



Martin Black at work as a horse whisperer

THE HORSE WHISPERERS

By

Jane Porter Fogleman

Many years ago in the western part of the United States two brothers and a friend began to voice and teach a different method of handling, breaking, starting, and training horses. This concept of working with horses had existed since the Greek Xenophon (400BC) was writing about his methods, and has survived in America for many generations - primarily in the West where the horse was the backbone of the working world on the ranches. But Tom and Bill Dorrance and Ray Hunt were among the first people to bring it to the attention of



Bill Dorrance (Jan 19, 1906 - July 20, 1999) at home just before his death.

the public. This came about by people hearing that they were a “good hand” with a horse and asking for their help and guidance. Their reputation spread, and so did this concept of horsemanship, which has grown into the mystique of the Horse Whisperer. Their quiet and gentle way with a horse has spawned a commercial industry, and an amazing number of people (many underqualified) who have realized they can capitalize on this methodology, and have marketed themselves and the Horse Whisperer cachet to horse owners. They have developed as clinicians such as

Monty Roberts, Pat and Linda Parelli, John Lyons, and some top horsemen such as Buck Brannaman, Curt Pate, and Joe Wolters.

Monty Roberts started this Horse Whisperer demonstration or clinician blitz back in the 1990's with his TV specials, books, and clinics - all of which focus on the young horse and Monty's *joining up* process of beginning a relationship whereby the horse responds to the person in a positive manner.

The masters at marketing and commercialization of the Horse Whisperer are the Parellis. Pat is a very good horseman, and he and Linda Parelli travel around the US with their full entourage of trucks, trailers, horses, dogs, and employees giving clinics and selling their "Program." They were recently in Lexington at the Virginia Horse Center for a two day clinic and demonstration. I went to both sessions to see what they had to offer the average horseman or the backyard horseman. They had the arena set up with barrels with covers that are the black and white of Holstein cows and various other items designed to give the horses a reason to misbehave. On the upper level they had a huge marketing area set up with all types of clothing, various tack items, horse related items, CDs, barrel covers to look like a Holstein Cow, hats, etc. etc. All of course with the Parelli name and logo on them. Further, there is an area set up to sell memberships in their Savy Club (which publishes a newsletter once a month) and to promote their "Program." This "Program" is a series of levels that one must accomplish with their horse and themselves in order to achieve the ultimate -complete unity with your horse. At the end of the two days, it was obvious that if one needed to go beyond the demonstration given, one must purchase the "Program."



Linda Parelli showing off her Warm Blood

Buck Brannaman, an accomplished and respected horseman, is much more low-keyed in his presentation to the public than some of the clinicians or performers. Buck is a consummate horseman who has "walked the walk" and speaks to the horsemen from a vast background of experience. He provides real tools with which to fashion their horses' future work. He and Ray Hunt have forged a working relationship and respect for one another over the years and consult frequently to maximize their effectiveness for the horse.

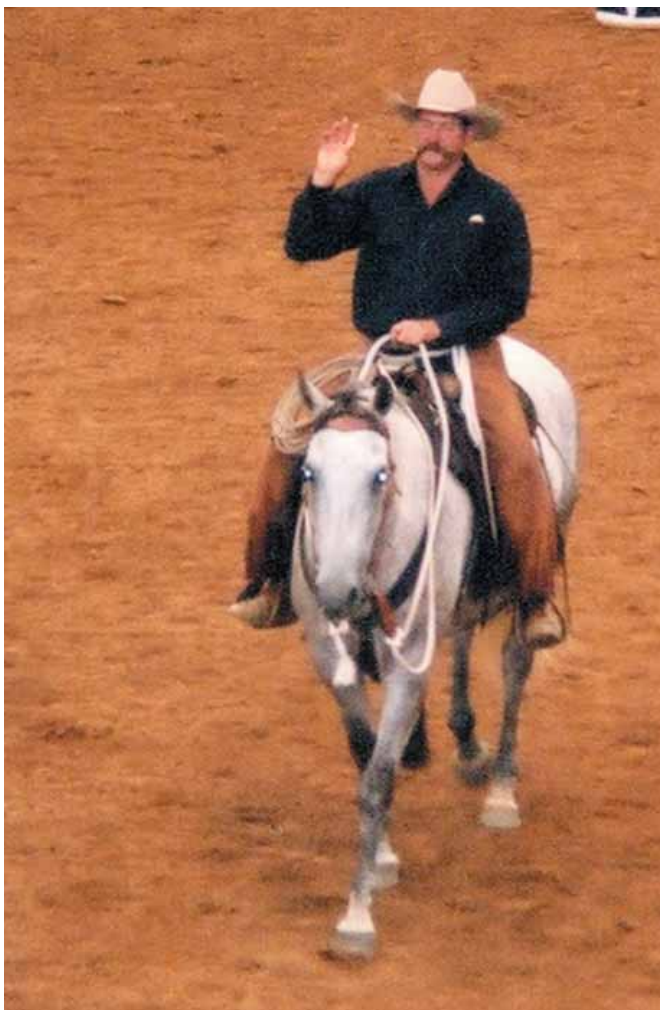


Tom Dorrance portrait by William Matthews

So who were the American pioneers in this field? Bill Dorrance and his younger brother Tom were born into a ranching family in Oregon and grew up working on the ranch with the cattle and the horses. They moved on to become ranch owners themselves and expanded into helping other people when the word spread that they were a "good hand with a horse." Until his death, Bill was a person who could be called on to explain the philosophy of cooperation between the horse and its owner. His brother Tom was more of the clinician in the family. Tom was not crazy about that designation, but he lived for helping people with their horses, and it was said that Bill often sent people to Tom

to help them with a difficult horse. Bill would say that Tom traveled around *helping difficult people with their horses*. Tom Dorrance said of himself and his expertise, "What I learned about the horse I learned from the horse." It is also said of Tom that he would be so attuned to the horse's every movement that he understood when and how each foot hit the ground. He spent many years working, and his reputation was building with the people in the West, but his true aim was always to help people gain a better understanding of the horse. He wanted them to appreciate the harmony that a man and horse can attain and to help achieve that unity. Sadly, both Bill and Tom Dorrance died a while back, and the

Pat Parelli at
The Horse Center
in Lexington, Virginia



world of both horse and human will miss their kind and gentle words of encouragement.

Tom and Ray Hunt formed a lasting working relationship after Ray called on Tom to help with his horse, Hondo. Tom said that Ray has an uncanny ability to seize the slightest clue given by a horse and build on that to a successful conclusion. Ray went on to become a master clinician, and today holds clinics for diverse types of horse owners all over the U. S. and Australia.

So who are the Horse Whisperers of today? Some, such as those listed above, have the huge media production and clinics. But less visible are the quiet, deliberate and immensely talented horsemen who go about the world helping peo-

ple and horses come to a better understanding. Such a person is Martin Black (son-in-law of Ray Hunt and close personal friend of Tom Dorrance). Martin is a great hand with a horse, and many of the top racing and breeding stables in the U. S. such as Calumet, and Wayne Lucas have engaged Martin to work with their young race and sales horses. For instance Martin broke Pleasantly Perfect, the 2003 Breeders Cup champion. He also travels to Australia and Europe to do the same. Additionally he works with some of the top cutting horse trainers. Martin is also a world class “hand” having ridden successfully in the Worlds Greatest Horseman competition. He owned and rode the world champion ranch horse in Amarillo Texas in 2003 and has competed successfully in stock horse shows all over the West. He is the “Real Deal” and gives the horses a

solid base from which to grow and become successful. Owners who leave a clinic with Martin will have acquired the tools to progress with their horses in their future development. Martin states his basic philosophy: “Build the horse’s confidence in everything he does. A confident horse is more capable in competition and less likely to injure himself. A confident horse is also more willing to learn, and more comfortable to ride.”

It is especially intriguing that this particular involvement and interaction with the horse crosses the lines of breeds, types, disciplines, and work life. All horses appear to benefit from this caring and constant attention to their needs. The jumper at Spruce Meadow, the steeplechase horse at Gold Cup, the event horse at Rolex, the cutting horse in San Antonio, the endurance horse, the fox hunter, the show hunter, and so on. There is obviously a great need in all disciplines of the horse world, both western and English, for this type of horsemanship as demonstrated by the success of so many of these clinicians.

These dedicated and talented individuals have helped countless horses to reach their full potential, lead stress-free and happy lives, and realize a harmonious unity with their owners. And the ultimate beneficiary of this effort - **THE HORSE**. All horses deserve all of the compassion, understanding, tolerance, and love that we, their *difficult people*, provide. In the words of a dear friend, “The best teacher is your horse; the results will be evident, and whoever can make you realize that is a success.”

Back in 1903 a ranch cowboy, Andy Adams, made the statement that, “No better words can be spoken of a man than that he is careful with his horses.” I feel certain all horse lovers from back yard horses to huge stables of working, racing,

showing, cutting and roping horses are grateful for the insight that these Horse Whisperers provide to improve themselves and their horses.

There are numerous videos from the people mentioned above and books that will help the horse owner tremendously. I suggest a few here:

True Unity - Tom Dorrance Talks about Horses

Think Harmony with Horses by Ray Hunt

True Horsemanship Through Feel by Bill Dorrance and Leslie Desmond

I would like to thank my lifelong friend Brooke Royster, a personal friend of all these great men. Brooke was very helpful in the writing of this article. He is also a right "good hand" with horses in many different disciplines. Hopefully he'll be able to help me and Tide Burton, my mighty steed!

Jane Fogleman was born and raised in Albemarle County and is an avid lifelong fox hunter. She hunts with Farmington Hunt Club, Keswick Hunt Club and travels to other Virginia Hunts whenever possible.

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