

LESSON WELL LEARNED

“THE ART OF CALM”

Submitted by Wade Murphy

One very valuable lesson I have learned over the years of being a horseman is the art of calming a horse. As I mature in my horsemanship I focus more and more on how my actions affect my animal's behavior. I have a fairly aggressive personality and during my early years of horsemanship I was often guilty of being too aggressive with my horses. I was never abusive, but my aggressive training style would often make my horse excited and energetic.

When I joined Upper Clark Fork BCH I often rode with a veteran horseman from our chapter. I was quickly impressed by his group of animals. He always seemed to have the quiet animals on our rides. The more I watched this veteran cowboy the more I learned. He demands respect from his animals but he always does it in a calm and confident manner. He never gives his animals a reason to fear him. He never adds to their excitement by being too aggressive, yelling or abusing his animals. In contrast I started observing other horseman who always seemed to be either in a wreck or on the verge of one. They were always loud and very strong handed with their stock, and their animals responded accordingly. I watched and learned.....



Because of a horse's intimidating size many people feel like they need to be loud and strong to control them. This is not true. Horses are extremely sensitive. They feel a fly land on them. We certainly don't need a 2x4 to get their attention. They are also very aware of what is happening around them. You don't need to scream and yell for them to notice you. I do a lot of ground work with my animals. I make them move their feet in all directions. I start with the slightest pressure and then ramp up to be as firm as necessary. Very soon the horse realizes what you want and they learn to respond with the lightest cue. Moving a horse's feet from the ground is a huge part of gaining their respect. With that respect comes their trust.

The second critical part of ground work is desensitizing. Time spent desensitizing your animal to lots of “spooky” object pays off for the entire life of the animal. The proper balance between respect (moving their feet) and desensitizing makes for a calm and confident animal. It is very important to remain quiet and calm as you do your groundwork. Your energy will transfer to your animal. If these concepts are new to you find a horseman you trust to help you out. Make sure you pick a horseman that has calm animals! There are also lots of great videos available to help you learn.

My latest project is a five year old mule that I picked up last fall. She has not been handled much and is very nervous. She is teaching me a whole new set of lessons as I continue to learn the “art of calm”! I still have a lot to learn.

Wade's quote for his story...

“There is nothing better than riding a good horse through new country.”
Gus McCrae~ Lonesome Dove.

