

# Stories about Horses and EFT

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The longer I live and the older I get, the more I begin to believe that the whole of life revolves around stories. The way we act depends on the stories we tell ourselves about our life, the way we interact with other people depends on the stories we tell ourselves about them, and the way we treat our companion animals (and therefore the way they behave) depends on the stories we tell ourselves about them. Stories form the structure of our lives.

My special interest is the stories I'm told about horses, the behaviour that these stories explain or provoke and the way that tapping can alter the story to the benefit of both the horse and its owner.

I'd like to share some of these stories with you.

## JOSHUA'S STORY

Last week I worked with a lady over the phone, she had called me because a horse that was stabled along hers was having problems. One of these problems was that the horse was quite aggressive and had bitten her quite badly, which naturally had shaken her. We began to tap round the short cut points as Susan described the story of Joshua. Joshua told me how he had been bought by a family who hadn't fully understood the needs of a horse like him, bought from the stud that bred him and a horse that was destined for success in the show ring. All the time Susan described the story, we tapped at least a full round on each new fact, sometimes a little longer if it felt there was strong emotion involved in the telling. Susan told me how sometimes Joshua would be left without a rug in the winter, kept a little short of food and worked in a saddle that didn't quite fit him. These things were not done to him because his owners were cruel, heartless people, only that they didn't really understand Joshua. Gradually his behaviour deteriorated until his owner's daughter didn't want to ride him anymore, and another family took over his care. His behaviour improved to some extent, but he still appeared angry and defensive, especially around food.

We began to talk directly to Joshua- *even though you were left in the field when it was wet and cold, you are a stunning horse. Even though they didn't understand what you needed, you are a gorgeous looking horse. Even though they made you really angry because they just didn't know enough, you are great horse.*

Susan then moved on to talk as if she was Joshua, and we began to offer Joshua some slightly more positive versions of his story.

*Even though I was cold and wet and muddy, they just didn't know I needed something better, and Charlotte and Susan both do their best for me now. Even though I was hungry, I always get enough to eat now and love going to shows with Charlotte. Even though I'm sometimes angry at people, maybe the way I get angry at them isn't helping either them or me, maybe I could try a different way because I'm a cool horse really.*

The last full round I had a mental picture of a horse, stood in his stable with his ears slightly out sideways, looking a little perplexed!

Susan said that she felt a warm glow had enveloped her and Joshua and we tapped a round or two on holding onto the feeling and letting the cold hard feeling go. We both felt that the energy had altered and Susan could see Joshua being calm and friendly with people.

We finished up the phone call, and I promised to do some tapping for Joshua by proxy later that evening. I began by tapping a picture of Joshua in his stable, still enveloped in his warm glow. He looked calm, content and relaxed. I took the picture back to when he was first purchased from the stud, and immediately, he became agitated and angry.

*Even though they took me away from everything I'd known, I know I'm a special horse. Even though I deserve better than this, I'm a special horse. Even though it's ok for those fat woolly ponies to be ignored like this, don't they know that I'm **Special**? Even though my life has turned upside down and I was always told I was Special, they just don't understand that I need more than this, because I'm a superb horse. Even if they don't really understand me, surely they can see I'm special? Even though I'm APPALLED at my circumstances, and really feel angry at how life has turned out, I know I'm a special horse. Even though I get angry when I think what my high expectations led me to believe I can now accept that these people only did what they thought was right. Even though I expected life to be better than it was and I was so appalled when it wasn't what I thought it should be, these people were only doing what they thought was best, and people in my life now are trying hard to get it right.*

I felt it was fine to leave it here, as Josh had begun to think of a 'reframe' and was happy to leave him 'thoughtful' as he was whilst tapping with Susan. I had no perception of him as a nasty, viscous horse, just as one whose expectations of his future had radically altered, due to changes of circumstances. Susan had told me that, surprisingly, he was always really well behaved in the show ring – but now it made perfect sense! He was **made** to show off in the show ring, his whole upbringing had been geared towards the primping and preening necessary to show, whereas many horses really HATE this sort of life, especially if it is forced on them after an upbringing involving freedom and a lack of fuss.

From this one session, Joshua's story is much improved. He is far less aggressive, although he still sometimes flicks an ear as if to lay them back, or twitches a leg as if he thought about kicking – he now very rarely follows through. He went out hunting on the first day off the season and behaved impeccably – in the words of his first owners, who didn't know we had had done some work for him. They were impressed that Joshua had changed, despite not knowing how! Hopefully Susan will continue to tap for him, for her distress at the bite he gave her, and his story will now have many chapters telling of his good behaviour.

## FLEUR'S STORY

Fleur is a home-bred youngster, now four years old, who has been kept in way many horses would envy! She has been kept in a secure herd, still grazes with her mother and brother and other long term friends, she has had very little confinement and has been allowed, if not encouraged, to have opinions about her routine and daily activities. For example, throughout last winter the whole herd was kept overnight in a large open barn with ad lib access to hay. On most days I would turn up with their breakfast, then throw a waterproof rug onto some of the more delicate horses and put the horses out, one at a time into one of two fields. Some mornings Fleur would not stand still for her rug and would continue to walk off as I approached her with it. Traditional horsemanship would suggest that either I tied her up or held her, to enable the rug to be fitted, or that Fleur was being 'disobedient' and to correct her by working on her 'respect' issues. What I did was to reflect that fleur was telling me in her own way that she didn't want a rug on today and I would shrug and tell her she'd regret it if it did as forecast and rained later! Some days she would get wet and muddy, some days the forecast would be incorrect and she would have a few hours with a lovely winter sun on her back. Some days she would stand at the junction of the two fields and insist she would rather go left or right. Mainly she went where I told her, but if for any reason she refused, I would put her in the field she wanted. Tradition would have this as a dangerous move, which would have the horse 'walking all over' the handler, and calling all the shots, I tended to see it as Fleur communicating her wishes, and in this instance at least, I had no problem with fitting in with them.

All this is a long winded way of explaining that Fleur is quite used to the scenario where humans ask her to do a desired action and she is allowed to have an opinion about whether she does it or not. This summer it was decided she should be started under saddle. On the fourth day, tacked up and ready to go, half way between barn and school, Fleur stopped and as far as I could guess, communicated that she been there every day and really, she didn't want to do it again today.....My strategy for this situation has varied as to my mood, but on the BEST days – luckily increasing with my continued use of EFT on myself! – I would stand and wait for Fleur, trying to use passive persistence to communicate 'thank you for letting me know what you want, but unfortunately today, it is not possible and you must accept my opinion in this instance'. I was not sure if that was communicated, but that was my intention, and horses are great at reading intention!

The longest Fleur had ever made me wait was about 8 minutes, the first time I had done it, now she rarely makes me stand for more than a couple of minutes. It occurred to me I might as well tap while waiting. For some reason I struggled to come up with any sensible words so in their absence, I made some pictures in my head, of Fleur cantering in circles and having a bit of a leap about, then pictures of her grazing in the field, then a brief picture of her cantering on the lunge, then back in the field, whilst all the time tapping. I had not got beyond the collar bone point, when the rope went slack and Fleur strode out beside me. We walked and trotted on both reins then I asked for canter – Fleur having fun by having a small buck and a play, then a short canter on the other rein – perfect, then back to the first rein, perfect calm transition and a full circle of canter.

I told her how good she was and lead her out of the school, towards the barn, as she slowed down I remembered I'd said she could STRAIGHT back into the field, so stripped her tack off in the lane and put her out. This was the first time I had played with 'the stories I tell my horse' but this had a major

influence on how I now deal with my horses and the improvements in their behaviour have often been dramatic.

#### ZAC'S STORY

Zac is a gorgeous pony, about 14 hands and 19 years old. He is at loan on the yard where I keep my horses and I teach some lessons on him. He's so good with the kids and always aims to please, he always coughs when he first goes into trot, just to clear his throat, Maybe he has a dust allergy because he is worse in winter but it doesn't quite go away in summer either. It's difficult to do the normal 'cure' for dust allergy i.e. damp down his hay, as all our horses are kept as a herd with ad lib hay from hay feeders. However, Zac is bottom of the pecking order and is 'Billy no mates' so finds eating hay in close proximity to other horses difficult. He always grazes on the outskirts of the herd.

The Vet had checked him several times but didn't seem to think the cough was a problem, his opinion was that, as long as Zac was well in himself, and the cough didn't get any worse, then it was 'just something Zac did'. However, a small part of me worried that we should be doing something more for Zac, as Zac worked so willingly for us.

I remembered that the proceeding week I had taken one of the children out for a hack, and sent her and Zac up a steep hill at trot, and he hadn't coughed at all. Maybe he was bored of doing quiet lessons in the school. I mused that although Zac had a very expressive trot and a great jump, he spent most of his time doing lessons for small children and novices because he was so sensible and predictable. Maybe Zac would like to do more cantering, galloping, hacking and jumping? Maybe he was bored in his work?

As I tapped with these issues, I tried to see a scenario where Zac would be more integrated with the rest of the herd, and having fun on his lessons. By tapping to the end of the story, I found it much easier to visualise him socialising in the herd and enjoying his work and really felt things had changed somewhere! Since then, Zac has been grazing much closer to the other horses and seems much happier, cheerfully pointing his toes as he trots about and much less coughing! Who would have thought that Zacs cough was more about his social inadequacies and his boredom with his ridden work than with any medical issues? By tapping whilst re-writing his story to include descriptions of him being an energetic and capable pony, accepted by his herd members, his whole life has improved!

These are just a few of the stories I've worked with recently, and I'm sure there are many parallels we can draw between horses, other companion animals and people. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to consider how you tell your own story, to yourself and others and how you tell the story of your pets, particularly if they have been neglected or abused. No animal wants to be permanently labelled as 'abused' and by telling and retelling the story this way, you give the animal no choice but to continue life in that role. Tapping is the only way I have found to overcome the past by re-writing the tale with a happy ending. And after all, isn't a happy ending what we are ALL striving for?