



Steve Melzer, Steve's TWH Jubilee and Liz  
Photo Credit Cheryl Melzer

## **In Anger for Their Fears and Pain**

By Elizabeth Graves 2007©

### **The Non-Fiction story:**

The day starts out as another grey and rainy day of fall which is common in the mid-west. It's a run of those days that can take the spirits to a low place. Being one of those that work's hard at not letting things get me down, I take my energy drink, joint supplement and head to the barn knowing I have a lot of horses that need cheering up as well.

It's been a good day in spite of the weather. I've gotten a lot done and feeling pretty good to be around what I am the most comfortable, that being my horses.

I head to the house for a cookie break, thank goodness I have a few as I burned 4 pans of them the night before getting caught up in answering horse folks e-mails, I'll use a timer next time I bake! I see a message has been left by some dear friends from out west.

I return the call hearing those wonderful, warm, comforting voices of friends at the other end. This is a special couple to me in that they share the same passion for horses that I do. They have been very successful in raising some wonderful foals, teaching young prospects and advancing the training in their older horses. They also spent a month here with Dave and me serving an internship that took all 4 of us to the next level of where we want to go in our journey of the horse and our own self growth.

Steve wanted to take his work to the next place in taking on an outside horse now and then for training. I encouraged him whole heartedly as I felt he is just the right kind of person that would do right by the horses in every way and help them be the best they can while advancing him to the next level of experience. That being in working with horse owners, the variables in individual horses and what they have experienced in their lives up to the point of coming into him for teaching. Steve has been through a bunch of horses at this point and been very successful. He was everything I felt he could be for the horses and learning so much more himself, it was wonderful to hear him share his experiences, the highs and lows.

I thought I had done my job well as a teacher and friend in giving him much of my experience in what to expect in people and horses. I shared the positives and the negatives. Today I realized with that phone call I had let him down and forgotten to share one other piece with him, or had I intentionally not wanted to tell him about it because of knowing the pain myself?

The next words Steve spoke rocked me to my core, the guilt hit me hard, and I had not prepared him for this. His words were "I am feeling so angry over what this horse has *been through*" along with, " *knowing she may have to face that pain again with another person in her future*". Oh I know that feeling of anger and knew this was one of the biggest hurdles to overcome in working with horses and the histories they bring with them.

## The Anger

I could hear the depth of his anger and the pain it was causing him. I also knew, in that he was feeling this anger, I was right in his being the right person to be doing this kind of work. My guilt was in not only making him aware of this as a possibility in happening but I had caused him feel to its intensity 10 times more than if he had been warned about it happening. I had also caused him pain. As a teacher I know that it is sometimes necessary to go through these emotions to find the next place in our growth as students and teachers but it's not easy to see them go through. One of the biggest benefits it has though to the teacher of the horse, is that takes them to a level of being much more sympathetic to a horse's history and emotions. Horses are very emotional creatures which is important to their survival living in a manmade world. Every direction Steve will take with a horse from now on will be more thought out, he will watch for the smallest of signs of distress, confusion and scarring. He will look for just the right answer to make it easy for the horse.

I want to cry in joy for him in knowing he is the person he is, and also cry for the pain he will endure.

## The History

The mare Steve had been working with was aged and had been raising babies for many years having some amount of training and riding early in her life. What he discovered at first was even catching her was a challenge, one of those big signs that humans have not been a good thing in her life. Steve and Cheryl have a positive, peaceful and safe environment they maintain on their facility Steve was able to overcome this evasion from humans she had. Steve starting the under saddle work is when the depth of the mare fears and almost terror in the tension and the tightening in her body, made it very clear as to what she had been through previously. We can only guess at exactly what had been done to her. One guess is that in her early work she was put under so much emotional and physical pressure she learned to shut down, go away, zone out, as we sometimes say and just go in fear and not much else was able to be done with her in the previous trainer's opinion. The only thing that could be done with her in their eyes was to be a broodmare, not that the trainer had failed in their task and failed the horse in their responsibility to the horse.

## **Are the doors still open or have they closed**

That very important factor that Steve was able to bring this mare back and give her some help while teaching and advancing her in her under saddle skills, is the door to the mind was still open. She had not gone to the other side as I say. I hope for Steve he never has one of these horses. The pain and anger that comes with seeing one of these horses is almost unbearable. A reality yes, and not what I would term as rare either, I have a books worth of stories of horses that went to the "other side" some that chose to be unreachable ever again, some that chose death to be a better choice than another day living in a human world.

## **They have to go Home**

Oh another hard place! Yes at times and often they have to either go back to the place that created their misery. Even if this is not the case the chances are high that they will have many different homes in their lives, and some may not actually be homes just places of survival. It's so hard in knowing this, and I have spent many long nights the day before their departure in turmoil and tears. Even with a horse that's got a good home, had a clean past and just has come in for teaching, you take them in to you, and you touch them and live with them. You get to know them and yes that scary word for some, feel that human emotion of love. It's never easy to send them home if you care, even in the best of circumstances.

I needed some serious help with this at a point in my career and this is the answer I was given so I could live with it and continue my work," *If the 30 or 60 days or even just the 5 minute you may spend with a horse, in showing them kindness, touch them, make contact in that they know you care and that they are acknowledged. Even if this is all they get of it in their entire lives it is better than them not knowing this from a human at all, ever".*

## **The Emotions**

You swirl in them; you know not what to do with them at first. You get mad at yourself for having them. You're a teacher you should be able to deal with them, you should always be strong! Well, at first you can't you just have to feel them, and then you realize just how real it all is. Its part of being alive, yes alive, even in pain and sometimes feeling is painful but it's that pain that makes you strong. It's what able to help one and bring those horses back to living a life of self worth and value again. That pain, anger and pure emotion is what keeps your doors still open, just as we hope they will still be in those horses than need us most.

## **To Cope**

My answer to Steve was you will have to find some way to put up a wall. Steve's answer back was the right one in that he said, *"I want to feel, I don't want to block it out"*. So I clarified myself a bit more. What one needs to do is be able to put up a wall at times, or have a place you can go in your mind to give yourself some rest from it. If one does not learn to do this it can totally consume a person, in some cases even destroy them, they then are numb and the wall in permanent. They just become that run of the mill trainer, just doing a job and getting

it done. Then the bad things come in to the methods that take the horses to the other side. I have watched in my years so many start out with all the right motives in teaching horses, and the reality of the emotions takes over and we lose them. At this point we are fixing what they create in horse's histories, and deceitful business practices. They don't care anymore. To them anything is better else is than having the emotions, seeing and feeling the pain and fear in the horses.

## **Where do we go from here?**

We keep feeling, that's what we have to do. We just have to manage it so one can keep moving ahead.

I've been so consumed at times by it in the past I wanted to just walk away from it all. Do something else but then my mind would tell me *"but if I do then what chance do the horses have that I could have helped"*. *I'd be letting them down; I'd be even guiltier than those that created their pain and fears.*

So for myself I have found my journey, my purpose. I have also found horses need a purpose to, and are so willing when it's reasonable and they know that their well being matters to you as well.

The biggest inspiration also for me is in knowing I'm not alone in this work. That there are folks out there like Steve and Cheryl and others in which we can share, support each other to keep going while helping the horses that need us and are still open to us. We can share too, the joys, the sorrows and feel together. There have been times in my career I had no human around me or in my life that was in the same place in all this with me, all I had were the horses. I have them now and many, we're in it together. Doing the work, the work that relieves fear and pain of the horses, those glorious horses that as the older I get the more in Ah of them I am.