

pets with power

building a bond of love and trust

BY ANDREA LEIGH PEAK



Early people relied on animals for many things. For the first hunter-gatherers, animals represented a source of food and clothing, but they quickly realized that some animals could be helpful in other ways. In their undomesticated states, both wolves and horses could defend themselves against threats with their natural strength and power. How could that power be directed and checked to be useful to people? Wolves could be domesticated to assist in the hunt and to protect the community. Domesticated and purposefully bred, over the millennium wolves gradually became the dogs that share our homes and hearts. Early nomadic communities saw the horse's ability to carry both goods and riders, selecting them to become the companions and helpmates they are today.

During their evolution, horses and dogs never lost their ability to harm, but most have kept it in check. Dr. Ian Robinson of Waltham Institute had this to say: "I think that the important thing to remember when thinking about horse or dog interactions with people is that the animals are

continued on page 6...

domesticated. That is they have been selectively bred to tolerate or become attached to people. Both horses and dogs are social animals and therefore, to a certain extent, are predisposed to have social relationships.

"The socialization of an animal is also very important. Even for domesticated species, if they have had no contact with people in the first few weeks of life, they are normally difficult to handle. Many of the horses' behaviors in their interactions with people are similar to those they would demonstrate to other horses.

"When thinking about horses there have been two main approaches in human relations with them:

1. Domination—teach the horse that you are the boss and he will respect you and do what you want.
2. Bonding—teach the horse that you are a companion and so he will work with you out of respect.

"Of course many people have relationships based on a combination of these two opposite approaches. The bonding relationship has gained popularity recently."

Developing the Bond

Becky McGaughey makes her living boarding and training horses on her five-acre homestead in the middle of Austin, Texas. A few years ago, she lost the horse of her dreams—Conales—to an untimely injury. She was devastated; this horse had been her soul mate. They had a level of communication that was almost telepathic, with Conales anticipating Becky's every move when they rode together. Becky felt closer to her than to any other horse she had owned before.

Hoping to replace her in both body and spirit, Becky bought her sister Desiree, an Arabian-Crabtree-Egyptian cross and daughter of multi-national champion Confidence.

Where Conales had been Becky's from the start, Desiree, a high-spirited and unusually large and powerful Arab, had been owned by a family who didn't know what to do with her. They had kept her as a pet; she had no training and had spent most of her time tied to a tree.

She was beautiful—blood red with four full white socks, a white blaze with a pink dot in the center, and a mane and tail of red and white mix, so it appeared frosted. But she was also nervous and scared, charging Becky the first time she tried to work her.

Becky knew this horse would take some time



Becky McGaughey on Desiree with Cleo and Cash.

and extreme effort, but she also knew it would be worth it. She brought Desiree to her friend Judith Connolly, a horse trainer in Bastrop, well-known for her gentle ways and great results. For over six months, Becky worked with Judith and Desiree to build the kind of trust needed.

Desiree required every ounce of confidence Becky had in her ability to handle horses, but little by little, as the trust was built, she began to want to please. Together they began to develop routines that worked.

For example, Desiree seemed to realize that when she shied, if she shied forward Becky could ride it, so she began to consistently shy forward. They worked out a number of routines they agreed to stick to. The consistency gave both Desiree and Becky the ability to trust each other. Becky describes it as a true team effort.

"We developed a base we were both comfortable with. We both had rules we wouldn't give on. I had to let her make some of those rules. She understood, and let me make some rules too.

"I don't think she has any sense of my being superior, we interact as equals. I honestly don't believe it's ever occurred to her that I would be unhappy with her or think ill of her. She's very emotional. If I don't go to her first in the barn, she screams bloody murder. She wants to be first of all the horses; she thinks we are deeply in love, and she's right.

"I trust her completely now; she's the horse I choose to ride. We have been on trails in Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico—on the skinniest mountain ridges full of scree. I trust her absolutely to take care of me," concluded Becky.

That trust is the basis for most good human-horse relationships—relationships that can, as many horse owners know, last a very long time.

Rewarding the Trust

Back in 1965, Fran Joswick was looking for a young event horse for her children, who were 8, 9 and 11 years old. She heard of a farmer in southern Illinois who was taking quarter horses who couldn't run off the track. She asked to see three of his best prospects.

The farmer made the long drive from Carbondale to Barrington with the three young geldings in the back of an open truck. Fran noted that he had no ramp and asked how he intended to get the horses out. He pointed to a hill, said he'd back up and the horses could jump off.

Fran knew that any horse that could survive that journey would have the stamina to be a good event horse. She kept one, a beautiful chestnut named Innsbruck.

A member of the Pony Club, Fran, along with her own children and other members of the club, worked Innsbruck to develop him into a first class event horse. They brought him along slowly for the first five years, doing dressage and canterlets. She took him to hunt fields so he could get used to the confusion and being around other horses. Her children and others in the Pony Club went on to ride Innsbruck in regional competitions all over the United States.

In 1974, when the family moved cross country to California, it was understood that Innsbruck would go with them. He continued his show career on the west coast even after Fran's children were grown and gone. His sense of loyalty and trust was so strong that they

Bby at home in Hawaii with Fran Joswick.



were able to loan him to special people over the years. (He is seen on page 5, in a photo from 1986, ridden by Pony Club member Kristin Buldley.)

Even though his show days were winding down, Fran always considered Innsbruck an important family member. This became most evident when, in 1988, Fran decided to move to the island of Maui in Hawaii.

She had reservations about bringing Innsbruck. He was 23 years old, and the move would be much more than a cross-country trip in a well-equipped horse trailer. He would have to fly in a cargo plane, and ride on a boat. Was it worth it? Could he endure it?

She asked her veterinarian who replied, "He'll do fine; I'm not so sure about you." In retrospect, Fran admits she was right. It would take a lot of doing, and cost \$2,200, but Fran knew it was the thing to do for this animal that had shown her family so much trust and affection over the years.

Innsbruck's odyssey included numerous inspections, a flight in a private stall on a DC-10, and a 27-hour barge ride over sea to Maui while Fran waited nervously. She recalls, "It was the longest day of my life. I was ready to treat this horse like he was coming off a cross-country run in total distress."

When Fran finally got Innsbruck home, she almost cried. "I thought he'd be exhausted," she said. "Instead, I took his lead line and he almost tore my arm off" (in his excitement of being reunited with her). She put him in a brand new paddock, and pampered him. He quickly regained his lost weight and trust.

Ten years later, Fran knows she made the right decision. "I refer to him as my second son," she says of this 33-year-old horse. When her children visit, they want to see "Bbs" first. Since their lifestyles preclude owning horses, he is their lifeline to the sport of their childhood. Their affection is apparent in their nicknames for him: Bby, Bbers, Mr. Big Horse and The Great Old Man. Fran jokingly says that she thinks he is the only reason they visit as often as they do.

Of their relationship, Fran comments, "Used lately we've had a very business-like relationship. He's a sports horse, not a cuddler. But he's become very mellow in the last few years. He now has two acts of the pasture. His inside digs are one half of my garage. His favorite thing is to come by my bedroom window and nicker for his breakfast." They take a daily ride for about 45 minutes—all Bbs can handle with his arthritis.

Fran continues, "It was never a question of would I bring him or give him away. I had seen too many old horses come to bad ends. I did not want him to. I would not have gotten another horse. He is really a part of our family. Though the kids all had appropriate horses for themselves, they all chose him for the big competitions. He was a great competitor; he loved to run and jump.

"He's given our family so much, he needs to get it back. And the best way is to have the lush life he has now—no climate problems, soft ground. It's not even an issue; if he needs something, he gets it. He always looks like he's going into a show. I don't think as you get old you should look scruffy," concluded Fran.

Horses are undoubtedly powerful animals whose bond with people can transcend their pre-domesticated role, but what about other creatures?

A Mother's Love

Allison Marrin* found herself the surrogate mother to three wild Hawaiian boar piglets brought to her by a hunter after their mother was killed. For days she bottle-fed them every two hours, caring for them as if they were human infants. They survived and have become pets on her ranch in Hawaii.

Now at 300+ pounds, these three, no-longer-little pigs come up to visitors with their heads down waiting to be scratched on the neck. They roll over to have their tummies rubbed, never realizing that they are behaving out of character for wild boars.

Though they live outside and forage in the lush vegetation, they are also allowed in the house along with Allison's dogs. Still young enough that they have not yet grown tusks, the pigs play with all the members of Allison's menagerie, including chickens, peacocks and horses. When their tusks do emerge, she will have them capped so they can't hurt any of their "friends." Because she has raised them since infancy, Allison trusts them, and they trust and love her.

**Name changed for privacy.*

A Dog's Life

People have domesticated dogs to be loyal and loving companions. The giant breeds can be intimidating to some, but prove to be very loving and trusting during their all-too-short lives. Delta's Maureen Fredrickson swears by these gentle giants. Her Irish Wolfhound, Gaibhne, was one of Delta's early Pet Partners. "His best audience was infants and toddlers," says Maureen. "I was always amazed at Gaibhne's ability to be so careful with children. During visits with children who had been battered, he would touch just the tip of his tongue to a child's cheek or nose."

Size, however, however is not the only indicator of power. Every dog has the capacity to bite and inflict serious pain and injury. Every cat can scratch viciously; every bird can peck. Most animals have some way of defending themselves or lashing out when they feel threatened.

The lock is fear; the key is trust. A strong bond based upon respect, affection and understanding is needed in every human-animal interaction to unlock that fear and develop a relationship that will be mutually rewarding until it comes time, at the end of the animal's life, to say good-bye.



Maureen Fredrickson with "gentle giant" Gaibhne

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