

## Teachings from Molly

By Anne Porteous

**From early childhood, riding Shetland ponies on a beach in Sunderland England,** to riding amongst the 'wildies' in Alberta Canada, Anne has a life-long love and appreciation of horses. Her journey led her to becoming a nurse which expands over 45 years. This career path allowed Anne to gain experience in leadership, education, and facilitation. In more recent years, Anne has been able to combine her passion for nursing with her passion for horses. Committed to being a life-long learner, Anne completed her diploma in Equine Science from the University of Guelph. Anne is certified through the LEAD\* program and has completed her certification with the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association [EAGALA]. Anne is also a certified Erickson Professional Coach.



Equine assisted learning allows us to uncover parts of themselves they may not have had access to in the past—whether due to trauma or a diagnosed mental illness. By interacting with these loving and calm animals we can effectively address the person's treatment plan or learning goals, helping with issues such as addiction, domestic abuse, behavioral disorders, depression, anxiety and trauma.

Because horses are highly sensitive, people can work through their life struggles by interacting with the horses without feeling judgment or interpretation by another person.

In equine assisted learning, there is a focus on wellness taking a holistic approach to improvement in physical, social, emotional or cognitive functioning. As prey animals, horses are tuned to their environment and must be able to respond in an instant to changes and inconsistencies in order to stay alive. Their ability to scan humans and find our inconsistencies and growing edges is truly amazing.

Adele and I had worked together for a while. She struggled with confidence, finding her voice, and developing healthy boundaries. She was very creative and a visual learner. She used props available in my arena to create her “oasis” and during our sessions if anxiety rose, she was able to visit her oasis to help calm herself.



This particular day Adele arrived visibly distraught. She spoke to me about “issues” she was having with a person in her life. Adele decided to set up a course that would represent her experience with this individual incorporating pylons of various sizes. The small pylons represented her attempts to communicate and her attempts to “make things better”. She then placed two very large pylons, one representing her, the other pylon this “nasty” person. Her pylon had the red stuffed horse {seen in the picture above} which Adele chose because “red is the color of love, and I love horses”. While Adele was telling me about her creation, one of my horses, Molly walked over slowly and proceeded to knock over all the pylons with the exception of the one large pylon representing the nasty person. Unusual behavior for Molly. I asked Adele “what’s going on here?” She replied Molly just “trashed my course”. I asked Adele, why Molly might have done this. “Because Molly knows it’s not the way I feel; I’m really quite afraid of this person”. I invited Adele to create how she really felt which resulted in one large pylon [individual] and one small pylon [Adele]. With the truth now exposed, Adele and I were able to explore boundaries, body language, and how to be assertive without aggression.

Horses mirror our energy patterns and blind spots; behaviours that can stop us from moving forward in life or from moving into our own authentic self. Horses show us that to be effective in our daily lives, we must un-mask any internal frustrations and conflicts that may be preventing us from moving forward. What better way to examine how you think?

Adele was able to connect with Molly and participate in various on the ground [no riding] exercises learning how to establish her boundaries. Interestingly boundaries are shown in the oasis picture as the pool noodles/tube encircling the brightly colored sheet. According to Adele, she left “feeling empowered, gained confidence and self worth.”



Anne Porteous, owner of Sierra Acres Equine Assisted Learning Program can be contacted on Facebook, or [anneporteous@sympatico.ca](mailto:anneporteous@sympatico.ca) For more information about services go to [www.sierracres.ca](http://www.sierracres.ca)