

My Painfully Slow Journey towards Horsemanship
by Bonnie Martin

I've never claimed to be a quick learner, but you think thirty years of studying would be enough. That's how long I'd had horses when I finally got around to discovering Natural Horsemanship. I spent the majority of those years searching for ways to improve myself and my horses. Sadly, I wasn't making nearly the progress I had hoped for, despite the years of traditional lessons with different talented instructors. Nevertheless, my husband and I thought we were ready to have a stallion, and that was a move that showed us how bad we really were. The three year old stallion was fine until we started breeding him. He remained controllable under saddle, although barely sometimes, but he was getting worse and worse in hand as the breeding went on over the next two years.

We attended some Parelli tours and bought the kits and were slowly working our way through that program (without coaching, it was painstakingly slow!) when I decided we needed to progress faster for our own safety and sanity. That's when I started working with a natural horseman nearby, Mario Rossi, to learn how to improve myself and therefore my relationship with horses. I started with Shadow, a gelding we owned, because I heard and believed that you needed to start with your easiest horse. Plus, no one recommended learning with a stallion.

Once I started working with Mario, talk about progress! Not because of me being any kind of whiz student but because of the things Mario taught about horse psychology, feel, timing, and balance. Some I'd heard or read, but having someone coach me through things really helped. I kept taking different horses to him to get help starting or restarting them and was continually amazed at how much "smarter" each one was. It finally dawned on me that maybe they were better because I was starting to "get" some of what Mario was working so hard to impart.

It was not enough or soon enough for us to get a handle on the stallion situation though. The day finally came when we knew we needed expert help with him, and Mario graciously agreed to tackle the major disrespect we had inadvertently built into him. Unfortunately, things had escalated to the point that we were too late, and my husband ended up getting seriously hurt because of our mistakes.

We realized at that point we had been fooling ourselves into thinking we were better than we were, and we got Baron gelded and started treating him like a horse. He had to learn to socialize with other horses, and that was hard for him because he had always been kept away from them and never learned to get along. It was quite a surprise to us to realize that he was actually afraid of them, and his best defense was a good offense!

The years since that epiphany have been ones of greater growth and understanding, trying to soak up as much horse savvy as possible from as many sources as possible. Without natural horsemanship, I'd still be blaming the horses for my mistakes, still be floundering around trying different things that would probably prove to be unsuccessful and slow to boot, and still be very frustrated.

I'm happy to say that Baron is now very happy living the life of a gelding, outdoors 24/7 with other horses and even learning to play with them some. He still worries some about strange horses, but that too is getting better.

Natural horsemanship has given me confidence in being able to read a horse better and to have an idea of what to do in so many different situations. My horses and I are still works in progress, but the journey is a lot more fun these days!