

FLORIDA CLINIC

by Barbara Janelle

As a T.T.E.A.M. Practitioner, in my seventh year of association with this discipline, I find that TTEAM work continues to fascinate me with its growth and change. In March, Carol Lang, a friend and fellow practitioner from Michigan, and I assisted Linda Tellington-Jones at the TTEAM Training in Orlando, Florida. I have attended Advanced Clinics for several years and so it was interesting to participate in a regular course again. Seven days of watching, listening and helping the 21 participants showed me that TTEAM work continues to inspire people. As well, it also encourages the journey into personal awareness.

The participants came from 14 states and the Canadian province of Ontario. Backgrounds ranged from over 35 years of experience with teaching riding to under three years experience with horses. All acknowledged that they had come seeking a way of training horses with understanding and without the use of force.

Bonnie Grueninger of Missouri said she had been unable to go to Linda's Pacific Coast Equestrian Research Farm years ago. "I've waited 25 years to train with you!" Corene Kufta of Massachusetts described the way things had come together for her. "It's like stepping stones that have led me to this clinic." Darlene Allen of Mississippi added a comment that many laughed in agreement with, "Everyone thinks I've gone to the moon!" Listening to the introductions, I remembered my own reaction to seeing Linda's work for the first time. "After 28 years with horses, I've finally found what I want to do!"

This clinic was unusual because no one brought horses. All the animals belonged to Woodlands Camp, the 300 acre center which hosted the clinic. Half of the horses were in the therapeutic riding program and half were in the trail riding barn.

Erika Veamoi, the farm manager was welcoming and very helpful. Added to the good working facilities, the superb accommodations, good food, comfortable meeting room, and snack shop provided ideal conditions. The weather topped it all. In all the seven days, it rained for five minutes. The sun shone and temperatures were in the high 70's and low 80's. I think "Perfection" pretty well sums up the situation.

Increased understanding and improved definition of TTEAM work has led to changes. Linda's introduction of TTEAM work, which six years ago dealt with awareness, coordination and obedience, now focuses on balance. An animal with sprawling forelegs and clamped hindleg lacks not only physical balance, but mental and emotional balance too. Changing the posture improves breathing and encourages the horse to think rather than react.

TTEAM Touch activates neural impulses and gives the animal confidence in its body. Now TTEAM also recognizes that touch communicates with individual cells and helps activate their specific roles. Touch work draws many people to TTEAM. However, Linda says it is secondary to ground work. She believes it is possible to make most of the changes, even more effectively, while the horse is moving. Certainly the renaming of ground work positions from numbers to animal names has had a dramatic effect on how quickly people learn.

The delighted reactions of the Orlando clinic participants to the first day of TTouch work set the stage for the rest of the course. Once again Darlene spoke for the group when she said, "I'm learning to speak another language." Nicole Coulter (Ontario) recognized a change in herself. "I'm learning to think, not to react." Natalie Alexander from Ohio exclaimed, "I have the ability; I can do it!" Denise Ruzich (Kentucky) commented on her developing self-confidence and sensitivity to the horse. Many spoke in wonder at the mutual support and openness that existed in working with partners on the horses. Julie Bates of Michigan glowed as she said, "We worked together. We really focused and worked together!"

The participants learned more TTEAM concepts with each passing day. Jackie Forbes from Louisiana recognized that the lack of energy in a horse in hand was actually a lack of balance. "With a few minutes work in Dancing Cobra, the horse found balance and ease of movement." Denise Ruzich and Lynette Brannon (Texas) asked Carol Lang's help when their horse would not walk over a ground pole. Carol taught them to "chunk down" the situation by getting the horse to walk over a lead line first. Stepping over the pole was easy after the horse was successful with a similar but less threatening object.

Several people personally experienced the release of muscle holding patterns. Release rather than forced change through stretching is a principle of Feldenkrais work. With a few minutes of TTouch work on her back Julie Bates felt the release of a pinched nerve from a fall two weeks earlier. Sally Alasin (South Carolina) noticed how quickly the tension in her shoulders disappeared. Denise had not realized how self-protective her body was because of an old leg injury. Linda's work on the leg with a stuffed animal and a sheepskin pad showed that a less threatening approach leads to breakthroughs.

Finding alternative ways, chunking down, trusting your hands, understanding the difference between training and educating the horse, learning to see the horse, and working with precision, directness and clarity all came quickly to the participants. Yet another lesson, the willingness to try new tools, led to great fun with the horses under saddle.

Everyone had a chance to feel how the neck ring and balancing rein changed the balance of the horses. Pam Sternberg, an international level dressage rider from Florida, told of using the balance rein without a bridle on one of her horses. The animal, never truly connected through its body, changed dramatically in a single session with the balance rein. The sudden connection, balance and lightness in the horse was incredible.

Horses in the clinic showed some major changes. Love, who was very difficult to stop with a snaffle bridle, responded beautifully to the bitless Lindell. The balancing rein used either alone or in combination with a bridle changed heaviness on the forehead to light, fluid movement.

Reaction to this work was enthusiastic. Sally found that trying different tack gave her "confidence to experiment." Pam recognized that a runaway horse is just out of balance. With improved balance, the horse becomes less fearful and breathes. Carol Cruikshanks (Pennsylvania) said, "riding with just the balance rein and nothing on the horse's head led to a real change in how I use my own body." Jackie also recognized that riding with the balance rein affected her balance and made her feel more secure. Bonnie said that having her students ride with the neck ring "developed their awareness in a way that all the talking will not do." Jan Snodgrass (Ohio) delighted at how "happy" the horse was with the balance rein. Joyce Larson (Oregon) said, "I got off the horse a different person." Jean Wagner (Florida) learned a new way to mount. Honnor Hannon (Florida) appreciated the experience of "feeling what the horse feels" in the bridle-wearing exercise.

As the participants learned approaches to touch work, leading positions and ground exercises for developing balance, ground driving, and riding techniques, their confidence increased. In the final hour of the clinic all summarized with a word or phrase a change in themselves. Some of the descriptions were:

- New eyes
- New body, new hopes, new confidence
- More trust in my intuition
- There are no wrong ways, only better ways.
- I have 23 new friends.
- Happiness, laughter
- A whole lot of fun
- I'm more open
- What I don't know isn't so threatening now.
- A new sense of reality.
- A new animal spirit.
- Horses are vehicles of awareness about ourselves and beyond.
- Expanded feeling of presence.
- The best teachers teach by osmosis.
- I've never had an experience like this-enjoyment.

- Breathing and balance lead to free movement.
- I'm looking forward to spending time with my horse.
- My light is a little brighter and my confidence is too.
- Precision, directness, clarity.
- It is amazing how horses reflect us, how we also need to balance - mentally, emotionally and physically. This balance opens so many doors.

And the horses in the clinic changed too. Freckles showed the most dramatic change. This seven year old Appaloosa mare, threatened with elimination from the Woodlands program because she frightened people when they tried to get her out of her stall, and during grooming, is a different horse. Norman Veamoi says she is a regular in the trail program now. Freckles is very calm and reliable and she will be in the summer children's camp.

Jeremiah the donkey drives well now and will also be in the summer camp. Love is going beautifully in the Lindell that the clinic participants donated to the therapeutic riding program - no more charging through the bit. Norman and Erika are enthusiastic about TTEAM work. They are looking forward to hosting the TTEAM riding clinic at Woodlands in the autumn.

I come away from every clinic with deeper understanding and more effective use of tools. My beliefs are challenged and I recognize there are many more valid approaches than I ever imagined. These changes affect my life and my work.



PHOTO: In preparation for ground driving a body rope was used around Freckles. The driving line is brought around the chest, crossed at the wither and then taken around the hindquarters on top of the tail. The handler at the withers can give him a signal to come forward from the hindquarters and to stop a signal from the chest. This will help him get a better sense of his body, lessens fear of things from behind and helps accustom him to the driving lines.