

ALBERTA DONKEY AND MULE NEWS, MARCH, 2010

[The following is an article, and then a list of COMING EVENTS..so hopefully both can be used, sooner or later!]

Too Little, Too Late!

As I sit back and reflect on my love affair with the long-eared equine of choice that I have shared my life with for almost twenty years, I deeply regret that my lack of understanding often led to the ineffective handling of my stock.

Being human, I've made many mistakes with them. [And still do.] Sometimes I suffered for my lack of knowledge, but more often, the mule got the worst of it. I think especially of the many mules that we raised and the ones that were more challenging to handle from birth. It takes a special person to know, whether instinctive or learned, how to correctly respond when a critter, mule or otherwise, is acting in a way that we perceive as counter-productive to our goals. I will always feel a sense of guilt for the mules that I feel I failed and wonder how their lives turned out after they left our farm. Most ended in good hands and I still keep in touch with the people that now own them, but some of those that I have lost track of I fear may have ended in miserable circumstances.

Often we cannot control what happens to the mules, horses and donkeys that we sell. I am writing this in the hopes that more of us will realize that it really is up to us to give that mule, donkey or horse baby a good start in life in order to maximize their chance of a useful and happy life.

Thanks goodness that there are wonderful teachers and instructors available that besides being "horse savvy" have gone even further and addressed that hybrid combination resulting from a jack donkey and a horse mare - the mule. Granted, there are a few educators that I would consider outdated in their programs, especially when dealing with mules or donkeys. Thankfully, we now have, more than ever, access to some very great trainers and students of good horse/mulemanship.

From clinition, Brad Cameron of Corvalis, Montana, I have learned that you must get into the mind of the mule in order to get along with him. I learned that controlling the mule's feet starts with his mind first! Brad teaches that if you can direct the mule's thoughts, than you can control his body. Brad's tape on "Catching the Hard to Catch Mule" really helped me to work on my body language and taught me that I can use my body and movements to move and speak to the mind of the mule, thus controlling his body. In the end, following Brad's

techniques brought much quicker and lasting results than chasing after an already hard to catch mule.

I have read many excellent articles on mule handling and training and some, not so good. We need to be able to sift out the information that is either mis-leading or does not have the best interests of the mule at heart. Any trainer or article that suggests that intimidation and fear should be used as a training tool, I would personally suggest that you shun. When we lack the mental savvy, a gimmick can be a quick fix. It can force the animal's body to comply to our will but his mind is not with us. Only by first controlling his mind and gaining his trust and confidence can we get the soft willing compliance that is desirable.

Another excellent influence in my life has been teacher/trainer Jerry Tindell from Hesperio, California. Like Brad, Jerry works on the mule's mind as the way to control his body. Jerry has worked with some very difficult animals and by going back to areas missed in the animal's groundwork, he is able to redeem these lost souls. It is no surprise to anyone that the human has always been at the root of the problem. We seem to have a great ability to muck up our animal's mind and usually have no idea of how we created this monster! Jerry breaks things down into small safe steps and builds on those to get back the animals confidence in us. Jerry is not only an excellent communicator with the equines, but he has the same expert skills with people. Jerry says "you ride the horse/mule or donkey that you lead." In other words, what you get or don't get from your animal on the ground is only magnified once you start riding. Problems fix themselves once we go back to our groundwork program and fix the holes we left. Most of us need to really work on looking for the "try" in our animals and giving a quick release as soon as we see or feel it. Easier said than done!

If Jerry Tindell thinks I can still work on some bad habits I've let my now 28 year old saddle mule develop through my complacency, maybe the old adage that

" You can't teach an old dog, new tricks" isn't really that true. In my case, I suspect, "I" will be the slowest learner in the mule/ human equation!

If I could "do it all over again" I would wish that I knew then, what I know now! Perhaps some of those mule babies that developed bad habits or fearful personalities could have been set on a different course if only I truly had the understanding and the know how to reach their minds and bring about change for the good.

If you get a chance to take a clinic with someone that truly works with the equine's mind, and doesn't rely on gimmicks and constant control

of the animal, why not do yourself a favor and see what you can learn! Even if you might consider yourself in the category with the "old dog", you may be very surprised at what you still can learn!

Brad Cameron is scheduled to instruct a Colt Starting and Basic Mule/horsemanship Clinic, May 28 –31 at Olds, AB. Then he will be back August 7 –11 to teach a Mule Mountain Trail Clinic at Banff, AB. Check out his site at wwwmuletrainer.com to learn more.

Jerry Tindell will appear at the Mane Event in Red Deer, AB. April 23-25. He has a series of clinics including Colt Starting, Groundwork, Basic Mule/horsemanship and Intermediate Mule/horsemanship, from June 25 to July 7 at Lakedell Arena, Westeros, AB. Check out more at his site www.jerrytindell.com

Happy Trails,
Marlene Quiring

COMING EVENTS:

Please Note that ALL of our events except for Tees Longears Days, are Open to All Equines! Mark your Calendars!

March 7, Annual General Meeting, Potluck dinner followed by 1:30 meeting, 5015-46 Ave. Ponoka . Everyone welcome.

April 23 –25, Mane Event, Red Deer. We will have a club booth and demonstrations. Jerry Tindell, horse and mule trainer from California will be one of the featured guests.

May 8-9. Driving Clinic in central AB. Contact Colleen Campbell at 780 672-6105

May 21- 23, Ft. Assiniboine Wildland Park Trail Ride. Contact Fred Godberson at 780 674-5775

May 28 –31, Brad Cameron Colt Starting and Mule/horsemanship Clinic, Olds, AB. Contact Karen Anderson at 403 845-5308

June 25 –27, Jerry Tindell Ground Work Clinic

June 28 – 30, Jerry Tindell Colt Starting Clinic

July 2 – 4, Jerry Tindell Basic Mule/horsemanship

July 5 –7, Jerry Tindell Intermediate Mule/horsemanship

All Jerry Tindell clinics will be held at the Lakedell arena, Westeros, AB. Contact Marlene Quiring at 403 783-5210 or email marlenequiring@hotmail.com

July 27 –29, Hummingbird Trail Ride. Contact Keith Kendrew at 403 843-3293

August 7 -11, Brad Cameron Mountain Mule Ride, Banff, AB. Contact Karen Anderson at 403 845-5308

August 21-22 Tees Longears Days – Donkey and Mule Show. Contact Colleen Campbell at 780 672-6105

September 8 -12, Spruce Meadows Battle of the Breeds, Showcase and Equi Fair.

Dates are still pending for a couple of possible Trail Rides and a Therapeutic Massage and Saddle Fit clinic. Keep checking our website www.albertadonkeyandmule.com for more information and registration forms.

