

Practicing natural horsemanship

BY DELLA MERRILL

Rogue is an eight-year-old quarter-horse mare. Her wide eyes, often rimmed in white, reflect the abuse of her past. Rogue lived knee-deep in manure and mud and was barely alive when she was rescued and brought to Sanctuary One. Her foal did not survive the filthy and starving conditions and was found dead when authorities arrived.

I met Rogue on one of my first visits to Sanctuary One. Her ribs poked through the sides of her skin, her coat was dull and dirty, and the terror in her eyes told me all I needed to know about her past experience with humans.

Sanctuary One is about healing—humans, animals and the earth. We practice natural horsemanship as a way to heal the rescued horses, to regain their trust in humans and to rebuild their confidence in the world. This approach also teaches us life lessons that go beyond the horse-human connection. The importance of practicing love, language and leadership, all in equal doses for example, as well as taking responsibility for our actions, controlling our emotions and practicing patience and persistence.

I understand Rogue needs love, but just as importantly she needs for me to understand her language and be the leader she innately requires. Loving a thousand-pound animal without a balance of leadership and the ability to understand it leads to dangerous situations. Horses are herd animals that need a leader to feel safe. If their human is not a strong leader, the horse will take over, becoming pushy, obstinate, even threatening. Likewise, in order to be the effective leader she needs, I need to learn and understand her equine language.

Knowing how horses communicate through body language is essential.

Taking responsibility for how Rogue reacts rather than blaming her is a huge life lesson for me. When things don't go the way I expect, instead of blaming her and wondering why she is doing that, I ask myself, "What can I do differently?" It is common to find fault in others rather than taking personal responsibility and looking at how our own actions have had an impact.

Horses often mirror our intent and energy. If I get frustrated or angry, it only serves to drive Rogue away and causes her to distrust me. Anger and frustration also closes me down to the gifts that are presented in the moment. Natural horsemanship reminds us that if the horse

is doing the opposite of what we are asking, it's most likely because of *how* we are asking, not because the horse is intentionally trying to make us angry. So a key to succeeding with Rogue is controlling my emotions, looking at feelings of frustration and anger as an opportunity to learn something new, to try something different, to ask myself; "What am I doing in the way I'm communicating that isn't working?"

Practicing patience and persistence, in other words, taking the time it takes to achieve a goal, is also an important life lesson as well as an important practice in natural horsemanship. It might be faster to corner Rogue in order to catch her but what about taking the time to create a trusting relationship where she starts to see



Rogue today.



Rogue when adopted.

me as a source of comfort and safety and then begins to choose to come to me when I want her? It might take longer for this to happen, but the results are lasting and real.

Today Rogue is a different horse. Her coat is shiny, she has filled out and is healthy and robust, and her eyes are often soft and inquisitive. She has a long way to go, but each day she trusts a little more and fears a little less. Rogue reminds us of our responsibilities as caretakers, to never forget to take responsibility for our actions, to be ever-mindful of our emotions, and to take the time needed to achieve goals worth achieving. She also reminds us of the importance of practicing a balance of love, language and leadership.

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RUTH

Besides working for the *Applegater*, she also worked for the Forest Service in Ruch providing visitor information, and was a caregiver.

She is survived by her three children and eight grandchildren, all of whom greatly miss her.

J.D. Rogers and the
Applegater Board of Directors



A Granddaughter's Remembrance

It is impossible for me to reflect on any stage of my childhood without being reminded of Nana. She spent endless hours caring for me as both a grandmother and a friend. She made immense efforts to engage me in my early years, sharing with me her seamless patience and compassion for all living creatures. When I was young,

I loved nothing more than rummaging through Nana's closet and prancing around in her oversized shoes, dresses and hats. Nana was always there beside me, grabbing what I couldn't reach and playing the eager audience to my retro fashion show. Once, I decided it would be fun to dress up her German shepherd, Sable. Nana, who was probably enjoying my childish excitement at this prospect, voiced no objections. She just kept laughing with me; even when Sable ran after a squirrel into the wet brush, ruining a pink scarf and nightie. Nana was truly young at heart. She and I shared a mosaic of adventures. Whether we were gardening, enjoying picnics, attending parades, or just running errands, Nana ensured that I was always learning and always having fun. Wisdom and altruism were the defining traits of Nana's character, and I feel blessed to have had her friendship and guidance.

Sara Austin
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Photo above: Ruth served in the Coast Guard as Second Class Radio Man. (The words "Radio Woman" weren't in the Coast Guard's vocabulary in those days.)

Photo, far left (from left to right): Ruth, her sister Grace, and friends Vandy and Shirley in Washington, D.C. in 1944.

Vern Meyer, Manager

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