



The Wind and The River are Horses

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PHOTOS BY SUSAN T. BLAKE

How Reiki is helping me in my work with horses, and how the horses have helped me to appreciate how Reiki is changing me.

I DON'T KNOW IF THIS IS TRUE for anyone else, but I have found that Reiki has been slowly taking root, sending out tendrils and growing in me without my really knowing it. And it took a herd of horses to show me this.

I took my Level I Reiki class in January 2014 from my friend, Chellie Kammermeyer. I had been to Chellie for Reiki sessions and had some extraordinary experiences (ask me sometime about the word “oatmeal”). I'd long been interested in alternative and complementary modes of healing, and another friend who is an intuitive and healer had told me I was a healer, too, reinforcing something I thought—I hoped—might be true. I didn't know how I would use it, though I thought that I might use it in conjunction with my work as a coach, although I wasn't sure how. In other words, it was a lark. An experiment. *Why Not?*

And it was cool. I learned a lot: The history of Reiki. What it is. How to do it—*technique*. But I didn't do much with it. There wasn't really any opportunity to use it in my work at the time and, being single, I didn't have any guinea pigs—I mean family—to practice on. I used it once on my roommate at the time, when she had a headache. And I went to Chellie's Reiki Share nights to practice. But that was pretty much it.

I had some intriguing experiences at those Reiki Share nights, though, so I signed up for the Level II class a couple of months later. That was also very cool (of course). I still didn't really have much hands on use for it, but I did send distant Reiki to people I knew who requested support or prayers for one thing or another.

And, I confess, I didn't have a consistent practice. I wasn't using Reiki on myself, and I didn't really practice the symbols consistently. So, since I wasn't really using it much, and I didn't plan to teach, I didn't seriously consider going on to take the Advanced Reiki Training/Reiki Master class.

Then something happened.

I had been visiting the horse ranch operated by The Flag Foundation for Horse/Human Partnership in Sebastopol, California for more than two years, volunteering and learning about

partnering with horses in coaching through Equine Guided Experiences and Equine Facilitated Learning. The horses there live at liberty on 80 acres; they are masters of mindfulness, and they have taught me a great deal. Several have become my friends, and I have become an honorary member of the herd. In 2014 I began taking coaching clients to Flag Ranch and co-facilitated my first one-day retreat with the herd at the ranch.

Well, on my first visit to the ranch after my Level II class, there was a new “rescue” horse in one of the stalls in the barn. A recently gelded (former) stallion who, sadly, had spent most of his life in isolation. He was skin and bones after being neglected and starved while waiting to be sent to slaughter. He had arrived at the ranch a few days earlier and was being evaluated and cared for.

On this day, Kamikani (his new name, Hawaiian for “The Wind”) was pacing and whinnying nervously in his stall. He had bonded with Sidney, a mare who was recovering from surgery in the stall next to him, but Sidney had been taken out for exercise. Kani, still somewhat wild and full of hormones and nervous in this new environment, was frantic without her. So I perched on a stool outside his stall and just sat there and sang to him. Gently. Humming and crooning a tune that comes to mind when I'm with the herd.

He calmed down just a little, listening.

When I visited the next month, Kani and Sidney had graduated to adjacent paddocks next to the barn; Kani had calmed somewhat, but he was still very thin and still nervous. I paused to greet Sidney, and sang to Kani for a moment before going out to visit with the rest of the herd. Later, I mucked out Sidney's paddock (so Kani could see what I was doing) and then eased into Kani's paddock. I sang to him while I cautiously worked my way around his paddock, and he cautiously grazed his way around me.

Then it happened. I was scooping up poop, dumping the rake into the bucket, mindfully focusing on my work, when suddenly Kani was standing in front of me. *Right* in front of me. He stood broadside just inches in front of me, blocking me.

I carefully patted him and tried to move past him, but he moved with me, re-positioning himself in front of me, doing this weird shuffle with his hooves until his belly was right in front of me.

Jodee (left) and Christee (right) vying for some Curry Comb Reiki.



Kamikani (center) with Rio's band (Rio is on the right).



Tessa.

Suddenly I knew what he wanted. Without thinking, I set down the rake and put one hand on his side and the other on the bottom of his belly. And just let the Reiki flow.

He stood stock-still. And then his stomach started gurgling.

Later I asked Kimberly Carlisle, the Executive Director and co-founder of The Flag Foundation, if Kani had stomach problems. "Yes," she said, "he's been treated for ulcers."

I got goose bumps.

After that I made a point of spending time with Kani on my subsequent visits, and even after he and Sidney were released to integrate with the herd, he would come to me for his Belly Reiki. We would stand in the pasture with the herd scattered around us, with my hands on his belly and his side where the ribs were becoming less noticeable with each passing month.

Then, in late November, I arrived to find the atmosphere in the herd charged with electricity. A new gelding, a small but feisty black mustang, had arrived and quickly commandeered a mini-herd—a mini-herd that included Sidney and Kani and two others, Manteca and Butterfly.

While the herd was usually somewhat dispersed throughout the pastures, on this day they stayed tightly clustered in the area below the barn, keeping an eye on the new boy (newly named Rio, Spanish for "river") as he protected his mini-herd and chased others off. The entire herd was on High Alert, and the air was decidedly electric, unlike the normally relaxed atmosphere.

I carefully made my way around the pasture, visiting various friends while keeping my awareness up, always knowing where Rio was and keeping him in sight, while consciously staying grounded—and doing a lot of sighing. Several times he moved the horses I was with, and I got out of the way.

Eventually I found myself with Kani and the rest of Rio's little band, with the rest of the herd around us at a distance. Kani presented his side to me for his Belly Reiki, and as I stood with my hands on him, I looked across his back and saw Rio watching us as he grazed about 10 feet away.

A little while later I was standing with Sidney, and Manteca and Butterfly were just beyond her. I just stood with her, consciously being a calming presence while humming my little tune, grounding, and occasionally sighing, when Sidney yawned—a big, toothy, neck-stretched-out yawn. I felt her relax, and she yawned again.

Then Manteca yawned.

Then Butterfly.

Meanwhile Rio grazed quietly around us, watching.

Later that day I spent time with my friend Christee, one of the huge draft horses. Although she is much larger than Rio, he had moved her a couple of times that day. This time, though, she put herself between Rio and me, and when he challenged her she just made herself taller and said No. And he turned and walked away.

By the time I left, the herd had begun to disperse a bit and things didn't seem quite so charged. Later I was struck by the realization that just my presence, my conscious, grounded *presence*, changed things. I usually only visit once a month, but I felt compelled to go back the following week. I was curious—I had to see what was happening with the herd. Had Rio successfully staged a coup and taken over the entire herd?

When I arrived, I was relieved to see the herd was back to its peaceful existence, spread out across the pastures, grazing contentedly with its leadership intact, with Rio and his band flowing along in their midst.

At the end of that day, I found Christee happily munching on a pile of hay alongside Rio. I greeted Christee and stood with them for a few minutes. Then Christee walked away, leaving me alone with Rio, who continued eating. After a few minutes, I eased closer and offered him a handful of hay. Rio, who hadn't yet let anyone touch him and had only taken food from a few other people, quietly took the hay from my hand.

My next visit proved to be yet another turning point. (I know "But wait! There's more!") It started like any other visit—checking in with the herd, then doing chores in the barn. Back out with the herd, Kani came to me for a brief session of Belly Reiki.



Christee connecting with a retreat participant at Flag Ranch.

Then Tessa, who had recently been released back to the herd after confinement with Pigeon Fever (a nasty and contagious infection that produces large abscesses), came to me and presented her right front shoulder for Itchy Healing Scar Reiki, which I happily gave to her.

Then Christee presented her left hind leg for Creaky Damp Weather Rheumatism Reiki. I, of course, complied, after checking for swelling or limping and sensing only an ache.

I didn't think much about it until a couple of days later, when I tripped over an old email from Kimberly to the ranch team. In it she had mentioned that Christee had strained her left hind knee and to keep an eye on it. This validated what I had sensed. And then it hit me like a ton of bricks.

How do they know?

And how do I know?

But they do.

And I do.

The horses, like true friends, showed me what I am capable of by asking me to do it. I shared this with Kimberly, and with Chellie. Soon after, Chellie sent me an early morning text.



Tessa and Toby enjoying some affectionate mutual grooming.

"I almost called you in the middle of the night."

"You could have. What's up?"

"I had a dream about you. You were teaching people how to give their horses Reiki."

So I went through the Advanced Reiki Training/Holy Fire/Reiki Master training in January 2015.

It's still sinking in. But bit by bit, Reiki is taking root. I'm telling people about it, I am consciously working with the symbols and I have something that is growing into a daily practice.

Where is this going? I don't know. But Reiki goes where it is needed, so I am content to go with it. 🌿



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