



## The Gift of the Horse: The 12 Neighs of Christmas

By Tim Hayes

It's the holiday season: families, friends, eating, travel, reflection, spirituality and gifts. Before running out to buy the new Sony Playstation or GAP gift certificate, I'd like to share some thoughts with all of us lucky enough to have a horse in our life. As the years go by I become more aware of the amazing gifts I receive not only from my horse Austin but from every horse I meet.

I believe happiness is a feeling that spontaneously originates inside me when I feel good about myself. When, however, I depend on things outside myself to make or keep me happy, my happiness eventually disappears. So the question becomes; if my happiness begins to fade when I start to get scratches on my new car, what can I do to help me feel good about myself and stay happy on the inside?

For me the answer is the same old, corny, Boy Scoutish advice I got when I was a little kid: It's called "The Golden Rule": Treat others the way I want them to treat me. Treat myself the same way. If I have a happy relationship with myself, I have a very good chance of having a happy relationship with others: spouse, partner, father, mother, son, daughter, friends, boss, etc. When my relationships bring me happiness, I feel good about myself and I feel happy on the inside. It's the ideal win-win situation.

The greatest teacher of The Golden Rule and all it's ingredients I have ever known is the horse. From years of studying how horses treat each other I now understand they are treating me the same as they would another horse. What's amazing is that they treat

me naturally using the 12 "Golden Rule" qualities. The same ones I want to be treated with from other humans: acceptance, kindness, understanding, patience, generosity, consistency, honest communication, justice, respect, compassion and forgiveness. Another way to say it is with "Love" and they want and expect me to treat them the same way.

My horse is a prey animal. His natural world is living outside with his herd-mates. When I show up he accepts me as I am. He never questions my race, my gender or my age. He's kind and doesn't seek to hurt me. If I get bit, kicked or dumped it's because I haven't taught him to respect my human vulnerability. When it comes specifically to horseplay and communication he must learn not to treat me like another horse. If I am clear, consistent and patient in my requests he understands me. He's a generous soul who doesn't complain if I ask him to let a little kid pet his nose or sit on his back. He's totally honest with me and consistently tells me the truth about what he thinks and feels whether he's scared, angry or happy. He's fair and just with me. If he tries to ask or tell me something and I don't listen or acknowledge him, he lets me know I'm being disrespectful by resisting or ignoring me.

Finally, with great compassion and forgiveness, he continually tolerates all my mistakes and inadequacies. If I allow my horse to help me become a better person then all my relationship with both horses and humans will improve. This will bring me the kind of happiness I could never find in a store. My horse, love in its finest form. What a gift. ©TimHayes2006

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