

CONTINUING EDUCATION

The learning process never ends

By Joe Wolter

Working with horses and being a cowboy has been my dream my whole life. Starting when I was a small kid, for several years I cleaned a lot of stalls at a neighbor's Thoroughbred farm in order to get to ride and earn a little spending money. The more I rode, the more I realized how much more there was to learn. I still feel that way, maybe even more.

I'm writing this time to express *how* I've learned, instead of what I have learned. Those first few years were a lot of fun because no one told me what I couldn't do. I was given a lot of freedom to just catch, lead, handle and ride a lot of horses.

At the time, I didn't really like it when things weren't going well with a horse – and they often weren't going well. It was tough for me as well as my horses. But that set me up to appreciate and notice good horsemen and teachers when they came along later.

For instance, on a ranch I worked on in Nevada, I had a friend who would see me struggle and say, "Don't worry about it!" That was about 25 years ago and I am just now really noticing how important that is to the horse.

I guess what I'm getting at is I cherish the experience of being a horseman, but if it weren't for quite a few people who came along with their kindness and words of wisdom, I probably would have done something else for my living.

It's funny how sometimes when a person gets stuck on something how

just a few words like "Don't worry about it" can help so much. That same friend would say, "Get him ready to do things and then just let him do it."

Another bit of advice that helps me so often is "Think about what happened just before _____," and you can fill in the blank with anything a horse does, good behavior as well as bad. Think about what happened right before he got in the trailer, or what happened right before he refused to go in the trailer.

Another good reminder is "Horses are just doing what they think they need to do to survive." I think that applies to us humans, as well.

Another is "See how smooth you can be, and you will be amazed at how smooth your horse

will get."

I watched a lady get instant improvement from her horse after someone advised her to "Pet him like you like him." Even if you don't like a horse, if you pet him and treat him like you do like him, he will respond better.

"Ride him where he is right now, not where you think he should be."

All these sayings or phrases came from others who wanted to help me and my horses.

I often think how blessed I was to get the opportunities and help I got when I did. Nowadays, we have a lot more learning opportunities available to us, because of all the videos, books and clinics. There are probably more people willing to share their knowledge of horses today than ever before.

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The more you learn about horses, the more you realize there's plenty left to learn.

When I leave my ego at home, I usually am open to learn something. It doesn't come easily, but anything of value is usually hard at first.

These books in particular have helped me: "The Winning Attitude," by John Maxwell (this isn't about horses but it applies); "True Unity," by Tom Dorrance with Milly Hunt Porter (also on audiotape); "Think Harmony with Horses," Ray Hunt with Milly Hunt Porter. I've also really benefitted from Ray Hunt's video, "Colt Starting."

While I encourage you to read, go to clinics, observe other people, ask questions and watch videos, there's no substitute for personal experience. If you always approach a horse with respect, and an open mind, he'll be the most reliable teacher you could ever have. ☻

Although Joe Wolter of Texas says he's learned a lot from the late Bill Dorrance and Billy Askew, his list didn't include their roping video, because he's also one of the stars. The horse books and videos mentioned are available through Quarter Horse Outfitters, (888) 209-8322.