

A Tale of Two Ponies

Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives, the power to re-tell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts.

Salman Rushdie

I'd like to tell you two stories.

The first is about a pony that came to us as a problem horse. We got him as part of a three way trade to help a friend. We were only supposed to have him for a short time before sending him on to our friend's breeding farm. Instead, we've been stuck with him for the past year and a half.

When we went to pick him up, he refused to be haltered for two hours. He had very poor confirmation, bad head carriage and choppy movement. His previous train-

Equality

ers said he was dangerous and unsafe for kids. He spooked at everything, often bolting and taking the rope away. We had to just forget about grooming as he wouldn't let anyone touch him past his head.

Finally, after a year and a half of training, he is starting to come around. He can now be ridden by a professional and by a child rider on a lunge line. However, he is still hard for some people to catch and we don't have any idea when he will decide to be sane enough for one of our advanced students to ride on their own.

The second story is about a rescue pony that we took in after he had been passed through six different traditional English riding trainers. At the time we got him he had spent the previous year standing in a pen that was only twenty feet on each side. It took a long time just to build up his trust enough to approach him. His true personality was hidden under layer upon layer of behaviors that he had learned to use to try to stay safe after having first been terrorized with rough training and later neglected.

We've had the privilege of working with him for over a year now. He's taught us numerous invaluable lessons about earning trust, helping a horse to overcome fears and destructive learned behaviors, and how physical and

Les Freeman

emotional pain are related. Recently, as enough painful layers have peeled away and his true horsenality has come to the surface, he has really started to blossom. He has an amazing amount of try, and has begun to offer us all kinds of creative, high level behaviors on a daily basis. He loves kids and has really stepped up to the plate to regulate his own energy and help to calm a hyperactive 5 year old that works with him weekly. He's now being ridden by Kali and we have hopes he will be rideable by our more advanced students soon.

What amazes me is that these two stories are about the same horse, a Section B Welsh Pony named Sam. Even more amazing is that both stories reflect the facts of the situation. Either could be considered totally true. It all comes down to perspective. Everyone who had come into Sam's life before us was telling his story as I told it the first time through: Spooky problem pony who will never be safe. We choose not to tell his story that way and in so doing we've created a reality that has helped a throw-away rescue pony to return to his true self, reach new heights of expression, and teach us invaluable lessons along the way. We have the power to think new thoughts and change the story that dominates our lives.