

Working with Horses Through Feel

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Every clinic is different and sensitive to the horses, people and horse/person combinations in the moment. These course notes are designed to give a feel ☺ for the content of my clinics.

Note: the quotes in this document are from "*True Horsemanship Through Feel*" (THTF) by Bill Dorrance and Leslie Desmond, with page numbers noted. It is my hope that you will visit these pages in your own time to augment your understanding of Feel through the words of the master.

What do we mean by FEEL (in this clinic)?

- ❑ The flow between two beings: nature's telemetry
- ❑ Living in our human world of confinement and expectations: how does this affect Feel?
- ❑ Compare life and responsiveness in an unhandled Mustang vs. horse on a trail string
- ❑ True feel vs. learned response
- ❑ The horse's loss is our loss of lightness and connection in our ride
- ❑ Feel is the direct line to the whole horse and the holy grail of unity with our horse
- ❑ For more, see Bill's 8 definitions about Feel in the Meanings Section

"When it comes to cooperating with the human, we're talking about the feeling the horse has in every square inch of his hide and all through his mind, as it relates to a human touching him directly or indirectly." Bill Dorrance, p2

Offering Quality in our Feel Feeling of The Horse

- The gift of Feel is in each of us for the asking
- Horses read true Feel: what we offer from the inside in that moment
- The Horse responds to Feel according to how he experiences it "in every square inch of his hide at that moment"
- Horses have an innate desire to get along with those they live with, survival is never far from their thoughts
- Quality in our Feel comes from:
 - respect for our horse, so that he can offer respect
 - trust for him, so that he can offer trust
 - our full presence in the moment, sureness and clarity – so that he can be clear and respond with sureness
- Quality: reciprocal Feel

"When the horse understands what you want, he will do what that is, right up to the limit of his physical capacity and sometimes beyond it" Bill Dorrance, p3 THTF

Some Things Affecting FEEL in a Way We'd Like to Avoid

- Focus on past or future
- Human expectations
- Hand feeding
- Crowding space
- "Too many minds" vs. "One Mind" (The Samurai)
- EXERCISE: getting in the moment with your horse
- EXERCISE: offering a respectful feel around the head, neck and shoulders

"Without that person around, the horse is that nice mellow way in most cases" Bill Dorrance, p5 THTF

RELEASE and its meaning

- ❑ What is the role of the Release in 'pressure and release' ?
- ❑ Comfort and discomfort: the conditional release
- ❑ Timing of the release: what meaning is offered in this feel, exactly?
- ❑ What happens if we adjust that timing a little...
- ❑ EXERCISE: the box of chocolates -- an experiment in the timing of a release and the meaning in the float.

"Release of Pressure: That would be when there wasn't anyone around to bother him", Bill Dorrance, p347 THTF

PRESSURE and its meaning in "Pressure and Release"

- ❑ What is the biggest strength of "Pressure and Release"?
- ❑ Having a plan vs. an expectation
- ❑ What we mean by what we do -- mindful presentation to the horse
- ❑ If we are working with *reciprocal feel*, when is the horse right, and wrong?
- ❑ EXERCISE: getting a feel for release only, explore how offering this feels different to us... and therefore the horse
- ❑ EXERCISE: how is this reflected in the horse? Where will this lead in terms of partnership?
- ❑ What are some 'actual facts' about the meaning expressed in a feel that uses pressure?

"Pressure: This is what we're trying to get away from, so we might not mention it", Bill Dorrance, p346 THTF

Taking the RELEASE Further

- ❑ What happens if we adjust the presentation to leave out the expression of pressure and *just release*?
- ❑ What change takes place in our inner being to offer just the release?
- ❑ EXERCISE: 'the cliff edge', explore the feel in two presentations, experience the residual feel each leaves with you for the partnership
- ❑ EXERCISE: when did you feel 'brace' and what was its effect, in terms of biomechanics?

"Our main goal here is to bring out the best in the horse" Bill Dorrance, p319 THTF

Exploring Just Releasing

- ❑ Offering a release without preceding it with an expression of pressure
- ❑ Understanding cadence
- ❑ Getting with the feet
- ❑ Accessing the feet with quality
- ❑ Observing how brace ceases to have meaning (why is this?)
- ❑ EXERCISE: releasing a foot, releasing a diagonal, developing powers of observation -- what story does your horse's feet and body tell about his thought process?
- ❑ EXERCISE: picking up the feet through feel

"There were two things that happened that I can say were the most important things that helped me to improve my horsemanship – that being the proper way to sit on a horse, and learning to feel of those feet" Bill Dorrance, p40 THTF

Connecting with the Horse's Mind through Release

- ❑ Where is the root of the neck?
 - ❑ What needs to happen for the horse to release the root of the neck (physically)?
 - ❑ Some implications of this release: mental and physical
 - ❑ Why is it useful to link this release to a new 'lesson'?
- ❑ EXERCISE: asking for the root of the neck
 - ❑ EXERCISE: leading up 'real free' – how did the exercises preceding this figure into your horse's response?

"Following a feel: This part of the foundation is deserving of quite a bit of time" Bill Dorrance, p318 THTF
"The horse's mental and physical setups work real close together" Bill Dorrance, p85 THTF

Quality in Forwards/Backwards and Developing the Stop in One Stride

- ❑ Where is the Stop?
 - ❑ Releasing the horse to a stop
 - ❑ What story does your horse's feet tell about what he is offering?
 - ❑ A feel to stop vs. 'life down'
- ❑ EXERCISE: shaping the horse for backing and stepping forwards
 - ❑ EXERCISE: releasing the horse backwards, forwards and to a stop
 - ❑ Why do we do these exercises one step at a time: what are the implications?

"You don't ever want to hurry him when you're trying to teach him something he doesn't understand"
Bill Dorrance, p98 THTF

Quality in Turns and Developing Straightness

- ❑ If the Stop is between forwards and backwards, where is 'straight'? What feel would mean go straight?
- ❑ How do many people ride straight?
- ❑ Clear meaning vs. micromanagement: let's offer a feel that fits a sentient, intelligent mind
- ❑ EXERCISE: backing on an arc – what does this have to do with turns?
- ❑ EXERCISE: adding quality with access to the feet through the mind – root of the neck L&R, hind foot to float, offer feel for releasing shape, offer feel for releasing the feet

"The horse has the ability to distinguish between several meanings at once, and a person needs to help him develop this quality" Bill Dorrance, p88 THTF

A Different Kind of RELEASE: Releasing the Life in Your Horse

- ❑ A release that does not relate to a request, but to accessing the life in your horse or bringing attention to the part he needs available
- ❑ If the horse is not available to himself, he is not available to you... to do anything well
- ❑ EXERCISE: accessing the shoulders
- ❑ EXERCISE: accessing the hind quarters
- ❑ By releasing the life that 'died' we free his capacity to be light: we have something to shape

"If a horse hasn't been around people who brought the life he has inside of him right up to the surface, some people might call a horse like that a dull one, even if he wasn't" Bill Dorrance, p337 THTF

Understanding Locomotion

- Basic biomechanics: what you need to know
- Why you need to know: long term health and soundness
- Which moves first: hind quarter or fore quarter?
- Does an 'engaged' HQ or the HQ 'coming through' predict lightness?
- What does this mean for turns?
- Balance supports lightness
- EXERCISE: support, reach and step through
- EXERCISE: shaping the horse for balanced locomotion and lightness in turns and other maneuvers
- EXERCISE: coiling the spring for a snappy depart -- change eye via tail and release shoulders

Lightness is already in the horse. That's what true lightness is. It's just a question of if the person can leave it in there and get it to work for him, because the horse's preservation is tied right to that lightness" Bill Dorrance, p336 THTF

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Riding Through RELEASE: Remaining Mindful of Meaning

- Baseline: what meaning does 'pick up the rein' mean to your horse? What are the implications?
- Review: meaning of the lead rope and float
- What has our foundation on the ground prepared for the meaning in our rein?
- EXERCISE: explore the feel offered in the reins, and observe the meaning understood by your horse

"Meaning: We want the horse to understand the meaning in our feel. That is our main goal" Bill Dorrance, p339 THTF

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Riding Through RELEASE

Getting Mindful of our Riding Style

- Baseline: how do you sit on your horse, how do you move when your horse moves?
- Understanding the biomechanics of movement so you do not block your horse
- Balanced seat -- its importance and implications for FEEL
- EXERCISE: getting 'in the zone', feeling of the whole horse, riding the whole horse -- freeing his movement

"When you're walking along in good form, your body is fairly balanced on the horse, and it's sort of like it is when you are standing on the ground" p42 THTF

Riding Through RELEASE:

Feeling of the Feet

- Cadence and getting in time with the feet
- EXERCISE: riding the feet: feeling of the feet, influencing the feet through release

"It was pretty important when I learned to put that foot someplace as it was coming up, because that's when it hardly weighed anything. I could move it one way or the other and the horse didn't offer to resist at all. He needed a place to put that foot down anyway" Bill Dorrance, p43 THTF

Riding Through RELEASE: Forwards/Backwards/Stop on Float

- ❑ Accessing the root of the neck from the saddle
 - ❑ What does this mean – review of shaping through release and purpose
 - ❑ Invite a step, release the diagonal
 - ❑ Timing of the release for forwards vs. backwards – it's all in the meaning
 - ❑ The feel to Stop
- ❑ EXERCISE: shaping the horse – separate shape from movement
 - ❑ EXERCISE: exchanging clearly understood, reciprocal feel – forward, backwards and stopping on a float

"I found that the more accurate feel I had to offer the horse, the less "trouble" he offered me, and it wasn't because he did something different" Bill Dorrance, p45 THTF

Riding Through RELEASE: Left, Right and Straight

- ❑ Re-educating the head, neck and shoulders for lightness in turns
 - ❑ Releasing the shoulders for lightness; releasing the hips to support lightness in the shoulders.
 - ❑ Balance in locomotion
 - ❑ How does access to the root of the neck affect turns?
- ❑ EXERCISE: offering a feel that releases the shoulders and educates the hips for balanced turns and lightness into the next maneuver
 - ❑ EXERCISE: clarity in the presentation of our feel to release L&R and straight
 - ❑ Why does L&R develop straight?

"Things started to work out for me and my horses when I could move those feet where I needed them to go, but I had to get with them on the start" Bill Dorrance, p45 THTF

Working with Horses Through True Feel

- ❑ The feel of a dear friend vs. a good boss
- ❑ Partnered through release and clearly understood, reciprocal feel, which...
- ❑ Frees the horse's unguarded try
- ❑ Frees the horse to perform with heart, to offer ALL he has
- ❑ Frees the horse to think, bring his own ideas to help you in your partnership – feeling back to you in a real way that could save you
- ❑ Operating through Feel becomes a state of being, just as it is with the horse
- ❑ Leslie and the Mustang

"Make it his idea: Say instead, 'help it to become his idea through feel.' No talking about 'make' the horse do anything. That's out." Bill Dorrance, p339 THTF

Or To Put it Another Way...

"Feel, Timing and Balance: Sometimes it's best to talk about feel, timing and balance separately, and to learn how to apply each thing separately on the start. But when you go to apply these three things a little later on in your training, then you see that each one of these things supports the other. They are interconnected and all three are real important. You really can't get along without all three. If one is missing, there's sure to be a poor effect on the other two. The main one you need to have in there when you ride is balance. Without that you'd fall off your horse just as soon as you got up on him"

Bill Dorrance, p321 THTF