

BEING NATURAL

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In the '70s the tragic British comic Peter Sellers starred in a movie called 'Being There'. Some of you may remember it. In the movie Chauncey (Peter Sellers), a simple gardener, was thrust into the public's attention as a leading light, full of deep and meaningful inspirational sayings, and the world went crazy. In reality Chauncey was an uncomplicated bloke who fell victim to the public's gullibility and lack of leadership.

The only thing this has in common with being natural is the word 'being' unless you wish to read more into these words than I meant. That's your choice. We are after all, human 'beings'. Not human 'doings'. Being natural is a state of mind, although many 'do' natural and 'doing' natural doesn't necessarily make one 'be' natural. 'Being' comes before 'doing' even if many just do the 'doing' bit without the 'being' bit. Confused? Me too.

So often I hear people tell me they 'do' a little bit of natural, or they started this or that horse doing a little bit of natural. 'What then?' I think to myself and more often than not the evident relationship these people have with their horse or horses tells me the answer. Some of these people are about as natural as a sausage.

Being a little bit natural is like being a little bit pregnant. You is or you 'aint! Or to put it another way, it's like being a little bit wealthy. Work that one out. No, I reckon you are either natural or you are not. Or you are like me, trying very hard to 'be' natural.

Doing natural to some people means having and using a 12' lead rope and a rope halter. Swinging the rope at the horse to get him to move is their version of 'natural'. The rope halter is for 'catching' the horse and leading him to be saddled up. It can be a problem though when the bridle is placed on the horse's head and the lead rope is tied in all sorts of manner around his neck. And off they go. I once heard one of these people call natural horsemanship people 'rope twirlers'. I think she missed the main point of being natural. Mention to these people that they could do without the bridle and just ride in the halter and lead rope and they react like I did when this absurd and unsafe and downright irresponsible and scary proposal was put to me. 'You gotta be joking!' 'How would I control her?' 'She would bolt'. 'Ooooh no'. 'Too dangerous for me to consider'.

Anyway I overcame my fears, listened to my teacher about teaching the horse to cope without a piece of metal in its mouth and developed a level of trust in my mare that took our relationship to a stage several notches above the one we existed on. My part in this deal was to learn 'feel', 'sensitivity', 'timing' and 'trust'. No longer could I rely on pulling on her mouth for brakes and steering. Instead I had to develop (and still am developing) the power of focus, riding with an independent seat (more bareback required here) and the technique of 'lifting' rather than 'pulling'.

So far all this is working. She (the horse) seems to like it too.

The biggest drawback of riding this way is dealing with the comments from the part naturals and the normals. "Forgot your bridle eh?" "Showing off are we?" "Horse got a sore mouth has she?" And so on. Yep, yep, yep. In context it probably isn't such a big drawback after all. My horse is happy and I have a really good Aussie made stock bridle for sale.

But getting back to 'being' natural. After a very enjoyable two-day clinic (sounds clinical but then 'workshop' is even more inappropriate) with a NH instructor (Hi Jayne), I came up with these two formulae:

Natural Horsemanship formula no. 1 - EEM (Expect emotional moments)

Natural Horsemanship formula no. 2 - E2BC (Expect to be challenged)

and I'm sure there are hundreds more. Because when one exposes oneself to the process of being natural, it can be emotional and it can be challenging. But it is rewarding.

Being natural has affected my life in a very positive way. There are so many instances when 'NH' concepts apply to life without horses. Things like clear language, ambiguity, certainty, honesty, time concepts, natural rhythms, play, possessions, emotional fitness, moving feet (yours, mine or theirs), learning to read subtlety, learning softness, accepting responsibility, trust and the big one for me, realising what is *really* important. Because sometimes what we think is important is not what is *really* important. It's a personal thing I guess and in essence, to me, that (what is *really* important) is what 'being natural' is all about.

Many 'natural' people talk or write about the journey being natural has taken them on. You know, the deep and meaningful type of journey. Not the one where you hook up the float and take off to the next clinic. Although sometimes on that type of journey one experiences the 'other' type of journey. Journeys within journeys. Whoa! I'm getting in over my head here so back to the core subject - being natural.

How can you tell if someone is natural when you meet them in the street or if you meet them at a social function such as a wedding or a funeral minus the horse and without the Parelli logo on their breast? Do 'natural' people look or act differently from the average 'normal' person? (Hey! Are we on to something here? Is another definition for 'average', normal? Hmmmmm. Anyway getting back to the issue; what do you say if you suspect that you have been introduced to a person you guess is natural? What little hints do you drop without giving the game away totally - that you are and you wonder if they are, natural that is? Yes I know these people are easy to spot when they are around horses but are they that easy to identify without equine support?

When these people are around horses the giveaways are; they seem quietly confident, there can be a deliberate but gentle way they move, speak, look and breathe. A little bit of fun also comes in to the equation. Often horses instinctively 'face up' to these people. They show respect that may not have been demonstrated to their regular handlers. Horses know. They can tell. Horses understanding of energy and body language, be it horse or human, is highly refined. 'Natural' people may subtly give themselves away by their dress, their mannerisms, their actions, how they treat their family, other humans, their pets, their gardens and their partners. Not all ways, always though.

That brings me to the issue of what do we mortals, who are trying to learn to become natural, do? Or to put it in a more creative way, if our desire is to be natural, how do we manifest it? Desire as opposed to need or want. See if you need or want something then that is an admission that the 'something' does not exist in your life. "I need a million bucks" means I do not have a million bucks. (Or if I have, then I am being downright greedy). 'Desire' on the other hand could mean that the thing/situation/skill/experience is on the way. It has been

ordered and despatched for overnight delivery to your doorstep. You get what you desire, not what you want. You get what you deserve, not what you need. Sometimes we get none of this because we are trying too hard to 'be'.

So just how do we go about it? This is a big question in response to how so many of us are touched in our hearts and souls of our beings by having the types of experiences natural horsemanship can give us. Just reading through the beautiful personal stories written in this newsletter of what natural horsemanship has given the writers, confirms this.

Get lessons. Who with? Seems there are many teachers out there, all with loyal bands of followers, teaching young and old good and not so good, expensive and cheap ways of increasing one's knowledge of natural horsemanship. Some of these teachers teach how to 'do' natural horsemanship and some teach how to 'be' natural horse people. A big difference. The really good teachers teach both. And that's great. Because we are all individuals we all want different things, we all learn differently and having a diversity of teachers from whom we can learn suits perfectly. We can get parts a, and b, from one instructor, part c, from another, part d, from a DVD and part e, f and g from a combination of all of the above. Throw in a couple of books and some good websites and we have a smorgasbord of available knowledge and information for us to pick and choose from. Doesn't get better than that!

There are 'levels' and there are critiques. There are budget and time constraints. And there are moments of pure magic interspersed amongst the sometimes hard and frustrating slog of becoming natural. As one of my spiritual teachers points out: being enlightened doesn't necessarily mean you have to experience enlightenment continually. It can be experiencing fleeting moments or flashes of enlightenment that makes you realise you are indeed enlightened. So it can be with 'being natural'. Just to have a flash of a connection with a horse. The way he looks at you, the thought that comes from the horse into your own mind. The way he reacts to something you've done or asked for and you realise "Ah Ha!" It happens, it's great and it's something special and something that can be built upon.

And then you realise you are 'being' natural.

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Hoofnote:

Today I met a nice young lady and her two horses. The reason for our meeting was to trim her horse's hooves. Halfway through the first hoof on the boy, I asked her what she does with her horses. She replied, "I do natural". And the discussion took off from there. It's nice to be on the same wavelength with a new client.

However as the session progressed I realised that she does indeed 'do' natural. "Being' natural was a concept new to her and this got me thinking in light of what I had written in the pages above. Please bear with me while I try to explain.

The second horse to be trimmed came with a warning that 'she can be a bit nervous'. 'She' was also a standardbred. My favourite breed! And generally not a nervous type. Well, understandably she was a little nervous meeting a new hoof trimmer for the first time. You would be too, meeting me dressed in trimmers apron and gloves, sweating profusely (it was about 34°C) and armed with rasp, nippers and hoof knives. But after about three minutes of groundwork and friendly game, this lovely horse was on 'my side'.

I pondered and we discussed why this mare was perceived by her human, as nervous. In fact she (the human) didn't trust the horse. This is a strange thing coming from a natural horseperson. Trust is, as I understand it, one of the 'key' foundations of NH. Without it on both sides, 'do not move to the next square'. Then we discussed leadership; because I reckoned that this horse was an unwilling leader in the herd. The herd includes the humans on the property too. More new concepts for this human in the horse/human relationship I met on that day.

I also believe that to people who are 'being' natural horse people, the idea of them adopting the 'leader' role is as natural as breathing. To some people who 'do' natural this may be a new concept or one that they could really enjoy getting good at. I also believe that a horse who is an unwilling 'leader' also really enjoys life after the responsibilities and pressures of leadership have been removed from their backs. This concept could apply to humans also.

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* Hoofnote: Over the years and as my experience with horses grows I am reluctant to use the word 'natural' when it comes to horsemanship. A term that fits better these days is "Good Horsemanship" - and I wonder, in the years to come, how we will view what we did with horses today.