



COLLECTING a YEAR OF THOUGHT

the thoughts of **Nancy Lowery**
www.TheNaturalLeader.ca



Ten years ago I embarked on a journey. I have the great privilege of saying - I Love what I do. That doesn't mean it has been easy. The choices we make come with a cost - sometimes financial, sometimes emotional, sometimes physical and sometimes.... all three.

This is the fourth anthology of images, thoughts and quotes from the past year's newsletters. ***A Year of Inspiration*** and ***A Year of Great Expectation, Remember to Breathe*** are available for download in **The Collection** on our website www.TheNaturalLeader.ca.

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In appreciation: *Many of the images in this book were captured by my husband Chris Byron others captured by Lisa Mercer of PrairieMoonPhotography.ca have been noted*



Collecting a Year of Thought isn't easy!

Especially if you have a mind like a sieve.

Thoughts just come and go.
The best ones come when I'm out on a ride with little
opportunity to record them.

Sometimes I'm relieved that we both just survived.

The luxury of putting together these eBooks
is I also have the opportunity to edit my thoughts.

So here they are with the gift of time to ease the flow.

www.TheNaturalLeader.ca

Nancy
February 2014

"You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great."



"When life feels like it's going western, there is no shame in grabbing on to the saddle horn" Cowboy Wisdom



IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

July - For the past couple of weeks I have been moving the herd onto

a neighbour's pasture. While the horses may love it, leaving horses out to eat 24/7 when the grass is lush never works out well, so we head over late morning back each evening. The routine is slowly beginning to develop a measure of rhythm.

The grass may be plentiful but the project manager in me appears when time is the scarce resource. Minimizing the number of trips by leading more than one horse seemed to be a sensible way to handle the process. Why take two horses when you can lead three or more?

Separating the herd always causes far more angst than you would think necessary. Without the non-verbal communication that connects them the whinnying begins. Actually, it's more a deafening scream when their muzzle and your ear are aligned! To be clear we're not talking about a long trip down the road, but simply one from our yard across the road. The drama doesn't end when you get a batch of horses into the field but continues until each animal has arrived. The newly separated race around worried for their yet to arrive herd mates, causing even more frenzy among those left behind.

Needless to say the first few trips were more like a gong show than any sort of coordinated effort. It was if each individual had their own agenda: those excited about the adventure would charge ahead, switching sides and spinning around generating excitement and confusion; another

seemingly suspect of the pending change would become an anchor, a “ya but” with each step and then there was the individual more concerned about how everyone else might impact them, not sure they wanted to be on the trip at all. I was trying to be the leader in the midst of chaos and had to develop a new strategy to stay alive. I needed the herd to respect me.

Horses like routine and any change will cause undue stress. When it comes to something new, a horse always reverts to the most basic of values, their life. So change triggers the “Will I live or die?” reaction. The initial plan was to move half the herd over, one I soon altered as visions of animals desperate to connect and fences mixing in a bad way came to mind. Moving sixteen horses and one donkey meant more trips in the short term but the field would be grazed down faster ending the whole project sooner.

Control is a measured word with horses. It is impossible to control one upset horse let alone four but you can influence one horse at a time. In the end I don't believe I saved any time moving more than one horse but once again I learned a lot. What became crystal clear was the bigger the team the more important paying attention to the individual becomes. The negative influence each horse can wield when concerns are not recognised is huge!

What impacted everyone was when my level of frustration got the better of me. I found myself recalling a mantra I had used as a project manager “Slow down to go faster.”, for whenever my energy came up so too did that of the horses around me. With each trip I have improved how I set myself up to execute my responsibilities, in turn I am better able support each horse and adapt to what shows up. Each trip has a better start and as we repeat the routine the horses expectations are now clearer and the walk over is less chaotic. The ever so important action of getting through the gate can now be completed with some semblance of order, each horse waiting their turn to be freed.

I have let go of the expectation this should be easy or faster but recognised that it will take the time it takes. I see each effort as the opportunity to both learn and teach, most importantly that my team can look to me for comfort in the midst of change. It certainly wasn't simple and it hasn't been easy but I am pleased with how the team now might look as we cross the road together.



*“A horse is only afraid of two things.
Things that move and things that don't.”*

FROM a DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The view of the mountains is spectacular from our farm, some days it feels like you could touch them.

We live on the eastern slopes of the Rockies, the point where the foothills turns into the flat lands of the prairies. With it's ready made windbreak of poplars, spruce and caragana hedge an old farmstead became our home. I often say there is nothing to block the view--a statement that translates to nothing to stop the wind. The wind can be relentless.

In the still of a spring evening bird song and frogs are the main chorus but as you move toward the herd the steady slap of the tail and stomp of feet means mosquitoes have arrived. After 11 years I realize there is a darn good side to that ever present wind. Between hill and sky, there can be a LOT of water. So when the wind blows it provides that point in the day you can focus and the horse can relax, the wind offers relief.

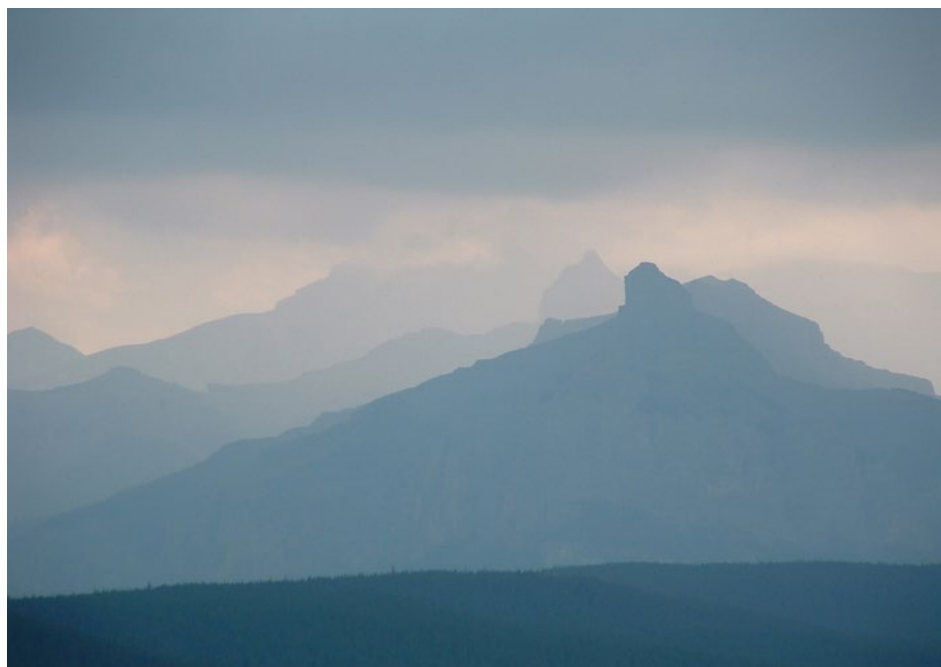
The Natural Leader programs are designed to provide a different perspective on leading self or others. I have to admit sometimes the questions that come forward catch me off guard, one did just that in a recent session. The individual was wondering what to do when all else appeared to be stacked against them. The first question that came to mind to begin the dialogue was "Is there another way you could look at the problem?"

We often have participants who are looking for a quick fix, that one idea that will transform their leadership journey. The horses provide that different perspective on how they show up as individuals and the expectations they place on self. If the horses had taught me nothing else, is you can only control and change how you respond and react to see a different outcome.

The same question came to mind as I headed down the road, glad for the reprieve from mosquitos the wind offered. When I could see the benefit the of wind rather than just loath it, I loved it. "It was the question that was needing to be asked, but was waiting to be said."

Not sure why it's taken me so long to find the upside of the wind. I guess needing to see something from a different perspective is something you never run out of.

In full disclosure, this is not a picture from where I sit, but a view not too far to the west of us.





"Study without desire spoils the memory, and it retains nothing that it takes in." ~ Leonardo da Vinci



"I've always thought that a fella took a better picture if there is a horse in there someplace and, generally speaking, you'd want to be sitting on that horse." - Bill Dorrance

a MEASURE OF CONTROL

A horse has an acute awareness of self and presence of others, their survival has depended on it. While horses have come to accept us, domestication hasn't changed that instinct. The slightest change in the environment can alter a horse's view of safety.

The day was gorgeous so we had the arena doors wide open. All was fine until a small herd of deer crossed the yard, in a heartbeat the horses went from sleepy, to alert and ready to run. We closed the doors.

The arena provides a measure of control in The Natural Leader programs over those unexpected changes which can be as small as a fly or big as a train. We prefer the focus remains on the interaction between horse and human.

While there are some things we can control learning how to adapt to what shows up is ongoing. A statement that refers as much to me as it does for those we host. Events of the day don't always unfold as anticipated as if to test that I practice what I preach.

One detail that is constant is how well the horse will attend to the individual they work with. For many simply being with a horse is so far outside of their comfort zone much responsibility ends up with the horse. As the human gains comfort in a new environment it is the horse who has to wait patiently through the human's idea of who has control.

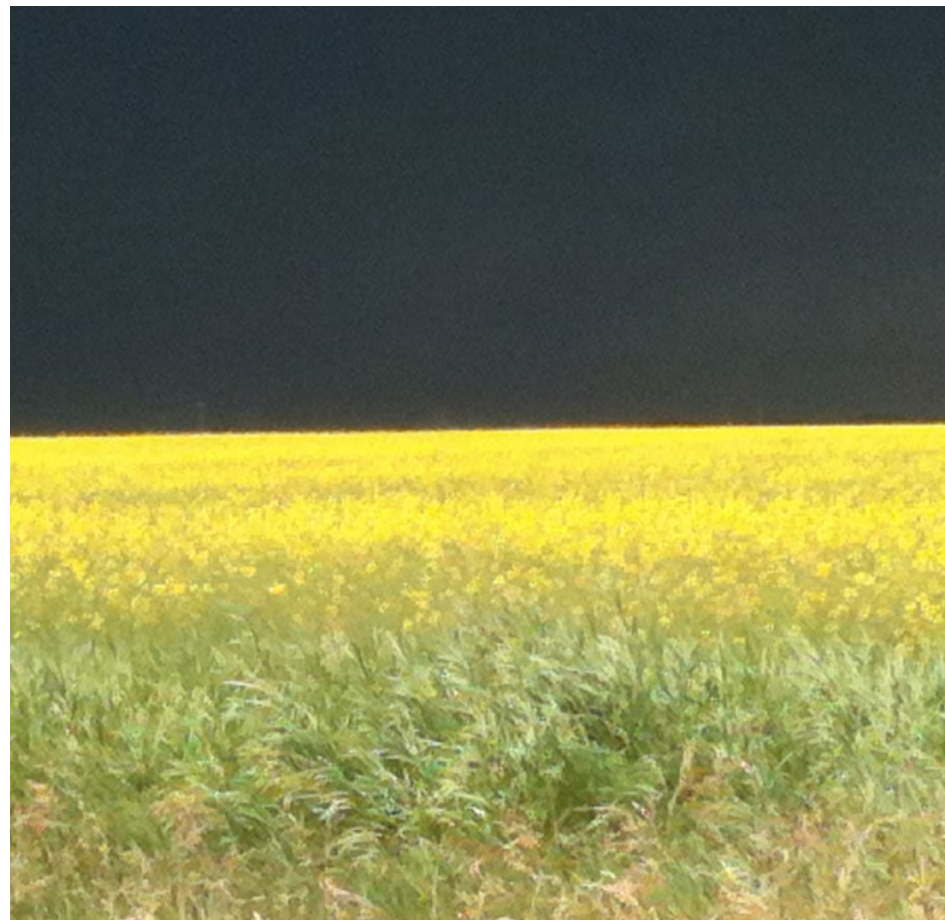
As they gain confidence the language many default to is indeed curious often suggesting "that things got better once they got control of the horse" unaware they simply got control of themselves.

Their idea of control may come in the form of a tight grip on the lead, pulling or simply trying to hold the horse back as they walked. Actions that of course beg the question "Who is leading who?". The non-verbal, more obvious than the words we choose, illustrates the root of where much miscommunication in the workplace lies. What we say versus what people see.

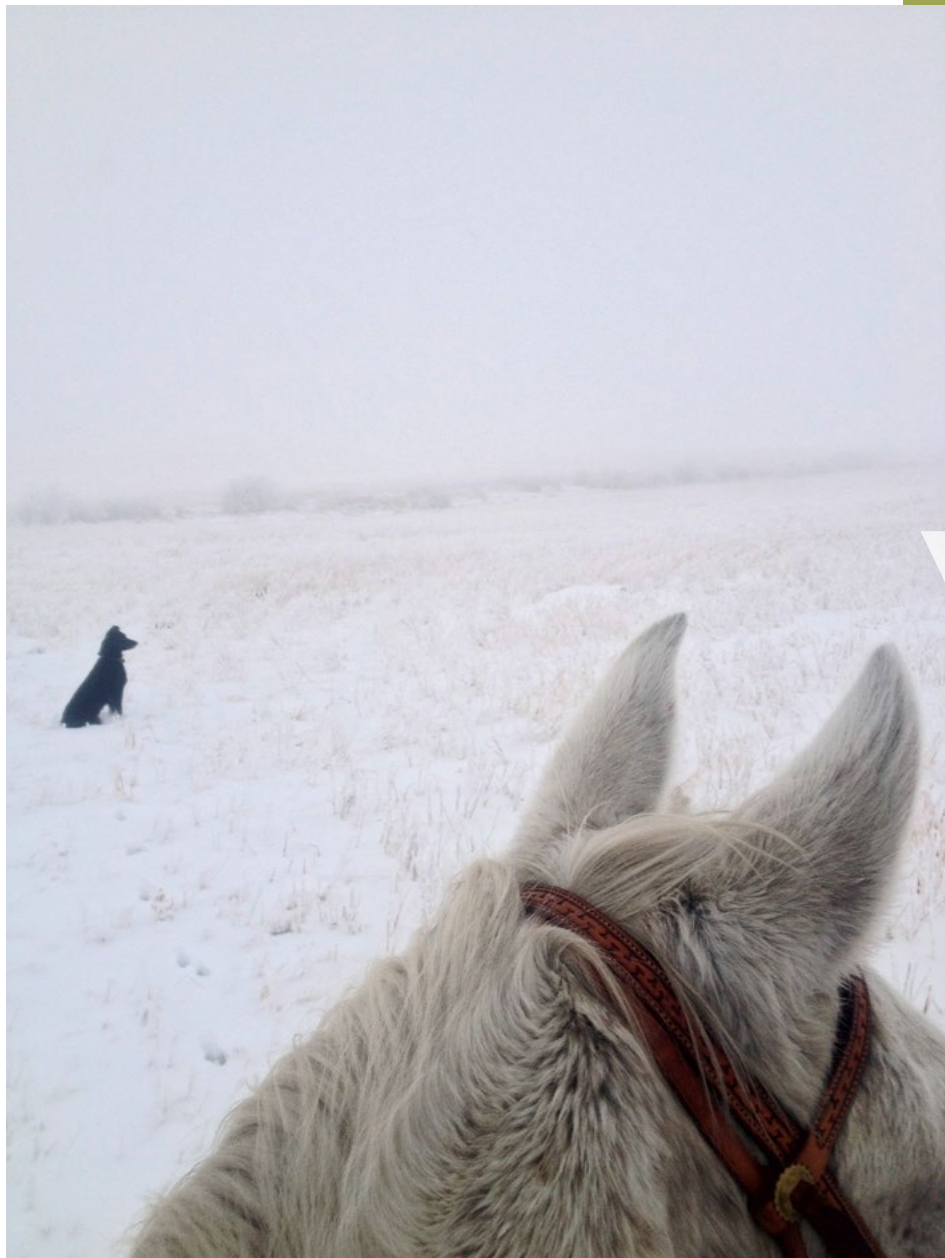
Control is something we like to have in our lives, the very state that change upsets. Rather than embracing the opportunity change might present we tend to resort to habits in an effort to slow down the pace of change or perhaps simply restrict our awareness of it. As we develop this envelope of denial, the horse or team, may be complying but they rarely let go their own need to deal with change. When comment of control surface I suggest they might view "the lead rope as simply the illusion of control". From my own experience if the horse wants to leave, it is unlikely you can prevent it and at best you might end up with a rope burn.

Leadership requires we use language that fits a situation, that we choose words carefully. The language of the equine is non-verbal so there are a number of ways we get participants to experience how letting go of the illusion of control can lead to a better outcome. For some it can be a truly a difficult task, they must trust themselves and the horse. A tall task when you have 500kg trotting beside you.

What is so uplifting about this work, is when the language does change. When an individual begins to recognise that the authority of leadership isn't about control but about gaining the awareness of self and others so you are working effortlessly together. Yes you might be out of breath but as the smiles, lightness and acceptance shows through the effort the words shift from control to collaboration and the recognition that change is something you adapt to through trust.



*"Do not confuse motion and progress.
A rocking horse keeps moving,
but does not make any progress."
Alfred Montapert*



Circles

IN THE SNOW

Winter is a fabulous time to ride. No bugs!

Without the luxury of an indoor arena, winter riding is not for the faint of heart. From the brown Michelin Man resemblance I take on to warming the bit before offering it to the horse, heading out requires preparation. Riding in the winter is an endeavour for the committed.

The colder weather also means the section of cultivated land across the road becomes my outdoor riding arena. There is little to stop the view, stubble rows and piles of chafe become landmarks to weave through and the real beauty is I can ride without the extreme hazard snow covered holes present.

Despite the number of times we may have crossed the road - there is always opportunity for something interesting to happen. On this particular day the land and sky were a seamless light blue grey. It gives you a feeling of floating as if in some middle world, at least it felt that way until a large truck broke the horizon 3 or 4 kilometers away.

The minute change in scenery interrupted the flow and Sydney became fixated on the distant object inching its way through the grey. The seemingly insignificant altered our ride from a pleasant amble to one where I had to quickly establish a common focus. What I could assume was explaining it was only a truck wouldn't be enough for her. I had to be able to communicate in a way that had meaning to her, otherwise there was little between us and home to slow the energy of my fondly named,

"Leadership is knowing when to speak and when to listen."

"Tank Girl". I needed to get Sydney focused, engaged, relaxed and Thinking!

Horses are not good with change. The instinctual response to change is "perceived threat". Sydney's ONLY thought at that point was get back to the safety of the herd. I had to establish a comfort zone for her where I was her support in our herd of two. Circles are a good way to get your horse focused and relaxed while keeping their feet moving and mind engaged. So circles in the snow it became.

Winter snow offers a brilliant tool for measuring progress. Our first attempts were anything but circular but as I was able to engage her in the outcome and we both started to focus the track in the snow began to round and narrow. The truck continued to inch it's way along the kilometers of the horizon but I now had Sydney's attention focused on the task at hand. As I gave her something to do it, a purpose, that in turn offered relief from the pending "threat" the change on the horizon presented. It helped us both regain confidence.

While the actual change minuscule, the perceived change and emotional impact was huge.

As everything about horsemanship and leadership is connected, the experience had me thinking about the chaos that change can inflict on the workplace. Like a horse we are naturally wired to react and resist change. The truck on the horizon demonstrated how easily a very minor change without the right communication can get blown out of proportion triggering the fright and flight mode in an organization.

No matter how many times I've encountered a tense moment on horseback I have to consciously remind myself that I have the experience, I have the skill and I have the knowledge to handle the situation. Each time the connection is easier, but like leadership the challenge with horsemanship is we can know what we need to do, but we must remember to carry it in how we respond. It is our actions that influence the change we would like to see.

It is our conscious awareness that will determine the outcome. I have to admit it is easier said than done, but with practice it starts to flow easier and most importantly when I encounter a change I really don't know how to manage. I am more than willing to engage the experience of others. It just makes sense.



*Discover
the power of listening
through
the art of whispering*



PReSeNCE

It should have been easy. The idea was simple enough, get Gabe used to stuff happening around him.

I have since learned how complicated simple can be. Well past the ninety day mark, we continue one step at a time working through the Tarp Challenge*.

Gabe remains hesitant about the blue tarp, what has changed is it no longer is about him getting used to the tarp. It is now about how I offer the information and allow him the opportunity to interpret my intention. To a horse "everything means something and nothing, means nothing." We are getting closer to nothing.

Horsemanship is a journey, each day with Gabe and each session with people I learn more about how I present myself. Leadership presence has been the focus of conversation in recent programs. We begin asking what each individual would like to get out of their day, defining a goal for themselves. We hear a lot about what they would like to see in their staff, changes in how their communication is received or thoughts that relate to getting others to perform their best. It is a challenge to get some to see the role they play in that outcome.

It takes seconds for a horse to figure out a person's "I statement". However, having the human articulate it plainly and clearly is another story. When they find it, it is gold for us in the arena.



*"Do not confuse motion and progress.
A rocking horse keeps moving,
but does not make any progress."
Alfred Montapert*

To be honest it really doesn't matter whom I pair with which horse or what activities we have planned for a sessions. The horses simply do what they do and the people will say the the most amazing things. I so love to hear it when someone simply states what they need to do differently as a result of the interactions with the horse. What was challenging for them to articulate in the classroom rolls off their tongue in the arena.

I am so proud of my horses. They do not just tolerate another human on the end of the lead line, but they share with them something that becomes so profound. I know that person is leaving with a whole new perspective on their own leadership presence.

Just as it is no longer about getting Gabe used to the commotion going

on around him, but rather about how "I can support and help him understand that he can trust me through whatever may be happening around us." Yes, I still want Gabe to accept a blue tarp, but I now understand it is more about what I am willing to do in order for him to get there, that makes the difference.

What's in it for me? Immense satisfaction on what I can accomplish if I set my heart and mind to something.

*You can read about The Tarp Challenge online at <http://www.thenaturalleader.ca/the-30-day-tarp-challenge>



DEFiNiNg Success

If doing what you love is success. Then I have achieved that!

Success is one of those words that has long been associated with financial return - success has many definitions. Like leadership and horsemanship it is personal.

Writing these articles monthly has helped me focus on topics that are important. I have learned that it is harder than it appears. Writing requires you to complete a thought!

This year's eBook has been long in coming but when you get to write the closing it produces a fabulous feeling. So here it is.

The absolute best part of offering corporate Leadership programs through Horsemanship activities is the fact I get to continually learn and spend time with horses. "I always wanted to do something with horses when I grew up, I just never knew what that would look like."

This picture is perfect.

Nancy

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