



THE ART IN HORSES

That's My Line

By Sandra Wallin, MA

"Healing of my Shadow" art by Davina Andrée

It was a perfect spring day. The horses grazed quietly and I could hear the buzzing of bees as they buried their noses in the clover. Ever the watch dog, Chiron swung his head up as a little black car pulled up the driveway. I left the horses and walked over to greet Sara. Her eyes scanned the property as she got out of her car, then briefly met mine before looking downward and away.

Sara had written me an email asking if she

could come out to work with the horses. What she revealed in her letter was a story that sadly, I've heard many times before. A story of abuse, in one form or another, that left the spirit fragmented and adrift. For some reason though, these drifters seemed to know that horses could carry them to a better and stronger place. I found myself walking once again beside a broken heart, down to the horses to watch as they reinitiated her journey back to wholeness.

Chiron was the first to greet us at the fence. He whiffed my shoulder and then turned his attention to Sara. His soft eye changed immediately, replaced by mischief as he began to pull at the toggle on Sara's coat. I watched as she giggled under his attention and as his mischief edged toward disrespect, I asked him to back away with my voice.

Carolyn Resnick talks about the different personality types found in horses. Chiron would be defined as dominant from her perspective. He looks for boundaries and leadership and when they are not present, he takes it upon himself to establish the parameters of a new relationship. He had just shown me that he would take over with Sara and this was the exact pattern that she had come here to change.

We talked about how this recurring theme had shown up in her life. How she felt attractive and of value when a man gave her attention. Chiron had just held up a mirror and she shared that what she saw was a reflection of how most of her relationships started ... flirtatious, mischievous and then dangerous. She said she knew how to invite men to her, but did not know how to draw a line in the sand or how to say NO without being afraid they would get angry or leave.

I jumped on the metaphor, inviting Cricket to join Sara and I in the round pen. A much gentler teacher of the boundary dance, I could rely on Cricket, aka the Love Bug, to educate Sara about the drawing of lines. Unlike Chiron, who would barge across someone's line if it was not substantiated, Cricket would sidle up in the most loving way, batting her eyes and giving moustache kisses until she was pressed right against you. What an unsuspecting person wouldn't realize was Cricket would often move them across the round pen at an astounding pace. She is covert vs. overt and when I point out to someone how far Cricket has moved them, they can't believe it until they look back to where they started. This is exactly what happened with Sara. In a quiet and gentle manner, Cricket crossed the line over and over, all the while dotting on Sara with Sara smiling and giggling what a fun horse Cricket was.

Step one was awareness. Step two would be learning how to claim her space with a gentle



Comfort and healing found in healthy relationships with horses.

horse like Cricket. Step three... that would come later. With a new awareness of how easily she gave way, Sara went back to the center of the round pen, stuck her heel in the sand and drew a line between herself and the Love Bug. This was to be Sara's zone and no-one or no horse was allowed to cross without permission.

I showed Sara a few ways to speak horse, so Cricket would understand what she was asking or saying. I watched as Cricket approached the line and dropped her head to sniff Sara's boot. Sara stood tall with her arm outstretched. She blew out as if to fill her space with breath. Cricket paused and looked back at me. I smiled and she returned her attention to Sara. She started the motion of taking a step forward and Sara said "No Cricket," followed with a downward sweep of her arm, as if to show

Cricket that there was more than a line in the sand that she could just walk over... there was a wall or a door and for the moment it was closed.

Cricket stood and stared. I could almost hear the wheels turning in her head. She sighed, licked and chewed and then stood quietly on her side of the line. A raven flew overhead, cawing down at us. Sara raised her head to watch as the bird landed high in the cedar tree beside us. Cricket took advantage of the change in focus, taking one slow step toward Sara. Sara in turn took one step back.

Before I could ask if she noticed what happened, Sara exclaimed, "Hey, that's my line," and stepped back toward Cricket to reclaim her space. Cricket stepped back in kind, then dropped her head with a contented sigh.

Sara's eyes found mine. "I did it," she said. "I drew my line, and when she crossed it without being invited, I asked her to back away. She did what I asked and didn't get mad at me or leave."

Her eyes sparkled as she turned to look at Cricket. She opened the door, gently reaching a hand toward her withers. Cricket responded to the invitation and touched her nose to Sara's heart.

Author's Note: The story above was a beginning for Sara. The graduation part was to come but before she could meet with Chiron again, she'd need to get by Grace, one of the greatest boundary teachers I know. Cricket was the first step - building confidence - having an experience of what it felt like to be successful, listened to and respected.

HOW HORSES HELP US BECOME OUR OWN MASTERPIECE

Sandra Wallin is a registered clinical counselor, an educator, author and presenter, who divides her professional time between a private practice, working in a local school district and teaching Equine Guided Development and PSYCH-K. As an expressive arts therapist, Sandra often combines the arts with equine guided activities. SANDRA'S THOUGHTS ON THIS SERIES: Horses have inspired artists throughout the ages and in turn, those of us who look upon their art are captivated by the beauty and majesty of the horse. The cave drawings in Lascaux, Leonardo's sculptures, and the finger paintings that adorn kindergarten classrooms, created by little girls who dream of being a horse.



What I want to share however, is a new way of looking at horses, through stories that pay homage to the master artist in each horse. Instead of the painted, they are now the painters, transforming the at times tattered canvas of the human spirit into glowing masterpieces, alive with the colours of love, compassion and joy. Learn more at www.chironsway.com

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