

A STAR REBORN – SERIES III WHOLISTIC NATURAL HORSEMANSHIP

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The change in Star was amazing after his chiropractic adjustment! His eyes softened along with his countenance and attitude. I had not realized he'd been subtly trying to tell me he was in pain. For instance, after his chiropractic adjustment he stood quietly for saddling with no fuss or fidgeting. I thought the fussing was a training issue for which I continually corrected him, but all the fidgeting and fuss went away along with the raised head and hollowed back after the adjustment. Star was ready for the next step to carrying me as a rider.

Every time I ride any horse, even my “been there done that” school horses, I run each horse through Frank Bell's 7 Step Safety System. This re-establishes my leadership and flushes out any issues I want to address on the ground before I get in the saddle. Star had been learning Frank's steps all along with his ground training and now it was time to teach him the 7th step in the saddle. I tossed the lead rope over his neck and converted it to reins through the shank of the halter. ^{NHTP#16} I then flexed his head on his near side with my left hand drawing his nose towards the girth resting my hand on the saddle. I held the rein until he nodded his nose and softened and I instantly released. Star had to understand the difference in the feel from lead rope to reins on both his near and off sides. ^{NHT#16}

Typically it only takes about 5 minutes to run a horse through the first 6 steps of Frank's safety system and Star was no exception as I completed each step. Now it was time to mount. From Star's near side I tipped his nose slightly to the left, grabbed rein and mane with my left hand and the cantle with my right and stood up in the stirrup. I held myself there watching for any reaction, but Star was calm and confident with the exception of a step to balance himself. ^{NHT#19} I slowly swung my leg over and gently lowered myself on his back. His eyes widened a bit so I took a deep relaxing breath and stroked his neck. I cooed over him drawing his nose towards the girth (partial one rein stop) while leaning down to rub his forehead. This was a reminder that nose to the girth is the *safe and loving place* we go when we are in trouble. I had established the *safe and loving place* on the ground in the first 6 steps of Frank's system before I mounted ^{NHT#17} and now I'm setting him up for the 7th step in the saddle, the one rein stop.

NH TIP #16 – Always flex your horse on both sides after you convert your lead rope to reins before you mount. It is important for your horse to realize that you are now using reins instead of the lead rope which is a different feel. I do this every time before I ride. To find out how to convert your lead rope to reins visit my website at <http://horsenatural.com/id18.html> where you can download a PDF for detailed instructions or call me at 503-630-3744 and I'll send you a brochure.

NH TIP #17 – Upon mounting it is important to gently pull the horse’s nose towards the girth (*the safe and loving place*) and reach down to love him up. This helps the horse understand you are the same leader in the saddle as you were on the ground. This is the beginning of the one rein stop in the saddle; the emergency handbrake.

After rubbing Star’s head I slowly leaned back holding the rein resting my hand on my hip waiting for him to nod his nose towards his girth and soften before I would release the rein. He wasn’t sure at first what I was asking so he started to disengage his hindquarters moving in a circle. I patiently stroked his neck with my right hand saying “whoa, whoa” in a soothing voice keeping my legs off him, and not releasing his nose: *do not release the nose until the feet have stopped moving* (NH TIP #13 Series II). Soon his feet stopped moving and I waited holding his nose until he nodded and softened. I instantly released the rein saying “Good boy, good boy” while I stroked his neck. I then gently pulled his nose to the right, held the rein with my left hand, reached down with my right hand and loved him up on his forehead reminding him this was the *safe and loving place* on this side too. When I sat back, he instantly nodded his nose and I immediately released the rein praising him for the right answer.

I continued flexing Star in a partial one rein stop (nose towards the girth) from one side to the other as he learned to nod his nose and soften. If Star was going to get silly I needed to be able to shut him down using his emergency handbrake, the one rein stop. Therefore, it was time to add the final step to the one rein stop; disengagement of the hindquarters. I began by flexing Star’s nose towards the girth, then I added heel pressure just behind the girth, as I had done on the ground with my knuckle to move his back feet. Star immediately responded by disengaging his hindquarters (inside hind foot crosses in front of outside hind foot), but he tried to pull his nose out of the flex. I held on to his nose firmly with the rein while releasing all foot pressure and stroked his neck to help him relax. Once he stopped moving his feet I praised him, but held his nose until he softened and nodded then I opened my hand instantly releasing the pressure, “Good boy” I said. At times Star moved his back feet before I asked him so I made it my idea by adding my heel pressure; remember *he who moves the other’s feet first is in control* (NH TIP #1 Series I). Soon Star was flexing and disengaging softly in a relaxed frame of mind and body ^{NHT#18}.

NH TIP #18 - When working with your horse it is not important that you get perfection the first day when teaching something new. What **is** important is to keep your horse engaged in learning without getting frustrated. If you are getting frustrated then **you** need to quit. If your horse is getting frustrated take a step or two back in what you are training and find a starting point that he can be successful at and then end the session. Always end on a good note as described in NH TIP #9 Series I. Once I feel comfortable that the horse understands the basic concept of what I’m teaching I will quickly move on to another learning experience. Often times at the end of a session I will come

back to a prior concept I was teaching and do a little refinement so long as the horse's mood is still willing and he's not feeling overwhelmed.

I now know the emergency handbrake is working for Star, phew.... It's time to move his feet forward under saddle. I squeezed gently with both legs while rotating my pelvis pushing forward with my seat bones in the saddle. Star instantly moved forward; I released my pressure by removing my legs and relaxing my body saying "Good boy". He immediately stopped at the "good boy" so I squeezed again and he instantly moved off the leg pressure. As a high energy Arab Star was going to be fairly easy to teach walk, trot and canter.

Star's forward motion was excellent, but he struggled balancing me at first, even when mounting. It is not natural for horses to carry humans so there is a time of adjustment working out the balance. You have to give your horse time to learn to balance you in each gait. Some horses learn very quickly, but Star struggled for a better part of a week. He sometimes staggered a moment when I mounted shifting his weight to balance me and I'm less than 140 pounds. (I note my weight because I believe it is important to be fair to your horse and ride the appropriate horse to your body weight).

There is a huge difference between a horse that wants to move around when you are mounting and one that has a balancing issue. To help a horse with a balancing problem, before I mount I will position his feet squarely and then I flex his head slightly so the horse can reposition if needed; sometimes a horse will move the outside front leg to adjust his balance, that's ok. Always work on mounting from both sides helping your horse to improve his balance. Remember your horse has two brains *what you train on one side of the horse you must train on the other side* (NH TIP #14 Series II). Mounting and dismounting is the most vulnerable position that we can be in as riders. If your horse moves when mounting and it's not a balancing issue you must fix this immediately for your own safety.^{NHT#19}

NH TIP #19 – Mounting Issues: If your horse is moving around when mounting and you know it is not a balancing issue, you need to rule out pain before you apply any discipline. Sometimes horses are trying to tell us they are in pain when we mount so seek professional help for your horse if you are in doubt. If pain issues have been eliminated you need to make the *right thing easy and the wrong thing uncomfortable* (NH TIP #9 Series I). Here's how: Did you check saddle fit and desensitize with the saddle? If not, check out the saddle fit and always desensitize first to eliminate any saddle issues.^{NHT#20} Using the process of elimination I'm going to breakdown my mounting into steps to flush out the specific action that triggers my horse to move. The first step is to flex his head as if I'm going to mount, but not pick up my foot. If the horse moves I will repeatedly make short jerks on the rein upwards backing him up making the ssshhh sound. I will do this for about 3 seconds, stop and stare at the horse until he drops his head in submission and licks or chews as described in NH TIP #11

Series II. If the horse didn't move his feet I pick up my foot as if to put it in the stirrup. If he tries to move away I make short jerks on the rein in an upward motion and make the ssshhh sound backing him up *making the wrong thing uncomfortable*. After I've disciplined for movement when I picked up my foot I need to desensitize my horse for that. I will march around my horse lifting my knees high using nurturing techniques until he settles down and stops moving. Once I have desensitized my horse to my leg lifts I am ready to try mounting again, but this time my foot will make contact with the stirrup. I have flexed his head, praised him for standing, have rein and mane, praised him for standing, I've lifted my foot, praised him, and have now made contact in the stirrup. If the horse starts moving his feet I immediately release my foot from the stirrup, take the rein that is in my left hand and repeat the short jerking motion upwards while making the ssshhh sound backing him up *making the wrong thing uncomfortable*. I try it again, praising for each benchmark and now toe to the stirrup, but if he moves his feet I immediately repeat making it more uncomfortable by jerking upwards on the rein backing him up further while making the ssshhh sound. You can see a pattern of consistency in my discipline. Typically it only takes a few discipline moments and the horse "gets it", but if not I stick with the consistent discipline and praise for each benchmark. You must remain consistent upping the pressure for each infraction, but don't get mad or frustrated; be patient and giving with praise for the *slightest try and smallest change*; it will work. By now I have my foot in the stirrup and I'm praising my horse and stroking his neck because he is standing quietly. As I begin to stand up in the stirrup I continue to praise him if he's still standing quietly, but if he starts to move I immediately drop out of the stirrup, jerk the rein driving him back making the ssshhh sound. Rarely have I had any further problems once I'm standing in the stirrup; by then the horse has "got it" and found it to be pleasurable standing quietly. Break the problem down into baby steps and praise your horse for doing it right and make it uncomfortable when he does it wrong. If you use a mounting block the same techniques apply, but make sure you have desensitized your horse to the block if it scares him.

NH TIP #20 – Saddle Desensitizing: I include saddle desensitizing every time before I ride. For instance I like to flap the stirrup leather closest to the saddle not hitting the horse and repeat both sides. I start by tipping the horse's head towards me slightly with the lead rope while I stand at a 45 degree angle at his shoulder. I have the lead rope in my hand that is now on his neck to nurture him. I begin by lifting the stirrup and slapping the upper portion against the saddle and saddle pad. If the horse tries to move away I am able to pull on his nose towards me which disengages his hindquarters so he can't run off. I then stroke his neck and nurture him, but continue slapping at a reduced noise level until he stops moving his feet. Once I have a starting point I can increase the slapping noise until it no longer bothers him. I do this on both sides of the horse. Then I will use the end of my lead rope to tap the saddle rhythmically. I repeat holding the lead rope tipping his nose towards me standing at a 45 degree angle at the shoulder in case he gets frightened by the slapping sound against the saddle. This

position gives me safer control if he was to try and get away. You'd be surprised how many horses get spooked by the slapping sound. Repeat as you did with the stirrup finding a starting point if your horse gets frightened and work up to the horse not caring about the slapping. Make sure you do not slap the horse, just the saddle.

Time and patience with Star resolved his balancing issues and soon he was walking, trotting, and cantering athletically carrying me in the saddle. We had our moments of sticky feet, but I simply flexed him, disengaged his hindquarters and bumped his outside shoulder pushing him through a turn on the haunch. It works beautifully every time a horse gets stuck. Soon we were on the trail where he amazed me with his confidence and trust. By our second trail ride it was just the two of us where Star could explore the woods yet listened to my every cue from running up a hill to a complete stop the moment I asked; I was so very proud of him. All this was accomplished using just a halter and lead rope and in less than three months since his arrival.

Star whinnied to everyone as he departed with his owner to head home. A twinkle in his, Star was no longer a jaded angry ex-stallion, but a regal confident partner trusting in the human herd. My throat tightened and tears swelled as I waved goodbye.

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