equine community. Specifically, these funds will assist Cooperative Extension to build a network of horse farmers for the purpose of providing educational

Tim Hayes continued from page 28

have created a partnership with our horse on the ground which has established us as the leader. We have taught him that even if he feels like rearing and bucking because he is happy (and sometimes that is what happy horses do) he is not allowed to do it when his leader (senior partner) is sitting on his back.

Unfortunately there are some riders who have not worked out their pecking order on the ground prior to getting on their horses back. If our horse is being disrespectful (not acknowledging us as the leader) or playful (starting to buck), we need to remember the following the moment we feel our fear: our horse is not trying to hurt us; he is behaving like a horse. To be comfortable in his world we need to be in control. The same principles that work for us on the ground will work for us on our horse's back.

We need to be the better horse. We need to redirect his disrespectful or playful energy. We calmly give him a job to do without expressing anger frustration or fear. Please turn circles to the right. Disengage your hindquarters to the left. We turn his attention back on to us. We cause him to move his feet. We regain his respect and reestablish our leadership. We continue until we are both calm and relaxed.

As we discussed in Part One regarding horse fear, horses live their entire lives on alert. They must be ready to flee or be eaten by a predator. When our domestic horses "spook", it is because something has triggered their genetic sense of survival. Knowing this and knowing there are no wolves or mountain lions allows us to remain relaxed and calm. In turn we can reassure our horse and let him investigate whatever he needs to feel safe.

Human fear that is caused by horse fear that is caused by non-existent predators is one of the most common and most dangerous situations in horseback riding. Our horse "spooks" (sens-

es something that could be a predator). We become afraid. Our body tightens, our legs and hands grip our horse. Our horse sees and feel us becoming afraid which convinces him that he is correct in being afraid. He is genetically programmed to run for his life and he knows he can run faster and further without us on his back. We get thrown off and our horse runs back to the safety of the barn.

It is only by understanding the true nature of our horse that we see it was not his fear but our fear and lack of leadership that was responsible for making the above situation as bad as it was.

If we expect our horse to learn how to live confidently in our world and take the time to "sack" him out with clippers, horse trailers, raincoats, and bicycles, we in turn must "sack" ourselves out. We must take the time and use our superior intelligence to thoroughly understand the horses mind and use that knowledge in conquering our horse fears.

There is nothing more important than safety. If I'm not comfortable at the canter, I'll drop to the trot. If that doesn't work, then to the walk. If I still don't feel like I'm in control, I'll ask my horse to stop. If he won't stay stopped, I'll pick my moment, get off and do some more ground work. If it stops being fun, I'll quit and start my day over tomorrow.

Fear in humans and horses come from different places. Some are real, some are imagined. Natural Horsemanship is about knowing and understanding the difference. It is about using this understanding to create a true partnership between horse and human based on love, trust and respect. It is how we are able to turn fear into confidence.

*For more information visit: www.hayesisforhorses.com,
or call Tim at 631-329-5840*