

Hidden Quality

(Are horses much more intelligent and intuitive than we generally give them credit for? Why do they often accept our bluntness, our lack of sensitivity and our arrogance with dignity and grace? And why are they so forgiving and accepting of our apparent and regular rough, both mental and physical, treatment?)

My elderly mother has, with quiet dignity and grace, now mastered the knack of accepting when I am wrong or when I make a statement contrary to the real facts. She doesn't try to correct me. Either she can't be bothered or she realises that I will eventually find out the real truth, on my own, and within that process learn about humility, truth and dignity; perhaps a little bit better than if she had have countered my false beliefs at the time. That being said, she still cracks it with my father on the odd occasion.

Strangely, this maternal observation has a parallel with horses – despite my mother, in her eighty six years in this life, having had very little to do with them. Horses, for some not so obvious reason, show similar dignity, grace and forgiveness to us humans on a consistent basis. Often this goes unrecognised and even with this lack of recognition, horses just keep on keeping on with genuine and steadfast acceptance.

Despite our smug human superiority; despite our sensitivity (or lack of) and despite plenty of opportunity for us to see and respond to things differently, I believe horses are here to teach us great lessons in humility, acceptance and sensitivity; if only we were ready to listen and learn.

Currently in the training paddock I am re-educating a beautiful young horse about not being head shy. I do not know why she is so head shy as she came with a coloured and murky history in her five years of human experience. Someone, I suspect, did the wrong thing by her and as a result she finds it really challenging to have her ears touched. This is in great contrast to all the other horses here who, by and large, love having their ears and poll stroked and scratched. We would like Sonnet to join this club. Did a human in her past show her less respect and less appreciation than was needed? I would imagine yes, and, I wonder why?

Also as a works almost complete is a beautiful (inside) Standardbred mare. This horse had hooves that told me of serious neglect. A couple of times over last summer she had nothing to eat and as a result suffered from starvation laminitis. This was represented not by ridges but by grooves around her hooves. (I have also seen this condition in a grieving horse who lost his paddock buddy). The mare suffered silently. She suffered with dignity and grace and also shows those qualities now that she is healthy and happy. What a treat to be able to 'rescue' such a beautiful creature. What a shame that we can't berate the human responsible for her suffering – or even educate them as to their responsibilities when they have the ownership and care of a horse. Best just to make them an offer and remove the horse from their living hell.

Still being a tad judgemental, I have had to knock back several potential new owners for this mare, as I didn't feel that they would look after her in the manner I think she deserves. It may have been what they said on the phone when responding to the advert or it may have been the way the mare reacted when they first approached her. Or in one case Jemma would not follow them on a lead, despite much clucking and pulling. It is my responsibility to screen potential new owners for one of our rescue horses. Her hooves are now sound

and she travels really well being ridden in a halter. Of course I would like her to remain barefoot and bitless and part of a herd and I encourage her potential new owner to treat her this way. Hence the screening up front because such a dignified and beautiful horse deserves nothing less.

Maybe we could treat all life with similar dignity and respect. What would the world be like if we did? Yes, a very nice place to be – not that it isn't already.

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