

A View from the Hoof

An Artificial World, *the etiology of the human aspect*

By

Kerry Mark Thomas EE

Founder of Thomas Herding Technique

I love horses, I really do. I respect and appreciate them, and their place in the history of mankind. Very often love of the horse is never an issue, and if someone told you that anything other than a caring, nurturing spirit erupted from out of that love, there is a good chance you wouldn't believe them. Yet the relationship between man and horse throughout history has been one heck of a roller-coaster ride, mainly for the equine. The love hate relationship that can be found in nearly any cohesive unit can most certainly be located here. Any true study of diseases must be comprehensive in its approach; embracing both the emotional and the physical. It could be easily stated that a major cause of physical disease for the horse is stress, for stress cloaks itself in a variety of ways. The puppet of emotional stress is physical stress, and if we climb a few more ladder rungs, we see that the environment is often the dictator of this. In an artificial environment, (an environment created outside the natural realm), we are the moderators; the designer of the environ must then be governor of the species housed within its borders.

The human aspect is truly, in spite of our efforts, predatory in nature. If not for consumption, then for gain do we expend that which we feel is vital. This is not necessarily an evil part of being human; it is simply a part of the drive forward, the essence of our own evolution. We stretch boundaries, push limits, both within and without, create devices to assist us, or make use of things that are there to push the things that also happen to be there too, out of our way. The horse in all his glory was a key for the impact of man on the world around him. I can only describe this combination as the collision of one species traveling at a certain point on their evolutionary path, with that of another. In such cases there is unavoidable fallout, in this instance, the fallout being a serious environmental rearrangement for the horse. The horse was the right tool at the right time, with the nearly perfect capacities to be of great use to the human endeavor. Some of us see the beauty and the magic of the animal and work to appreciate it, some see the animal as an agent to get as much gain from as can be gotten; both can be seen as a form of predation. If you have known a horse who is afraid of the human, that horse has every right to be, for no matter your intentions, the animal has been swept away from its instinctive world and landed within one foreign. This can be sited as the very root of many equine disorders that are only evident down the line. Indirectly or directly, the white man of purest intention, delivered

disease to the American Indian; the horse as a species was not placed upon the earth to be used by the human *without regard*.

Etiology is a term that means literally, *the science dealing with the cause of disease*. If we think of it this way and consider the plethora of equine diseases, the human being has to be considered at the top of the list of at least some of these causes. Laminitis, colic, behavior issues, and many more such maladies, are too often the gift of the human artificial environment. I truly believe that no research into the cause of disease can be comprehensive until and unless, dare I say, the emotional; indeed, behavior element of the horse is amended to the study. There are two halves to the horse that are of equal importance, the physical species and the life force that makes it go, giving the horse its presence. If we summarily agree that each horse has a *personality* of sorts, we must then agree on there being two parts of the horse. Continued research into horrors like laminitis, and colic to name but two, are vital and must continue of course. But I feel that by only addressing the machine, the physical, we are indeed affecting only part of the equation. The puzzle is bigger than that, and the horse is not simply an operating piece of machinery or robot. Tactical psychotherapy behavior and stress techniques based on the individual patient, should surely be implemented. When we go to the doctor, do we like being treated like just another patient, or do we like to feel we are the only one; allowed to share our anecdotes and personal issues? We always feel better about things when our *emotional well being* is considered. We speak of quality of life for our loved-ones, why should we not be as considerate of our horses? With Thomas Herding Technique, my goals are just that for the horse; case specific development of techniques for the emotional well being and foundation building blocks of the horse.

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An owner's manual was never written for the horse by the horse, for if it were, it might start by asserting the necessity of a true study of the *Equus caballus* world as performed within Natures Theater. Is it enough to have beautiful trappings, a spacious and well manicured stable, saddles of the highest degree, and let's not forget how wonderful we look in our fashionable personal accouterments; our horse looks so dashing all spiffy and shining. This playful sarcasm is directed to a point; supplementing the environment to suite ourselves is perfectly fine of course, so long as we do not forget to supplement the artificial environment for the horse. Dress them as you wish, train them as you desire, groom them sheik, you can never cover over the basic foundation of the herding animal. If there is something wrong with the picture, the buck has to stop with us. We have taken the horse out of the environment it was intended and created for, indeed groomed by nature to live in, and placed this herd, this roaming animal, equipped for grazing and social living, into *our* world. The responsible caregiver then has the burden to fully understand the environment the animal was taken from, and re-create it. The first issue we have to deal with is the clash between the human's hurry-up-offense style of living and the equine's relatively slow, organic and socially ordered pace. Considering this our feeding style can be a dangerous offense; if for example, we take into account the feral horse diet compared to that of the domesticated horse. We cannot imitate the wild rations and tolerance levels of the wild horse,

an animal in rhythm with the environment and seasons of change in forage NSC levels that squarely coincide with breeding and foaling seasons. Simply put, nature fits the bill of necessity, a communicated dance of existence where fulfillment is provided for need. Our domesticated horses do not get the same paced exercise as the wild horse, nor is he/she faced with the same stresses. Though the way in which the horse deals with stress is a built-in basic instinct designed to handle nature's demands. Thrown into an artificial world, different kinds of stresses are present, with the same ways in which to deal with them in place. Etiological study must start here. The horse is a reactionary species where the human is an effectual one; we are generally the cause of, and not the effect from, making our comprehensive understanding of the opposite hard to grasp at times. The convergence brings forth many evils from the equine perspective, making the number one cause of disease borne out of environmental changes, to be stress related elements. To grasp stress issues with the horse, put yourself into perspective. Stress is the cause of many ills and unhappiness for us; being out-of-control over our world and environment troubles us. Do you think then, it is any different for your horse? What can be more stressful than having the will of another forcefully imposed upon your own? Do you often accept that without fighting against it in some way, or trying to create, if you must succumb, your own miniature world within? Did not the slaves in America etch out their own society and rules, despite their freedom usurped by others? Are there not a separate set of policies and edicts operating within the prison system despite the rules imposed by that system? Is there not, also, a world revolving within a world in your own life? Of course there is. It is the comprehensive puzzle of life, at once connected to and a part from the puzzle of another. This is an outlet that allows for individualism within a society. Your horse also operates within this dynamic of life; stress and behavior issues can often become byproducts of this.

Taken from a natural, instinctive world, placed into an artificial environment, your horse still creates and operates within his or her own puzzle. The human struggle against this, through no fault of our own, generates stress; the founding father of disease. The love for the horse cannot be questioned, yet this collision of environments cannot be helped. There can be a great deal of work done however in the area of prevention and dissemination. The most important initial step that can be taken in disease prevention starts in the environmental aspect. A true understanding and appreciation of the horse as an evolutionary animal, and a study of how he or she is designed to live socially and environmentally will pave the way for stress dissemination. This makes the eradication of stress from the environment, or the effort to minimize it, your best preventative medicine. When I began to formulate the plans for Thomas Herding Technique I knew that in order to bring forth true stress release and true psychotherapy technique development, I was going to have to undermine the *acquired instinct dynamic* and dig into the fundamentals of the basic instinct. Only working from the outside in is it possible to re-create how the horse fits into its world. The trick to prevention is matching natures' intended evolutionary path for a species, with our own design. It is a slippery slope, but I feel one both worthwhile and attainable. This being said the most elusive, yet dangerous enemies are not the outward, easy to read signs of stress; subtleties here are often the rule. It is always easier to deal

with an enemy that makes itself known. Handling and managing an effect is more negotiable than affecting the cause. Yet this is like putting a band aid on a nose bleed, covering the sign does not mean fixing the problem and can often create other issues that will not show up until later. Introverted stress has much more room to build upon itself, snowballing along until there is an outward explosion; behavior issues, diseases and other peculiarities often being the result. The effort to dislodge and handle these enigmatic issues within, should be the foundation goals from which psychotherapy techniques are built.

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Responsible horsemanship means much more than that treat in the pocket. It is an effort toward the creation of an environment that allows for a foundation matching that which nature has intended. An understanding of the horse, your horse, within his herd and artificial environment will help make it a little less, *artificial*. Preventative stress tactics, even for the loner horse who hasn't a friend in the field, can be discovered and implemented. The horse by its adaptable nature makes it easy on us to a certain extent. They will seek out their own stress dissemination techniques and willingly explore the ones we create for them. This is a double-edged sword however; *created* stress dissemination must be monitored and carefully formulated for the specific horse, if it is not, annoying side effects could arise. The birth of the *equine propensity* can be found within this layer.

Though we may never create a perfect environment in an artificial world, we can take many little steps in the name of stress prevention. The socially content, happy equine harbors a reduced stress rate, convalesces better if not faster and blends extremely well with any environment when given a chance to do so. Loving your horse(s) means so much more than the surface level items. It means you have made an effort to view life from the hoof, namely from the hooves of your best friend or patient. We can never hope to completely eradicate diseases, for disease is nature's way of keeping itself in check. Yet by making an effort to bring forth as much *natural* as you can into the necessity of the *artificial*, you are doing the very best you can by your horse. Whether in a one room boarding shed or a 20 stall palace, your horse cares less about what keeps him contained, and more about what sets him free.