

Noble Shady

The Year of the Horse (January 31, 2014-Wood element) and an article in California Riding Magazine February '14 issue couldn't be a more fitting time to kick off my blog. A project that has been on the back of my mind for quite some time. And, of course, we must start with a horse. A horse that represents all that is noble and generous in horse spirit and body. Shady, a gifted hunter/jumper who generously contributed to the success of several riders over the years is such a horse. At the time of our consult this Thoroughbred was 19 years old and ready for a change of pace.



One of her first jumper shows.

Her person, Christy, contacted me because she was about to make a very important decision about leasing out her mare out of the area to a young girl in Pony Club. Spending quality time with her horse is always an issue. Christy is often out of town for her work and wants her horse to stay active mentally and physically. Shady had recently come back from a lease with a teenage rider and she wasn't too sure she should send her off again. She knew her mare liked her work and was

concerned about limiting her to a more sedentary lifestyle. But this time, upon her return, Shady's legs really showed physical signs of wear and tear. Young riders benefit from riding a mature, seasoned horse but can drive them a bit too hard. Most likely, this is what happened. Christy recognized the years of jumping were taking their toll and she needed to find out what her mare wanted to do next.



I'll let Shady give her point of view through the transcript of our phone consult:

BN: Hello Shady,

This is Brigitte, the One-Who-Listens. I am here to be a go-between and translator for you and Christy.

Shady: Please let Christy know I do NOT, NOT, NOT, NOT want to leave her ever again. I want to be with her. I want to be with her. I am very attached. Very. I do not care to be leased out ever again. I am "somebody's horse" when I'm leased out. I get a big hit to my STATUS. Here I am "Queen Mare". I am recognized, respected. I am very, very happy here. I am. Please let Christy know this. I am very happy here and I do not want change. I am not as flexible as she thinks. I am not. I do not like the idea of a new person and a new facility. This is the best, best, best place, EVER. The best.

BN: I'll be sure Christy understands.

BN: What have you come in to do?

Shady: To be honored and appreciated. I thrive on appreciation for my qualities and my abilities. I am a horse with substantial abilities to overcome any obstacle or challenge. I am, I am, I am.

BN: What are you teaching?

Shady: I teach nobility. I am noble, I am noble, I am noble. I have great courage and stamina. I am noble (BN: Also as in excellent breeding.)

BN: What does Christy need to know she doesn't already know?

Shady: I am tired. I am tired. I am tired.

BN: Please explain "tired".

Shady: Need a rest, need consistent-same. Don't want any more changes to my routine. I am tired.

BN: How does your body feel?

Shady: Okay.

BN: Do you have any soreness?

Shady: Hocks (ankle joints just above the rear hooves) get puffy and sore, they do. Knees too.

...BN: What else would you like to share?

Shady: I am worried.

BN: That's okay, we'll sort it all out for you. Christy hears your concerns and she is keeping you close by. You will not be leased again. She apologizes for even thinking about leasing you again. She is very sorry.

Shady had therapeutic shots to her legs a while ago, Christy wanted to know how they helped.

BN: How did the shots help when you stopped being ridden by

the young person?

Shady: My appreciation goes to all the body work and the shots. I leave it up to Christy, I'm in need of a shot now. It is hurting again, everyday, not just every other day.

Christy learned so much about her mare's state of mind from this consult. She hadn't realized how attached Shady was to her, personally. And that she needed her presence more. They are now more bonded than ever because the nature of the relationship and the horse's feelings towards her are clear. Her veterinarian came out and treated Shady's legs. Her stifles (back knee) in particular. She did move her to another barn, but it isn't very far away and she seems to be fine there. We will perhaps do follow-up and "hear" how Shady likes it there from Shady herself.

A frequent question in a horse consult is "Does my horse like me?" Rarely is this a concern in respect to a dog or a cat. Dogs show their feelings and their devotion clearly. A cat person knows about their cat's affection too. But it seems people have more difficulty in sensing a more intimate connection from a horse. Horses live in a barn or corral and don't jump on your lap for a cuddle. Most often they work for us in one manner or another. Nevertheless, they show they care in many ways, often in subtle behavior that may not communicate the depth of the feeling as effectively or clearly as a companion animal. I am always so happy to let a person know how much their horse cares about them.

In Antoine de Saint Exupéry's *Little Prince* we find the story of the Little Prince and the fox, where the fox teaches the little boy how to develop a bond with him. A bond through which each of them will see each other as special and unlike anyone else. He asks him to come back at the same time so that he may begin to look forward to his visit several hours before he shows up. He prefers to know which days he will come, it makes those days different than the others, more special.

During his visit, he would like the Little Prince to develop a routine he can identify with him, and only him. These simple and essential steps foster their special connection.

One of the best places to develop a connection with a horse is during the quiet communion of grooming. In *Zen Mind Zen Horse*, Allan J. Hamilton, MD, has a chapter called "Grooming as an Act of Love." Grooming is a natural opportunity for closeness and for developing a feel for the particular horse. During regular grooming sessions one detects the horse's moods and state of mind. One finds out how he likes to be brushed or curried, his or her sensitivities and particularities. In ideal circumstances it is done in silence, at a slow, regular pace. A person's inner awareness is turned towards the horse. They are both present, in sync. By this I mean, the person has slowed down to "horse time" which is a flowing continuum far different from our chopped up mental clock time. (Many people don't switch gears and prefer to talk and socialize and/ or think about what is next on their agenda.) When grooming is done in the present moment, with complete presence and awareness, it sets the stage for receptivity in the person. A receptivity that allows the deeper, special, connection with the horse to take place and flourish, like the Little Prince and his fox. The very connection Christy recovered when her mare returned to her care and Shady became "Queen Mare" and special again.