

The Partnership of A Woman and Her Horse

teaching, reaching and helping others

By Joanne M. Anderson

You might think the only horse crazy people are kids, and the only horse shows have jumps, barrels and tracks that go around in circles. Not so. Tons of adults are horse crazy (me among them), and some performances include jumping through fire, running alongside a moving train and jumping on it from the horse, galloping through a dinner party, driving a chariot and riding horseback in an evening gown and heels through the streets of Laredo. Well, it wasn't Laredo – it was Atlanta at midnight.

Meet stuntwoman, horse trainer and equine therapist Lori Miller and Tonto of Blacksburg. Her story begins a couple decades ago, and his started nearly seven years back.

Lori's Story

"I always loved horses and grew up dreaming about them. Except for an occasional trail ride at a rental stable, horses were not a part of my life until college," she says. At Bowling Green State University, she took riding lessons for a physical education requirement, and she was hooked. "I felt at home on horses and soon learned to jump, ride the difficult or 'green' horses and do anything to be around them."

Lori graduated with a biology degree, and then worked in a banking career for 12 years. At age 28, she got her first horse, Romeo. "He was a rescue horse - several hundred pounds underweight with a split lip and a long, jagged cut above one of his grossly overgrown feet. To me, he was perfect," she remembers. Though Romeo was fraught with challenging, sometimes explosive and dangerous, behavior, Lori says he taught her how much she needed to learn. "I read books, watched training videos and attended horse clinics with the finest trainers in the horse world."

A few years later, Lori decided to abandon the financial industry and look for an arrangement where she could work with a top name trainer. She saw equine extremist Tommie Turvey perform once and found an internship program on his Web site. "He offered a small salary and room and board and allowed me to bring my horse and my dog to an equestrian training center in Illinois. The average age of the interns, most of whom didn't last very long, was 19. I was 33."

For four years, Lori worked long hours cleaning barns, stripping stalls, preparing arenas, assisting competitors during events and traveling all over the country with Turvey and his amazing horses so she could observe, learn and participate in his training programs. Along the way, Lori rubbed elbows with Josh Lyons (son of well-known horse expert, John Lyons, and a top notch trainer himself), appeared on Clinton Anderson's (famous Australian horse trainer) "Downunder" television show, dined with William Shatner and worked on a set with Larry the Cable Guy. She received her Screen Actors Guild card when chosen as a stunt double on horseback in the movie, "The Greening of Whitney Brown" starring Brooke Shields, Sammi Hanratty, Aidan Quinn and Kris Kristofferson to be released this year.

Lori offers natural horsemanship training – for horses and horse owners – from starting under saddle or trail riding to jumping, trailer loading and trick training. She can

work with difficult horses, and last year, she received her Equine-Assisted Growth and Learning Association certification.

As an equine therapist, Lori explains that “people dealing with stress, trauma, grief, relationship and communication issues, including team building skills, are given time with a horse to explore emotions of anger, anxiety, responsibility and trust. With horses, there are none of the personal barriers that sometimes exist in clinical settings. Horse are very social and their reactions to people provide valuable insight into thoughts and patterns of behavior.”

Tonto’s Story

Born in the Western United States into a herd of wild horses, Tonto is an American mustang. In 2005, he was captured in Oregon as a yearling and adopted by and transported to the Illinois training facility. “Under Tommie’s supervision, I began the gentling process and progressed with his training until he became versatile ‘at liberty’ (free to move, no halter or lead rope).”

From there, the stocky, 1,000-pound, pinto-marked gelding learned to respond to Lori’s voice, hand and leg commands - under saddle or bareback - and perform tricks. “He has been a willing partner in jumping over fire, mounted shooting and driving cattle,” Lori states. Tonto will sit, lie down, play dead, follow Lori in the open with no lead rope and bow down with her to acknowledge any little audience.

In 2008, Tonto was given to Lori as her own. Romeo died last year. These days, between training, equine therapy and lessons, Lori and Tonto practice new tricks, review old ones and ride in the open, rolling hills and forest roads around Paris Mountain – with a saddle or bareback, with or without a bridle, bit or halter. With just a loose rope around his neck, the two will run.

For Lori, the exhilaration is the clean, fresh air and wind in her hair, the freedom, the bond with Tonto. For him? Well, it’s probably reminiscent of his early days on the open range, running [almost] wild and free once again.

Sidebar:

www.lorimillertraining.wordpress.com

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Tommie Turvey

If you’ve seen a movie with a horse in it, chances are high that it’s one of Tommie’s movie horses. Several of them walked in the Rose Bowl Parade on January 1st. Tommie was standing up with a foot on each of two horses, and he kept jumping and reversing direction, facing forward, facing backward, while the horses under him kept on walking, side by side, for the five and a half mile parade route in the streets of Pasadena.

(www.turveyhorsemanship.com)