

Thoroughbred Joey and Cheryl Erpelding.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

Joey, a registered thoroughbred named Youmustberight, was sold like so many countless discards of the racing world. He probably was around two years old. In general, horses bred for the track are minimally handled and, if they do race, are trained specifically for racing and nothing else. If he is lucky, the young horse will be purchased by a trainer who sees potential in him and takes the time to prepare him for resale for another discipline such as jumping, dressage, English or even trail riding. Or an individual who intends to provide some general training along the way may buy such a horse at a low price. For a variety of reasons, among which are lack of consistency, know-how and money, the latter plan rarely works very well. However, affluence, of all things, turned out to be the enigma in this young horse's new home.

Handsome Youmustberight ended up on a luxurious property in the wine country near Temecula with a few other companion horses and was renamed Marquis. Unfortunately, this beautiful environment turned out to be a gilded cage in which Marquis was starved to skin and bones by his inhumane owner. She strongly disagreed there was anything the matter with her horses when the Riverside Animal Control finally removed them from her care. Falcon Ridge Equine Rescue in Valley Center, CA took in Marquis and spent three months restoring him to normal weight and health. He was soon adopted but brought back to

Falcon Ridge a year later because the person could no longer afford his care. Marquis was up for adoption again.

Cheryl Erpelding, whose mission, among her many equine related activities, is to save one horse at a time, was looking for a new project. She had recently completed training and successfully re-homing a horse. She turned to Nicki Branch and Falcon Ridge to find a suitable new horse in need of her expertise. Marquis, now 10 years old, had a sweet disposition but hadn't had any consistent basic training and desperately needed a spring board to a better life. Therefore, he was an ideal candidate for Cheryl's remedial training. After a few visits Cheryl felt he was the one and, in November 2014, she trailered him down to Triple S in Lakeside, CA. He is now "Joey", and is in expert, kindly hands, being loved and appreciated by all who know him.

Late February this year I came down for a consult with Joey. He and Cheryl were getting along well. She was moving forward slowly, at an extremely basic level of handling. Up to this point, nothing much had been asked of him and he'd hardly been ridden. He appeared to love all the attention, but didn't quite understand the purpose of having a rider on his back make him do things while going around in a large circle. Cheryl who is an assistant to trainer Ronnette Leja were making good process working together with Joey. When the time came and Ronnette asked Joey to go into a canter during short training sessions, he started to buck. Was this exuberance or something more serious? Cheryl set up the consult to find out more about Joey.

When I got to his corral I didn't know much about him, but I could see he looked glossy and healthy, had a friendly

disposition and a good confirmation. He appeared to be an uncomplicated sort, but we surely needed to know how his prior experiences had affected him. Cheryl met me and we sat down in front of Joey who was only too happy to have company and treats. I was aware he was Cheryl's new foster horse and that he had come from Falcon Ridge Rescue but I hadn't seen the picture of him emaciated and had no idea of the harrowing experience he had been through.

Joey ~ February 27, 2015

BN: Hello Joey,

This is Brigitte, The One Who Listens. Cheryl has asked me to connect with you. Would you like to share with me? I translate into people words for horses.

Joey: I am very curious. I am a curious horse. I love my life. I have a very good life. Very good. I love my life.

BN: Great. We are so interested in knowing more about you, especially Cheryl.

Joey: Please let Cheryl know I am a SIMPLE HORSE. NOT COMPLICATED. THEY THINK THERE IS MORE TO ME. THERE IS NOT. I love, love LOVE people. I need people to talk to me. TO CARE ABOUT ME. You care about me. I love that. I have a very, very, generous spirit, I have—for that "Special Person." I am a very good, good horse.

BN: Yes, I can see that. What have you come in to do?

Joey: To be with. I love to be with.

BN: What do you teach?

Joey: I teach love. I'm a lover boy.

BN: What did you do on the racetrack?

Joey: Not much. Considered okay, but just okay.

BN: Did you ever race?

Joey: No. Given away. I was given away.

BN: How do you feel inside?

Joey: I'm very calm, very contented.

BN: Cheryl is taking care of you now. She wants to know what you want to do.

Joey: I don't know. I'm not very ambitious you know. I like to hang out.

BN: Do you like dressage?

Joey: ...okay...?

BN: Do you like to jump?

Joey: I don't know.

BN: What do I need to know?

Joey: You know, you know. I'm just me.

BN: Do you have any discomfort when you are ridden?

Joey: I'm just not used to being ridden consistently. Tell them it is all new to me. All new.

BN: When you cantered, you bucked?

Joey: New. Too new. New.

BN: Do you have any pain under saddle?

Joey: No.

His communication confirmed a lot of what Cheryl already figured out, but I don't think anyone had an inkling as to how little Joey had been ridden or handled. In my opinion, his good disposition weighed heavily in his favor and made him more manageable. In addition, he says of himself that he is a simple, uncomplicated horse, without much ambition. A lover boy type. These are definitely desirable qualities for a pleasure/companion horse. Eventually, Cheryl may discover he likes one discipline or another, but being someone's BFF seems a likely preference for Joey. An important role indeed, not ever to be underestimated.

Cheryl agreed that the formula for success with Joey's training was to continue to move forward very slowly and consistently. She would continue to maintain a routine until he was very comfortable with it, then introduce one new element. The second or third time when Ronnette asked him to canter he had bucked again because it had felt strange to run with a person on his back. I could assure her it wasn't out of pain, resistance or unwillingness. We needed to understand, for the most part, his interactions had been with people on the ground. He was still a bit confused as to why a rider, i.e. Cheryl and Ronnette, got on his back and asked him to do things and he needed to be reminded: They are the teacher, and he is the student. In fact Joey, at 10 years of age, was learning kindergarten horse stuff for the first time. Because he had led such a sheltered, uneventful existence I also emphasized how everything was "new" to him around the ranch as well. In short, he was constantly called upon to become familiar with and learn simple things about being out and

about.

Our consult came to an end. Cheryl fed him his daily goodies and supplements, I gave him the last of my carrots and we called it a day.

All went well until about three weeks later. Joey, apparently not receptive to training that particular day, took the bit in his mouth and bolted at high speed out of the ring in the direction of his grooming area. He was out of control. Cheryl used all her experience to slow him down and safely guide him to a halt. No one got hurt. But this was a close call. I found out about this mishap and offered to come out and check with Joey. By the time I got there the next day, he was standing in his corral a bit sore from the lunging he underwent as a deterrent for future running off, but still very much sweet Joey.

Joey ~ March 22, 2015

(He had just finished simple round pen work with Cheryl and was back in his corral all groomed and handsome.)

BN: Hey Joey, you did really well today.

Joey: I am SO, SO, HAPPY. I am so Happy. I really like it here. I do. I'm so relaxed here. SO.

BN: Very good. How do you feel about your riding with Cheryl.

Joey: Very good. Very. Love, love, love ATTENTION. Love time with Cheryl, love, love , love.

BN: What happened yesterday when you took the bit. I'm just curious. To me you are the best boy.

Joey: I need a break. I need a break.

BN: I see. You got stressed?

Joey: I got TIRED. I WAS TIRED.

BN: Did you need to pee?

Joey: I just got tired.

BN: How can Cheryl know you are getting tired?

Joey: I'll just not behave.

BN: So you are willing until you get tired.

Joey: Yes, very willing. But TIRED, TIRED, TIRED.

BN: Please explain tired.

Joey: Just tired. Plain tired.

———

Working through his fear and flight instinct and being good for so long had taken its toll. I had a feeling things had been moving along smoothly and he had reached a threshold. I was happy to have this confirmed in the communication. He needed more time to catch up and reboot. Cheryl was more than happy to continue to give him a break. In addition, she scheduled a chiropractic adjustment to make sure he wouldn't have negative repercussions to his back and body from his exertions. A sore back would not help him learn to enjoy a rider and saddle. Soon, Joey was a happy camper again.

The back story about Cheryl is as important as her work as horse magazine founder and with Joey. Several years ago she suffered from uterine cancer. The surgery was a success and she is cancer free. However, her lymph nodes were removed on

both sides of her body around the cancerous region. This is a common practice. It is now evident that tampering with the lymphatic system has serious consequences that can manifest a year later or more. The lymph fluid runs through lymph vessels and is filtered by the lymph nodes and when these are removed the fluid starts to pool in the body because the fluid is unable to automatically flow up the body through the cleansing mechanism of the lymphatic system. The result is a massive amount of fluid retention in the legs and elsewhere. To keep her legs from blowing up like the Michelin tire man or the Pillsbury dough boy, Cheryl has to wear custom fitted and measured constraining compression garments twenty-four hours a day. I view them as Spanx on steroids. Even though Lymphedema now affects ten million Americans, it is often times not covered by health insurance. The compression garments need to be replaced at a minimum of every six months and they are very expensive. She has had to fight her insurance for some reimbursement for her garments and recently opted for elective cutting edge surgery from Dr. Jay Granzow in Seal Beach, CA. The surgery cost \$43,000 and was paid for by Cheryl and her husband Steve with the help of her many friends and family that donated to her GoFundMe site to have the surgery. The procedure removed 4.3 liters or a little over a U.S. gallon of lymphedema sludge from her right leg. (It did not eliminate the need for compression garments.) This is after having participated in a drug trial at Stanford University, undergone human growth hormone treatments and stem cell treatments to no avail over a period of three years. The out-of-pocket surgery seemed the last option and it appears to have been a good gamble. Her right leg is better than the left one, but she needs to gather the funds before she can have the same procedure on her left side. As Cheryl says "Hold on to your lymph nodes, you need them."

Not long ago, at an afternoon party, I saw a pretty blond

woman with an athletic body type in a long flowing skirt. Her right leg was heavily bandaged all the way up. She must have been around fifty. I assumed she just had some kind of sports injury or had surgery on her leg. We ended up sitting close to each other and I discovered she had been an avid sportswoman and runner. A couple of years prior she underwent cancer surgery in the hip area and the lymph nodes had been removed. There was another person with a serious case of Lymphedema. Thanks to all that I've learned from Cheryl, I was able to listen and relate to what she had to say. She put up a brave face, but it was clear the Lymphedema changed her life, and not for the better; she just couldn't get away from it, even for a short time.

The only place Cheryl can forget she is squeezed into a tight half-body girdle twenty four hours a day is on the back of a horse and with a horse. There, for an hour or two, she is totally focused on the horse and her interaction with him. She has lost some of her quickness and agility and she has to be very careful, but she is in her element. Her fatigue, feelings of discouragement and all physical discomfort fade away ~ to be replaced by the magical, timeless, healing connection with the horse.

Cheryl is enriching Joey and Joey is helping Cheryl. I am proud to say I feel like Joey's "Auntie" and sideline coach as I follow his progress with Cheryl and Ronnette and, in some ways, he is also saving horseless me. The trade is bountiful.

Cheryl Erpelding is the founder of California Riding Magazine and the annual California Horseman's Directory now owned by MPM Publications. She is advertising consultant for MPM Publications, photographer, videographer, part time assistant trainer for Ronnette Leja's Harmony Farms, horse show announcer, and part time bookkeeper and wife to Steve Erpelding.

FalconRidge Equine Rescue

Nicki Branch, President

P.O. Box 1500

Valley Center, CA 92082

(760) 742-0285

nickbranch@aol.com

www.falconridgerescue.org

Please remember Falcon Ridge Equine Rescue in your donations!