

L.A. Pomeroy of Massachusetts Horse Magazine interviews Missy Wryn

L.A. Missy, before I start, again BLESS YOU for your 'iron free' approach. I think you are so dead-on in everything that you are doing and the approach you are taking (lol, I will try not to let that bias my journalistic approach). Reading thru your press releases, I do have some specific questions for you, as well as I've shared some of the general questions I have put before other interviewees.

Thank you for sharing your expertise with our readers for our Aug/Sept issue's cover feature on holistic horse care.

L.A.: First, the easy stuff: your full name, medical/professional title(s), where based; how long you have practiced "W" Holistic Natural Horsemanship.

MW:

Current Titles:

Missy Wryn, WNH Trainer

Frank Bell Accredited Instructor

CEO of Natures Balance Care, LLC (manufacturer of natural fly-insect, skin and hoof condition products for the horse and organic livestock industries since 1994)

Based In:

Estacada, Oregon.

1-866-821-0374

I developed "W" Holistic Natural Horsemanship® over the last five years and apply it daily in my training of horses and teaching clients.

Past Titles:

Vice President Administration, Selectron, Inc.

Vice President Administration, Emmert International

CFO/Director of Finance, Parrott Creek Child & Family Services

L.A.: "Wholistic" includes the concepts of physical and emotional health, and the working together of a patient and their family/community, so how important to wholistic horse care is involving the owner/rider, trainer, veterinarian, farrier/trimmer, all together?

MW: It is critical to involve the owner/rider in the process of behavior assessment in the very beginning and then I will involve the vet, farrier and any necessary professionals. Gathering as much history and health information from the owner/rider is my first step when training any horse. For instance, I had a client bring a horse to me for "starting under saddle" training. The owner was a breeder in which this horse was born on their property so they informed me he had no prior medical complications or injuries to report. However, my first session revealed the horse had a very sore head which I observed when reaching affectionately to rub his forehead. His behavior was to pin his ears and wince under my approach. Further assessment revealed he was stiff and sore with a subtle lameness on his right front observed during the free lunge portion of the session. I followed up by applying 5 lbs of pressure with my thumb at various points on his body to confirm his soreness. There was no way I would subject this horse to riding until he had been assessed by my equine veterinarian/chiropractor who visits my facility monthly. I contacted the owners and advised that their horse had a headache along with sore body points

and subtle lameness. The owner apologized for not mentioning this upon arrival that his horse had bumped his head in the trailer when loading. I pressed further since a bump on the head explained the headache, but didn't explain the body issues. He went on to say that he thought the trailer was going to tip over on the way to my place since it was rockin and rollin with their horse in it, but didn't think anything of it. At that moment I realized his horse had fallen down in the trailer on his way here. Upon arrival I noticed the horse was tied off to a window post and was standing facing the back of the trailer. It came to me that the poor horse had been hung by his halter when he fell down and desperately struggling to right himself caused the trailer to nearly tip over. Can you imagine the pressure that horse's head was under while hanging from the halter with his feet out from under him? I offered my idea of what happened in the trailer and advised he would need chiropractic before I could ride him. He definitely needed his poll and atlas examined for the bumping of the head, but the horrific pressure he endured from the halter and the struggle to right himself needed attention. The owner agreed so I scheduled the horse to meet with my equine vet/chiropractor on his next visit which was only a few days later. Dr. DePaolo, my equine vet/chiropractor examined this horse and determined that the poll, atlas, C3, C5, T1, shoulders, elbows, knees, lumbar, sacrum, floating rib, tail, and whorlbone needed adjusting along with an aqua-puncture treatment of B12 in his left hip (aqua-puncture is acupuncture in addition to an injection). After the adjustments the horse's eyes brightened with the relief from the headache and he moved out with vigor now pain free. There are so many other similar stories such as a biter who had a rotten tooth that needed to be pulled and no longer was a biter once his pain was addressed. I had a horse that was seemingly lame in the rear, bucking when riding all because her back shoes had been applied crooked by the owner's farrier. My farrier pointed out the imbalance, pulled the shoes, trimmed the horse correctly and she was no longer lame or bucking. It is vital to consider the source of behavior problems as possible pain issues before arbitrarily "training" the behavior. Tuning in and observing the look in the eye, the gait, the cry for help the horse is expressing and involving the appropriate professionals is absolutely critical to healthy well balanced training.

L.A.: What role does stress play on horse health and behavior?

MW: I recently read a statistic that took by breath away. A statistic that said 80-90% of domestic horses have ulcers. In our humanness we think putting our horses in stalls, away from other horses keeping them safe is in their best interest, but we couldn't be more wrong. Confining a herd animal to a small space away from herd contact is equivalent to locking a human in a phone booth for a day and expecting them to be relaxed about it. Research is finding that stress to human beings is detrimental to our health with all sorts of complications; it isn't any different for our horses. Any vet will tell you that stress can cause colic, ulcers, cribbing, and many neurotic behaviors. I completely understand some folks have a limited choice in caring for their horses, but at least get them in a place that they can get turned out daily or have access to a large enough paddock that allows movement 24/7 with shelter; that much we can provide even in someone else's care. Also consider frequent feeding vs. twice daily. Horse's require their peristalsis action to be stimulated nearly all day as it is when on pasture or in the wild. Fasting 6 – 8 hours a day between meals is very stressful for their bodies weakening their immune system and creating a greater risk of colic and ulcers. I feed four times a day with portions in relation to each horse's particular body size and needs. I used to feed twice a day during my corporate life so I understand how difficult this task can be. If your horse doesn't

have access to pasture, see if the barn manager would be willing to feed at least 3 times a day in smaller portions (ask for 4 times a day and settle for 3 if possible). Most folks want to do the best for their horses and those that are in their care so when you explain the physiology of frequent feeding a barn manager is usually happy to accommodate. It's not about the quantity of the food it is the frequency that matters the most. Plus don't forget to add Probiotics to your horse's feeding program. A healthy gut will assist in relieving stress.

L.A.: Have you seen the alleviation of physical problems lead to improvements in behavior and performance? How so?

MW: Every time in every situation I have witnessed incredible turn around of behavior and increased performance due to the alleviation of pain. That rings true for human beings as well. The story about the biter that had the rotten tooth, well he went to the vet for a follow up check 6 months later and when he came back to my barn he was suddenly in my space, swishing his tail, striking out with his front feet, nipping at me and generally unruly. This was not like him at all since he had his tooth pulled and subsequent chiropractic after the procedure. I talked to the owner and asked if he had been sedated and in a speculum for his exam and she said "oh yes he had a float too". Ahhh, his behavior now made sense. He was telling me his head hurt, his poll and atlas and probably his TMJ needed adjusting. We had to wait 2 weeks before my vet/chiropractor could get here and it was a grueling two weeks with this horse. When I brought him out for his exam he was all over the chiropractor and even caught him in the shin with his hoof being a naughty dangerous pill. Just getting the vet's arms around the horse's head to assess and adjust was a real struggle while the horse kept attempting to bite and rear. The chiropractor found the poll, atlas and TMJ along with C5 and T1 needing adjustment. As the doctor got through the first three adjustments on the head a client who was watching while standing with her horse exclaimed "did you see that?" What she saw was a complete drop in that horse's countenance and level of energy. That horse dropped his head, sighed and licked his lips in relief. The rest of the adjustments were a piece of cake for the doc and the horse was back to his natural state of kind and gentle behavior. He was simply shouting in pain. Another instance of behavior and performance change was a mare brought to me who bucked her owner off for "no reason". Well I'm here to tell you that horses don't buck for "no reason". I have found it is mostly due to pain, and sometimes it is a hole in their training that needs to get plugged. In this case the mare's estrous cycles were prolonged and she was aggressive towards her barn mates - that was a clue. As I went through my process of assessment and fleshing out problems she began to display seizure like behavior when the saddle was just sitting on her back not even cinched. The owner's vet was brought in for an examination and found a granulosis tumor on her right ovary the size of an oblong grapefruit during the pelvic portion of the exam. The mare had been in excruciating pain and was simply shouting with her bucks. She had surgery with an 18" incision on her belly and came back to my barn for recuperation and rehab. After three months I was riding her again in the arena and on the trails. When she left my barn she could be ridden with just a piece of twine around her neck and bareback with a natural collected trot and lope to die for. She was so tuned in to her rider with a sound mind and pain free body.

L.A.: How great a percentage might you estimate that the behavioral and training problems you address in horses come from being at the hands of male handlers?

MW: I get many horses brought to me because the previous trainer tells the owner that the horse is screwed up, worthless and that they should get rid of it. Even a so-called natural horsemanship trainer told a client that very thing which left the owner broken hearted. It took that horse owner six months to finally call me she was so skeptical of NH training. I'm often the last hope before sending the horse to the auction block. I receive frequent phone calls from folks who tell me that their trainer just saddled up, got on and then the horse dumped him. I ask "did the trainer take the time to bond with the horse, or spend any time getting to know your horse before he saddled and rode?", the answer is always no and then the owner has an ah ha moment – their horse isn't a hairy motorcycle and their trainer never took the time to get to know their horse. 99% of the time the horse simply needs dental work, chiropractic, appropriate hoof care, nutrition changes, basic pain addressing, or has ulcers. The 1% is horses with broken hearts. 100% of the time the owner needs guidance on how to be their horse's herd leader. One time a mare came to me because she was charging her owner with gnashing teeth, rearing and striking. The husband pulled me aside when they delivered the horse and said to me "I'm afraid my wife isn't going to come home from the barn one day. I'm worried she's going to get killed". Going through the horse's history I asked the owner if there had been any significant changes in the horse's life. The owner mentioned that after moving her horse to a new barn three weeks later a barn mate died in which her mare seemed sad. That's significant. She went on to say in that very same week the owner found out that her mother had cancer so she flew to Hawaii for two months to care for her dying mother. That was **very** significant. I instantly knew her horse was ticked off for seemingly being abandoned during her time of crisis, losing her barn mate and dealing with a new barn. Now it was a matter of leading the mare through the process of forgiveness while redirecting her behavior to appropriate compliance and respect of the lead mare which was me and the owner. First I had to give this mare consistent leadership that she could trust while bringing back her confidence and trust in the human herd. Once I had the mare understanding that I was her lead mare through compassionate and fair leadership I then taught the owner. The mare and her owner are back to their herd of two running the trails and participating in local shows and events.

L.A.: What makes women different as horse handlers?

MW: History describes women throughout various civilizations and cultures as the nurturers, empathizers, healers and givers of life while managing the home fires and shaping the behaviors of the young. The men are hunting, providing shelter and protection from the outside forces. Sure there are exceptions in the archetypes of men and women, but generally the nature of women is compassionate, empathetic, patient, gentle nurturers who find discomfort with displays of rage and anger and who generally abhor inflicting pain as a learning tool. Horses are typically gentle, kind, quiet creatures finding solace and cooperation with a competent, fair and compassionate leader they can trust who is going to give them the opportunity and time to learn the right answer during training. I see too often trainers who expect the horse to "get it" within a count of three and then will use a stick or whip to force the correct answer. The horse never had a chance to respond correctly and was aggressively corrected if the wrong answer was chosen. Supporting the horse through the choices using a non-forceful approach leads to a greater companionship with deeper respect and trust.

L.A.: I'm curious which 'herd language' you teach - that of the dominant stallion or the alpha mare?

MW: Neither, I teach the second lead mare language. When observing a herd you will notice an alpha mare that only the lowest horse in the herd will consider hanging out with her and typically that's the only one she'll tolerate. There is a second lead mare that displays compassion, patience with great leadership that you will see many of the herd following. She disciplines the young, but usually gives a couple warnings before she presents her two back feet or teeth unlike the alpha mare. This is who we need to be in our herd of two, men and women alike with their horses. Compassionate and fair like the second lead mare.

L.A.: You say that 'women often get mixed signals about being too soft with horses.' Mixed signals from whom?

MW: The mixed signals come from statements made by trainers mocking women or making fun of us because we (women) call our horses precious, lovely, or sweetness expressing terms of endearment. Being mocked and made fun of gives women the impression they are wrong to display their affection and that their horse won't respect them. I had a client once tell me that her barn manager told her not to kiss her horse. I find that style of thinking unenlightened of the basic nature of the horse. Horses nuzzle one another in a herd using their lips as instruments of affection along with sharing breath from nose to nose. I encourage my clients to exchange breath nose to nose with their horse and deepen their companionship by displays of affection. Horses are creatures of comfort shying away from stressful situations, that's why they need their owner/handler as their herd leader. Horses want to be in the comfort zone with their leader who displays affection and caring along with confident leadership within their herd of two.

L.A.: Your Woman to Woman clinics teach how to balance their nature to their horse's nature. How are female and equine natures similar?

MW: I have found horses accelerating in their training when handled with gentleness and respect. Generally a woman's nature is one of compassion, nurturing and overall tenderness. When a horse is afraid of something say the gate at the end of the arena, my nature as a woman wants to support that horse through their fear without using fear or pain to "get over it". I do this by getting off the horse, walking him in hand to the gate allowing him to pull back as I gently nurture by stroking his neck and asking him to come closer. I will approach the gate and allow the horse to back away as I touch the gate all the while letting the horse know verbally and by stroking that he is going to be ok. I will go up again to the horse and stroke his neck, ask for his head down (*where the mind is the body follows*) and then ask to come closer to the gate. I'm supporting him through his fear as I show him the gate is not going to hurt him. I do this on both sides of the horse so he can see the gate and me through each eye (*what you do on one side you have to do on the other*). Say you have a best friend who is claustrophobic and you are standing ready to get on an elevator together. Would you tell your friend "get in there and get over it" shoving your friend in the elevator, pressing the 21<sup>st</sup> floor button and saying "just get over it"? No you wouldn't do that to your friend. You would go in the elevator with her, nurturing and supporting her through her fearful experience. That is what I do with horses that have fear. I take the time to support and nurture them through it. When on a trail ride and your horse balks at

a stump or something mundane, don't listen to the people telling you "just force him through it, get after him, and hit him", would you hit your friend and berate them for their fear, no, so get off your horse and support him through the fear. You will be amazed how a horse's confidence leaps dramatically and the trust in you as their leader deepens. You took the time to acknowledge their fear, respect their feelings and support them getting over it. Gentleness, honor, and respect are natural to most women and horses.

L.A.: How do you avoid running the risk of making sweeping assumptions about female nature?

MW: History and science reveal much about human nature both male and female, but there are always exceptions.

L.A.: Male trainers/clients? Can you help them find their 'softer side?'

MW: I do a lot of "Couples Clinics" where the wife whispers to me "we are really here for my husband. He won't listen to me, but he's the one who needs help". I have found most men are open and interested in being gentle with their horses when they experience the positive results for themselves. I often receive emails from the husbands saying how their horse really enjoys riding with just the halter and lead rope now and heartfelt expressed gratitude for broadening their perspective.

L.A.: Who is Frank Bell and what's so important about his 7 Step Safety System?

MW: After two concussions in one summer from my mare (the results of bolts) I came to the realization that there wasn't any trust between us. I wanted a trusting companionship from her, but I didn't understand or know how to achieve that with this mare. I came from the crank and spank school of riding starting at the age of six and simply didn't understand the needs of my horse. In desperation I began surfing the web and plugged in HorseWhisperer.com thinking I'd get the Robert Redford movie. To my surprise it was Frank Bell's website. I read his testimonials with teary eyes and was moved to buy his DVD "Discover the Horse You Never Knew". I watched his DVD over and over taking notes, running outside and applying his steps, running back in the house, reviewing it again and running back to the barn. My mare changed in attitude and behavior 180 degrees when I applied Frank's 7 Step Safety System. I couldn't believe how deeply bonded we became once I understood her perspective and need for me to be her lead mare. Her behavior all along was out of distrust and my lack of leadership in her life. She didn't need a harsher bit or tie downs, she just needed me to step up as the lead mare that she genetically requires in our herd of two. I wanted to share my discovery with everyone I knew so I pursued my accreditation with Frank which took a year and a half. I attended clinics, seminars and purchased every DVD from just about every natural horsemanship clinician out there. As my abilities expanded and my understanding of horses broadened I found myself taking on dangerous horses that were trying to kill people. Clients were clamoring for my time so I quit my corporate life of 20 years and took a leap into full-time training horses. Frank's 7 Step Safety System is an integral part of my overall program.

L.A.: In the northeast, many 'owners' board their horse, and many don't even handle feeding them or mucking their stalls, so how can the owner who is not living where their horse lives build that partnership and trust so important to achieving effective communication?

MW: Consistent herd leadership and predictable behavior by the owner of the horse is what their horse requires of them. It doesn't matter to your horse who is feeding and cleaning, what they want is a confident herd leader that is compassionate and caring, predictable and fair in their treatment. I think the meanest thing we can do to our horses is not be clear in what we are asking of them. We need to be black and white in our handling and I believe whenever you are around your horse you are training them. If you allow certain behaviors and then get after them for it later, you are to blame that you taught your horse it was ok to do that before. If you now decide that's not ok, then you need to be consistent, never allowing that behavior again, it's too confusing otherwise and you will lose your horse's trust and respect in you as their leader. It's ok if you realize you've made a mistake, change it, your horse will be happier when you continue to grow and improve your leadership skills.

L.A.: Is there anything you would like to add about wholistic care/horsemanship that I have neglected to bring attention to?

MW: How about some tips:

WNH Tip #1: My first session is usually the only opportunity to make a good first impression with the horse, so I take time to bond by rubbing and scratching on the "oh that feels good" places observing and taking mental note of the "don't touch me their" places for future desensitizing sessions. Then I establish my leadership with a "W" Holistic Herd Pen Joining. If I'm working with a dangerous horse the first session will be the Herd Pen Joining, then bonding. Know the horse you are dealing with and maintain safety. "W" Holistic Herd Pen Joining is not round penning, but a method that emulates lead mare behavior without exhausting the horse. There is a place for round penning, but not at a first impression. I have 100% success using my herd pen joining method since any horse instantly recognizes the communication and can do nothing but follow the leader.

WNH Tip #2: Breath. Take deep breaths and ask for your horse's head down to relax him. A high head is a stressed horse. If your horse is escalating in dangerous behavior, stop and get back together with your horse. Go to the bonding place of relaxation. It is ok to back up and regroup. It's not a competition that you must win or your horse won't respect you. If what you are doing is causing a meltdown with your horse, step back and reassess. Find a starting point and take incremental steps supporting your horse through the "new" thing you are trying to teach him.

WNH Tip#3: Tell your horse good boy/good girl when they get the right answer making it very clear they did it right. When they are behaving correctly let them know that's right by verbal support, stroking their neck and a soft countenance. If all they hear from you is what they do wrong they will get discouraged so be supportive and encouraging. Limit your reprimands to

dangerous behavior and never hold a grudge. When a horse is acting up our tendency is to have our feelings hurt and be mad at the horse, but remember you are dealing with a horse so don't let your human feelings cloud your judgment. Recognize the difference between play and disrespect. If a horse is kicking and excited on the lunge line consider, is he kicking at me or is he just getting out his yaw yaws? I encourage getting out the yaw yaws on the lunge line or free lunge before we get down to learning something new that day. If the kick is aimed at me with a feeling of disrespect, I will let the horse know that is not acceptable to the lead mare, but if it's done in play as horses do to one another I'll run him around and chase for fun all the while keeping myself at a safe distance. Let's have fun and enjoy our time together.

*My Motto: Problems are not always training issues*

Thank you! L.A.

LA Pomeroy, Features & Advertising  
Massachusetts Horse magazine  
POB 524  
Goshen MA 01032  
[www.mahorse.com](http://www.mahorse.com)  
DIRECT phone/fax (413) 586 6121  
main office phone (413) 268-3302  
office fax (413) 268 0050