

Free Rein an award-winner for local horse whisperer?

By Tabitha Wells

Any little girl with a love for horses might dream of one day becoming a horse whisperer – the kind of person who understands, so in depth, the minds, emotions and reactions of horses that they can speak into the animals' life and help them cross their unique barriers.

For Jessica Fobert, a local holistic horsemanship practitioner, that dream is the real deal – it's what she does.

“Just as with any other kind of animal, or people for that matter, nobody is ever perfect,” explained Fobert. “For a lot of equestrians out there, they are looking for that perfect horse, and don't necessarily realize that even if you pay a lot of money, that horse is still an animal. They have feelings, emotions, and things that go on in their heads that we don't quite understand.”

Her exposure to the equine world came during her pre-teen years. A friend of her parents owned a farm where they bred horses, and offered to allow Fobert access to the horses in exchange for mucking out stalls, cleaning the horses and helping out Sunday mornings.

“The whole experience started very minimally for me,” she said. “It was just about going out, being around them, brushing them and getting to know them. I took a couple of lessons, but most of it was self-taught. Just being around horses was really thrilling for me.” Her interest turned into a passion, and passion turned into a career. Now that career has taken her down another path by providing the opportunity to spread awareness nationally and beyond, about the impact truly understanding horses can have on these majestic animals.

“When I decided I wanted to take on a project horse, I posted an ad online,” Fobert said. “I wanted a horse that I could develop and bring through some training.”

Zoë Carter, who had to sell her two ponies due to a move to the city, approached her shortly after the ad was posted. The ponies were tame and halter-broken, but not trained.

“I wasn't originally looking for ponies, but it worked out really well, because I could try to make kids' horses out of them,” Fobert said. “I took on her ponies and invited her to come out and visit them whenever she wanted. She took full advantage of that and visited many times, watching as I would work with them.”

Soon after, Carter presented the idea to Fobert of working with horses in front of the camera, and presented her with a concept she had developed for a TV program.

Together, they built a three-segment, half-hour pilot episode for a documentary called Free Rein. The show, which takes audiences on an adventure of natural horsemanship, personal discovery, equestrian communication, and celebrates the timeless connection between horses and humans, was presented at the Equus Film Festival, and awarded the title of Best Equestrian Series.

In December, the pilot episode launched on Oasis HD – being aired nationally across Canada. The episode, which is still available online through the Oasis YouTube Channel and on FreeReinHD.com, could be the start to something bigger – if it draws in enough attention.

“Free Rein is a really good example of the variety that there is in the horse world,” said Fobert. “It's almost a culture with our horses that we have now. For a non-horse person looking in, the whole concept can be overwhelming. They see horses as fitting into one category, but there is so much more.”

She explained that with horses, the work she does is about figuring out how each individual animal communicates, what their needs and emotional needs are, and begins to work with them.

“When I started this, I kept meeting so many people along the way who were just missing that little piece; there was just that little bit of communication lacking that would stump them in their tracks and prevent them from moving forward,” she said. “A lot of times, it would get to the extreme where the horses ended up looking like they were getting abused or unfairly treated just because of that communication error.”

Much like humans, who both respond to and communicate through specific “love languages,” horses function much the same way.

“Every horse is very unique, and they have their own unique character about them,” she said. “The more you learn about their different characters, the easier it is for you to interpret what's going on and learn how to have a conversation with that horse. When a horse starts to recognize that you can appreciate that, they're willing to try harder for you.”

While the pilot episode was supported by funding through the Bell Media Fund and Oasis, they are still looking to develop the funds to take the show further. Prior to the national spot on Oasis HD, the show had already gained more than 30,000 views online.

“We're really hoping that if we get good enough feedback and enough people interested in the pilot episode, that we'll be able to get the networks interested,” Fobert explained.

Currently, the show is being filmed completely locally, in the heart of the Headwaters horse country. While the area has provided an abundance of stories through people reaching out for help with certain behaviours of their own horses, Fobert would like to see the show grow, taking them across Canada, and maybe one day into the States.

?The reason that I got into this side of horsemanship to begin with is because my goal and my passion is to see the world become a better place for horses,? she said. ?If I can educate people in the things that I know and have come to understand, and if I can help them in that way, it's going to make it a lot easier for them to feel successful and connect with their horses.?

The three-part episode is available online at <http://bit.ly/FREEREINHD> and at www.FreeReinHD.com. Anyone interested in following story updates, or Fobert's work, can follow on the show's Facebook Page, www.facebook.com/FreeReinHD

?I'm just absolutely thrilled that this has become something that a camera has been able to catch to an extent,? Fobert concluded. ?If I can share that with more people, I'm happy with that. I never dreamed of having my information reach that many people, but if this show keeps on going and we get to do more with the pilot, that's what we hope to share.?