

THE DOG NEXT DOOR

By Jimmy Stewart

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32. NIV

When I was about thirteen years old, back home in Indiana, Pennsylvania, I had a dog named Bounce. He was just a street dog of indeterminate parentage who had followed me home from school one day. Kind of Airedaleish but of an orange color, Bounce became my close companion. He'd frolic alongside me when I'd go into the woods to hunt arrowheads and snore at my feet when I'd build a model airplane. I loved that dog.

Late one summer I had been away to a Boy Scout camp at Two Lick Creek, and when I got home Bounce wasn't there to greet me. When I asked Mother about him, she gently took me inside. "I'm so sorry, Jim, but Bounce is gone."

"Did he run away?"

"No, son, he's dead."

I couldn't believe it. "What happened?" I choked.

"He was killed."

"How?"

Mom looked over to my father. He cleared his throat. "Well,



Jim," he said, "Bogy broke his chain, came over, and killed Bounce."

I was aghast. Bogy was the next-door neighbors' English bulldog. Normally he was linked by a chain to a wire that stretched about 100 feet across their backyard.

I was grief-stricken and angry. I stepped out to look at the bulldog, hoping to see at least a gash in its speckled hide. But no, there on a heavier chain stood the barrel-chested villain. Every

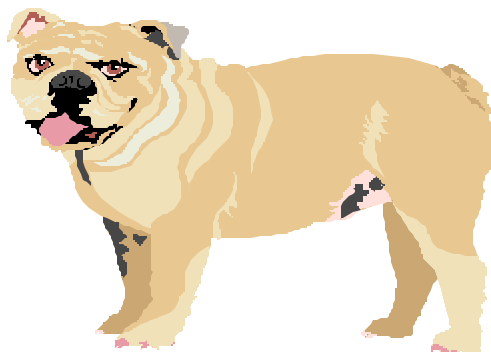
time I saw poor Bounce's empty house, his forlorn blanket, his food dish, I seethed with hatred for the animal that had taken my best friend.

Finally one morning I reached into my closet and pulled out the Remington .22 rifle Dad had given me the past Christmas. I stepped out into our backyard and climbed up into the apple tree. Perched in its upper limbs, I could see the bulldog as he traipsed up and down the length of his wire. With the rifle I followed him

in the sights. But every time I got a bead on him, tree foliage got in the way.

Suddenly a gasp sounded from below. "Jim, what are you doing up there?"

Mom didn't wait for an answer. Our screen door slammed and I could tell she was on the phone with my father at his hardware



store. In a few minutes our Ford chattered into the driveway. Dad climbed out and came over to the apple tree.

"C'mon down, Jim," he said gently. Reluctantly, I put the safety on and let myself down onto the summer-seared grass.

The next morning, Dad, who knew me better than I knew myself, said, "Jim, after you finish school today, I want you to come to the store."

That afternoon I trudged downtown to Dad's hardware store, figuring he wanted the windows washed or something. He stepped out from behind the counter and led me back to the stockroom. We edged past kegs of nails, coils of garden hose and rolls of screen wire over to a corner. There squatted my hated nemesis, Bogy, tied to a post.

"Now here's the bulldog," Dad said. "This is the easy way to kill him if you still feel that way." He handed me a short-barreled .22-caliber rifle. I glanced at him questioningly. He nodded.

I took the gun, lifted it to my shoulder and sighted down the black barrel. Bogy, brown eyes regarding me, panted happily, pink tongue peeking from tusked jaws. As I began to squeeze the trigger, a thousand thoughts flashed through my mind while Dad stood silently by. But my mind wasn't silent; all of Dad's teaching about our responsibility to defense-

less creatures, fair play, right and wrong, welled within me. I thought of Mom loving me after I broke her favorite china serving bowl. There were other voices—our preacher leading us in prayer, asking God to forgive us as we forgave others.

Suddenly the rifle weighed a ton and the sight wavered in my vision. I lowered it and looked up at Dad helplessly. A quiet smile crossed his face and he clasped my shoulder. "I know, son," he said gently. I realized then: He had never expected me to pull that trigger. In his wise, deep way he let me face my decision on my own. I never did learn how Dad managed to arrange Bogy's presence that afternoon, but I know he had trusted me to make the right choice.

A tremendous relief overwhelmed me as I put down the gun. I knelt down with Dad and helped untie Bogy, who wriggled against us happily, his stub tail wiggling furiously.

That night I slept well for the first time in days. The next morning as I leaped down the back steps, I saw Bogy next door and stopped. Dad ruffled my hair. "Seems you've forgiven him, son."

I raced off to school. Forgiveness, I found, could be exhilarating.

Courtesy of: Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul
Health Communications
Deerfield Beach, FL 33442-8190



AN EXPERIMENT IN LOVE

By Jo Coudert

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40. NIV



The dog discovered them—four newborn kittens abandoned in tall grass beside the road. When I returned from my walk carrying the tiny creatures in the palm of my hand, my husband, Mike, said firmly, "No more animals." Mike had already been saddled with my dog and three cats, and wasn't used to a houseful of pets.

"I won't keep them," I promised. "Just till they're old enough to be on their own." Mike looked dubious. "Word of honor," I assured him, never dreaming how much I'd come to regret the easily uttered words.

I made a warm nest for the babies by ripping up an old blue blanket and lining a wicker basket with it. Then I set out for the general store in the village to get advice about feeding them. "You can't raise kittens that young," the storekeeper told me. But he sold me a set of toy nursing bottles and I went home to try. I warmed milk, and after we all got the hang of it, the infants drank avidly.

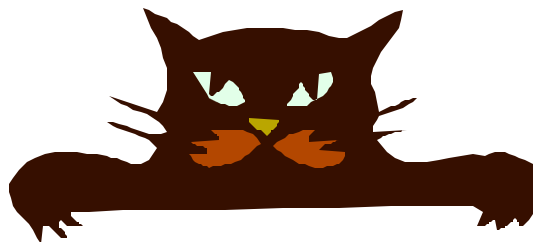
Two hours later they woke and set up an insistent chorus of soft little screams to be fed again. And every two hours after that. Four times in the night, I crawled out of bed to warm their milk, and in the morning I congratulated myself that

they were looking just a little bit stronger, a little bit bigger.

Mike, reporting on their progress to his co-workers, came home one evening with word

that his secretary had offered to adopt Peaches, my favorite because of her lovely soft coloring. Now that she soon would be leaving, I found myself picking up Peaches less often. Idly I wondered if no longer being treated as special would affect her personality. Then the thought turned itself around. Suppose I were to give one of the other kittens extra amounts of mothering? Would he grow up to be any different than his siblings? I thought it might be an interesting experiment.

I continued to love all the kittens, but I chose the most unpromising of the kittens as my subject. This was the little black one Mike had named Bat Cat because he was so homely, with his dull fur, squashed porcupine face and little folded flaps of skin for ears. The runt of the litter, Bat Cat was always on the bottom of the kitten heap, the last to be picked up, the last to be fed, and so the one



who got the least attention. I gave the tiny creature a new name—Boston, short for Boston Blackie—and I repeated it over and over while I held him for his bottle. He would drink until, blissfully full, he fell asleep. Then I tucked him into my sweater so that he slept against my beating heart while I worked at my desk. When he woke, I snuffled his small body with my warm breath and talked to him before putting him



back in the basket to play with his siblings.

The effect on the kitten was immediate. His newly opened eyes, vague and unfocused like his siblings, became alert, and he studied my face with interest. Quickly he learned his name and, when I spoke it, he clambered over the folds of the blue blanket as fast as his unsteady little legs could carry him to come to me. Now when he was in the sleeping heap of kittens, he no longer passively accepted the bottom spot; sweetly but determinedly he wriggled out from under and nested himself on top. Was it that, sensing himself valued, Boston began to value himself?

He was the first of the kittens to discover he could purr, the first to make endearingly clumsy attempts to wash himself, the first to undertake the adventure of climbing out of the wicker basket. When the others, exhausted from their tumbling play, fell asleep, he would climb over the side of the basket and search for me. When he found me, he struggled to sit up on his haunches and held out his front paws in a plea to be picked up. Unable to resist, I lifted the tiny body gently, turned him on his back, and nuzzled the star-shaped sprinkling of white hairs on his tummy. After a moment his small paws came up to pat my cheeks and bright eyes searched mine as he listened to the words I murmured.

It is said that when a child is born into this world, the first years of his life are taken up with finding answers to the most basic of questions: Is it a good and benign world? Can the people in it be trusted? Am I loved? If a little kitten can also be curious about such things, then the special love given Boston answered all those ques-

tions with a resounding "Yes!"

Even Boston's looks changed. His fur, once rusty and rough, grew sleek and shiny. At first, the luster was just on his head, but gradually the glossiness moved down his entire body until little Boston gleamed from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail. Though never beautiful, he became so alert and merry, so trusting and affectionate, that the mere sight of him was a delight.

Obviously my experiment in love was an unqualified success. Except for one thing. In the giving and getting of so much love, I had come to adore Boston.

I hoped that Mike would be captured by Boston's charm, too. And while he agreed that the extra attention given Boston had produced a fascinating effect, Mike's interest was mainly academic.

As he grew, Boston became ever more responsive. I never walked in a room without his volunteering a hello. I never said, "How are you, little Boss?" that he did not answer.

After dinner, Boston liked to sit on my shoulder and watch the soap bubbles pop while I washed the dishes. He was in his usual spot one evening when Mike walked in and heard us "talking."

"You're going to miss him when he goes," Mike said.

I wheeled from the sink. "Oh, Mike..."

Mike looked steadily back. I saw from his ex-



pression that this was a test between us. Would I keep my word to him or did I value a little black kitten more than his wishes? During our relationship, Mike and I had had our troubles learning to trust. I couldn't jeopardize the confidence I had struggled so to gain.

"Yes," I said as evenly as I could. "Yes, I am going to miss him."

Soon all but Boston went to new homes. When Mike came home with word of a church fair that was requesting kittens be donated for sale at a pet table, it was obvious that these were to be my last days with Boston. Now when I cradled him in my arms, it was often tears on my cheeks that he patted. "Oh, little Boss, it's going to be so empty without you," I would tell him, and his eyes would narrow with the effort to understand my distress.

Mike called at noon the day Boston was to go to the fair to remind me that a description of his age, sex, and food preferences was to go with him. "I've already typed it up," I said. Mike asked me to read it to him. I had included this final note: "Boston has been hand raised with an unusual amount of loving attention, which has made him extraordinarily intelligent and responsive. He is gentle, wise, perfectly be-

haved, loves all games, likes to ride in the car, has a large vocabulary and is a devoted companion. Please treat him with the great affection he will give you."

Mike was silent for a moment. "You've made him sound like an exceptional creature," he said.

"He is," I said and hung up.

I was in the kitchen getting dinner that night when Mike came home. Boston went to the door to greet him but I couldn't; I was fighting too hard not to cry. It was a long time before Mike joined me. When he did, he was carrying Boston, who had a big red ribbon tied around his neck. Silently, Mike held out an envelope. Inside was a Christmas card and written on it was: "It's only November, but let's give ourselves a Christmas present."

I reached out to hug Mike through my tears.

"If you can be big enough to let him go," he said, "I can be big enough to let him stay."

Courtesy of: Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul
Health Communications
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THE CASE OF MY FAVORITE BOOK

Creating a reading class skit

The act of drama in the classroom provides a stage where all can shine, even the weakest reader. Encourage the students to memorize their lines. Guide them in using their voices to create the courtroom atmosphere.

The following play can provide lots of fun and at the same time great reading motivation. Months later the students will be heard arguing "The Case of My Favorite Book."

It can be presented at chapel, Parent-Teacher Meeting, and Reading Class. The entire class should participate. The teacher may adapt the character names to those of the participants and the grade level to the one performing. The names of the books read may also be substituted by books being read in the classroom.

Characters: Court Clerk
Judge Malloy
Lawyers
Defendants
Narrator
Jurors
Several people as observers in the audience

Narrator: The children of Grade 5 wanted to share their love for books with the whole school, so during Book Week they sent out their message by way of: "The Case of the Favorite Book." The place is an imaginary courtroom. The characters include Judge Booker, jurors, lawyers, defendants, and a court clerk. I am your narrator.

THE SCENE OPENS WITH THE JURORS, LAWYERS, AND DEFENDANTS COMING INTO THE COURTROOM AND TAKING THEIR PLACES.

AFTER ALL THE JURORS, LAWYERS, AND DEFENDANTS ARE SEATED, THE COURT CLERK USHERS IN THE JUDGE.

Court Clerk: All rise! Hear ye! Hear ye! This court will come to order. Today we will hear the case of Grade 5 East End School. Judge Malloy presiding. Here comes the judge!

JUDGE MALLOY ENTERS, SITS, AND ASKS THE PEOPLE TO SIT AND THEN ADDRESSES THE COURT.

Judge: Good morning! Today we are about to try a most serious book case.

Lawyer 4: I object, your honor!

Judge: To what? I haven't said anything yet!



Lawyer 4: You said we are going to try a “bookcase” your honor. We are not trying a bookcase. We are going to try “books.”

Judge: Objections overruled! We are trying a most serious case that deals with books. Today we will decide which is the best book ever written.

THIS BRINGS SHOUTS FROM ALL OVER THE COURTROOM.

Judge: (angrily) SILENCE! Or I’ll have all of you removed from the courtroom. Now, will the first lawyer proceed!

Lawyer 1: Thank you, your honor. I would like to call my client Jessica to the stand.

Court Clerk: Jessica, do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Defendant 1: I do.

Judge: Proceed.

Lawyer 1: Jessica, will you please tell us what you were doing last night at around eight in the evening?

Defendant 1: I was reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.

Lawyer 1: I see. Can you tell us a little about the plot?

Defendant 1: It’s about a boy who lived a hundred years ago and what happened when he and a runaway slave name Jim traveled down the Mississippi River.

Lawyer 1: Can you tell us a little more about the characters?

Defendant 1: Of course. The important characters are Huck, Jim, and Tom. The three of them met many people in the course of their adventures.

Lawyer 1: Who would you say is the main character?

Defendant 1: No two ways about it. Huck.

Lawyer 1: And how would you describe this Huckleberry Finn?

Defendant 1: Well, he’s not older than I am, and he doesn’t always follow the rules. Just like me!

AT THIS, THE CROWD IN THE COURTROOM GIGGLES AND MAKES COMMENTS.

Judge: Silence please! Or I’ll find you in contempt of court.



Lawyer 1: And now—for the important question—which book do you think is the best book that’s ever been written?

Defendant 1: When I finished *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* last night I said to myself, “This is the best book I’ve ever read; so I guess it’s the best book that’s ever been written.”

THE CROWD IN THE COURTROOM GOES WILD AND BEGINS TO SHOUT DISAGREEMENT.

Judge: Silence! Silence! One more outburst like this and I’ll clear the courtroom. Now I’d like to hear from the next lawyer.

Lawyer 2: Thank you, Judge. I think you’ll find the testimony of Amanda helpful in settling this case.

THE DEFENDANT GOES TO THE STAND.

Court Clerk: Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

Defendant 2: I do.

Judge: Proceed with the questioning.

Lawyer 2: I understand that something very important happened to you last weekend, Amanda.

Defendant 2: Very!

Lawyer 2: Tell us about it.

Defendant 2: I finished reading *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott.

Lawyer 2: I see. And do you feel that this is the best book you’ve ever read?

Lawyer 1: Objection, you honor. The prosecution is now attempting to lead the witness.

Judge: Objection sustained. (To Lawyer 2) Please refrain from leading the witness.

Lawyer 2: I’m sorry, Judge Malloy. (To Defendant 2) Would you please tell us about the plot and setting of *Little Women*?

Defendant 2: It takes place in a small New England town during the time of the Civil War. The main characters are four sisters: Jo, Beth, Amy, and Meg.

Lawyer 2: And what do you think of this book?

Defendant 2: I think it’s an excellent book because it shows some of the problems of growing up. And it’s about making the best of what we have.

Lawyer 2: And last weekend when you finished reading the book, do you remember what you felt?



Defendant 2: Yes. I was sure that *Little Women* is the best book that's ever been written.

Judge: Thank you, Amanda. Your testimony has been most helpful. But we have many other witnesses to hear from.

THE 3RD DEFENDANT GOES TO THE STAND, IS SWORN IN BY THE COURT CLERK, AND IS ADDRESSED BY HER LAWYER.

Lawyer 3: Could you please tell the court why you've been brought here.

Defendant 3: For reading a history book.

Judge: A history book! What history book? Do I know the book?

Defendant 3: I don't know, your honor, but the name is *Great Negroes Past and Present*, and that is the best book in the whole world. Russell Adams made it seem so alive.

Lawyer 3: Russell Adams? Was he a character in the book?

Defendant 3: Oh no! He wrote the book. He told about such African-Americans as George Washington Carver, the savior of Southern Agriculture; Martin Luther King, Jr., Civil Rights Crusader; Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks, great writers of poetry; and Booker T. Washington, the great educator. Their lives can be such an inspiration to all of us. That's why I know my book is the best book ever!

Judge: Thank you Michael. That was very interesting. But we must hear more testimony. Could we have the next witness please?

Lawyer 4: Thank you, your honor. I call Joshua to the stand.

JOSHUA COMES TO THE STAND AND AFTER BEING SWORN IN, IS ADDRESSED BY THE LAWYER.

Lawyer 4: Joshua, you have a better book than those we've heard of today.

Lawyer 1: Objection! Your honor, my legal colleague here is putting words into the witness's mouth.

Judge: (Sternly) Sustained! Please rephrase your question.

Lawyer 4: (Apologetically) My apologies, your honor. I will. Joshua, do you have a book that you feel is better than those you heard about today?

Defendant 4: I most certainly do! My book, *Outer Space*, edited by Philip Clark and friends, is the most wonderful book ever written. It tells about the moon, space, rockets, astronauts.

Lawyer 4: How does that make it the best book?

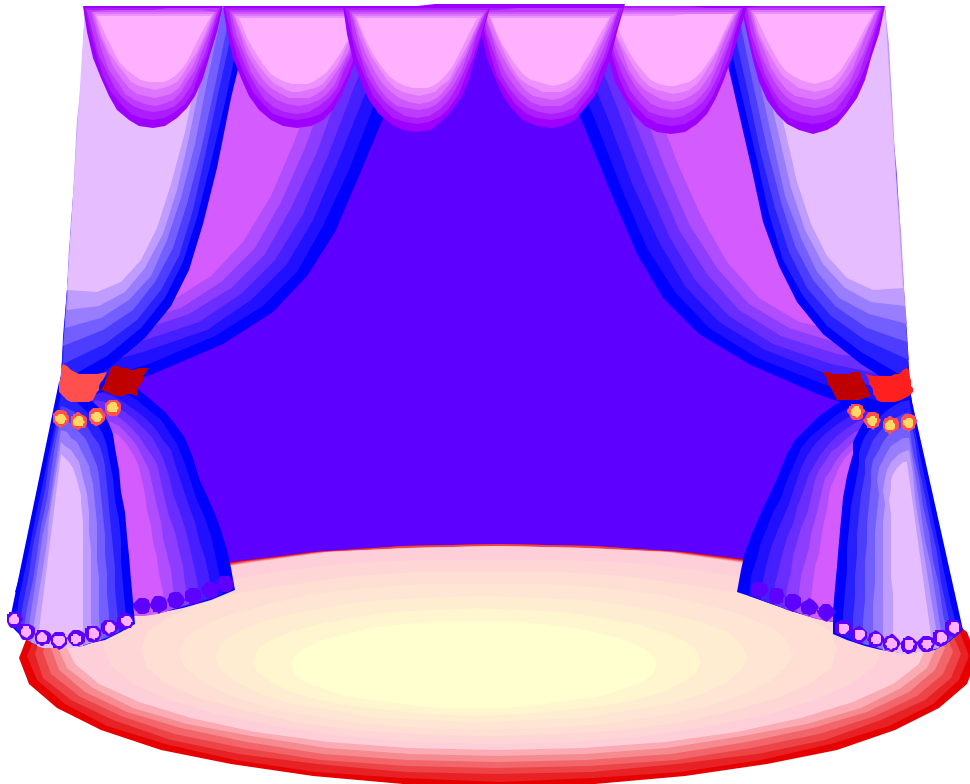


Defendant 4: You see, when I grow up, I want to be an astronaut, explore space, maybe even walk on the moon. My book is telling me about a lot of things that will help me. For me, it is really the best book in the whole world.

Judge: We have heard the testimony. The jury must now make its decision. And jury, I charge you to decide which of the defendants is correct, which book you heard about today is the best book ever written.

THE SKIT ENDS WITH THE JURY LEAVING AND SHAKING THEIR HEADS NOT KNOWING WHICH BOOK IS REALLY THE BEST BOOK EVER WRITTEN.

Narrator: There are many wonderful books to read. Each person may find a different type of book to be the “best.” But remember, in order to enjoy books, you must first read them.



THE LANGUAGE OF HORSES

By Monty Roberts

But wisdom is proven right by her actions. Matthew 11:19 (last part) NIV.

My father, a traditional horseman, was a tough authoritarian. He used intimidation and brutality to “break” horses to his will. Unfortunately, he used the same methods on me. At eight years old, after witnessing a particularly vicious example of my father’s methods, I vowed that my life would be different. I would use communication, not violence, to

enlist the cooperation of the horses I trained. I was sure that horses had a language, and if I could speak that language, I could train horses in a new and entirely different way. So it was at the age of eight that I set my life goal for myself—to be able to communicate fluently with horses.

My father thought this idea was nonsense, so I had to pursue my goal without his help. My mother supported me, but secretly, for she also feared my father’s anger. We lived on a horse facility in Salinas, California, at the time, and I spent every waking hour trying to communicate with the untamed domestic horses on the facility.

The summer I was thirteen, I went to Nevada for three weeks for a job. I had been hired to capture wild mustangs. This was the first opportunity I’d had to work with totally wild horses. Determined to make the best use of my time, I rose early each day and rode a long way into

the desert, where I used binoculars to study the habits of the mustang herds that lived there.

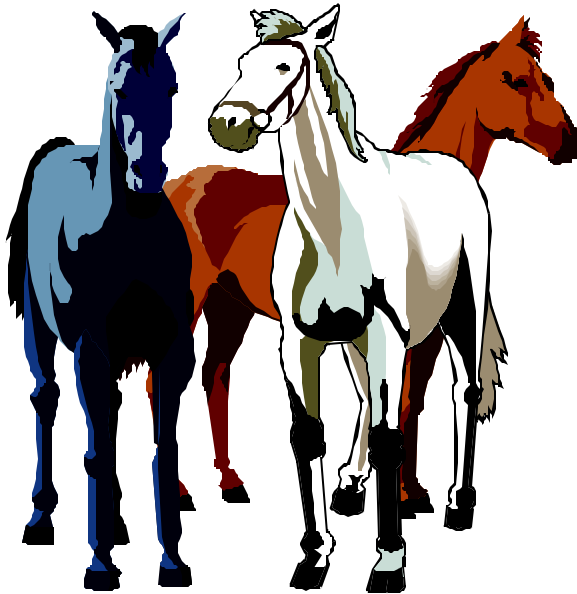
I was utterly spellbound by these horses. I would sit for hours and hours, watching those beautiful animals as they ran, grazed, and played in the wide spaces of the desert.

What astonished me most was how the wild horses communicated with each other. They rarely used sounds; instead, they used a complex language of motion. The position of their bodies, and the speed and

direction of their travel were the key elements of their language. And by varying the degree of rigidity or relaxation in the eyes, ears, neck, head, and position of the spine, a horse could signal anything it needed to communicate.

As I watched, I thought: *Could I convince a wild horse to let me get close enough to touch him without him running away?*

For easy spotting, I picked a horse with unique markings, and tried to herd him away from the others. For many days I tried every way I could think of to get near him, but he always sensed me and he was off before I was even close. One day, I got lucky and came up behind him in a small canyon. At last, I had his full attention. Then, using only my body to convey the signals I’d seen the horses use with each other, I persuaded the wary stallion to stand still. He watched me silently as I moved closer and closer. He was watchful, but he wasn’t afraid. Not breathing, I took the step that brought me



within an arm's reach of him. I avoided his eyes as I stretched my hand toward him and laid it softly on his neck. It lasted only a few seconds, but it was enough. I watched him gallop away, my chest exploding with joy. I had communicated with a horse!

When I returned home, I was bursting with excitement and told my mother what had happened in the desert with the mustang. While I could see that she was happy for me, all she said was that I must never speak of it to my father or anyone else, or I would get in trouble. I felt let down, but I knew she was right. My desire to learn to communicate with horses became a deep inner passion that I fiercely hid from the rest of the world.

Unable to share what was most important to me with anyone, I was almost always alone, except for the horses. The only thing that mattered to me was my life's dream.

Every summer, I returned to Nevada for three weeks to work, continuing my research in the desert. Four years later, when I was seventeen, I progressed so far that I not only touched a wild mustang, I saddled, bridled, and rode one without once using any pain or intimidation to do so. Proudly, I rode the wild horse back to the ranch. The ranch hands who saw me ride in called me a liar when I told them what I'd done. They ridiculed me and insisted the horse I rode must once have been a domesticated

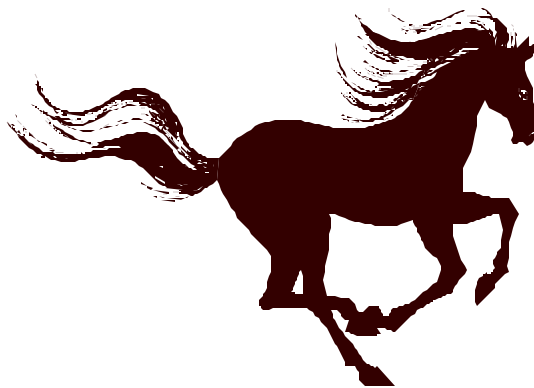


horse who had run away and ended up with the mustangs. Deeply hurt, I realized the futility of my dreams. With no one to believe in me, it was my spirit that was broken.

I eventually got over the pain of that devastating humiliation and decided to continue my training methods, but I vowed I would never again tell anyone what I did.

And so I became a horse trainer. I used my experiences with every horse I worked with to learn more and more about the language of horses. It was a slow but satisfying education.

Once, when I was about twenty-five, a family hired me to tackle the problem of their mare, My Blue Heaven. She was a beautiful horse, intelligent and extremely talented. But during her training, a previous owner had inadvertently mishandled her and she had developed a serious problem: She wouldn't stop. She would blast away like a rocket and refuse to be halted—crashing through fences, and slipping and sliding as she made dangerously sharp turns. She was diabolically treacherous. A short time earlier, the mare had almost killed the present owner's daughter. The family was going on vacation and they asked me to sell the horse for them for whatever I could get for her. They had heard I was good with difficult horses and they knew in order to sell her, someone would have to be able to bring her to a stop from a run. No one else was willing to try.



She was the most dangerous horse I had ever seen, but I used everything I had absorbed over the years to help her. Moving slowly and keeping my communication with her to just the basics, I



earned her trust. Building on that trust, I continued to communicate with her, and soon she melted. Our progress was swift and remarkable from that point on. It had seemed impossible, but within a few days, she was transformed.

While the owners were still away, I showed her in a competition and she took first place. I brought her prize, a very expensive saddle, to the home of the family who still owned her. I wrote them a note, explaining that she had improved enough to win this saddle and under the circumstances, I felt that they should reconsider selling her. I pinned the note to the saddle and left it in the dining room for them to find upon their return.

They were ecstatic about the change in My Blue Heaven and were thrilled to be able to keep her. My Blue Heaven went on to become a world-class champion. And her owners found in her a new willingness and sweet temper that made her presence in their family even more precious than her show value.

My Blue Heaven was one of my first public triumphs. But this same story repeated itself over and over during the next thirty years. Hopeless cases were referred to me, and using the simple tools of gentleness, respect, and communication, I managed to turn them around.

By then, it was hard to keep my work secret. Even though I still met with some skepticism

and scorn, I found many more who were open to, and enthusiastic about, what I was doing.

I was particularly well received in England. In fact, in 1989, I was astounded to find myself, the son of an American horse trainer, being presented to Her Royal Majesty, Elizabeth II, queen of England. It had been a long and often painful road from the high deserts of Nevada to the splendor of Windsor Castle.



That was the turning point of my career. The queen then endorsed my methods and provided me with her private car to tour England and demonstrate my techniques all over the country. Today, it is even possible to study my methods of horse training at West Oxfordshire College in England.

I have achieved what I set out to do when I was a boy of eight. But I feel that I am just a scout, marking the trail for all who will follow me. I watch the young people who are studying my work, and I know they will carry it forward to achieve communication with horses I can't even begin to imagine.

In a certain way, I have my father to thank for setting my life on this course. Out of his work with horses, my passion for them began. And from his violence, my dream was born—that all horses be spared the needless pain and suffering of being “broken.”

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