

## **Fyre on the Mountain**

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My deep affection for horses started in childhood when I met my first horse and learned to ride at summer camp. It wasn't until I came to Colorado and began volunteering at a local therapeutic riding center that my love affair with horses really blossomed. And, it was during my involvement with an equine assisted psychotherapy session, that the healing power of horses impacted me at a spiritual level. I connected with the sentient nature of the horse and was moved to make healing with horses my life's work.

By divine guidance, I came upon the Touched by a Horse website. Through tears of joy, I felt a sense of knowing that I had to become certified in the Equine Gestalt Coaching Method. The method is experiential, involving the horse as an active partner with the coach in the client's exploratory process. The integrative approach of the equine's interaction, combined with positive coaching, somatic awareness, guidance, and Gestalt methodology, assists the client in examining their life with a focus on designing a positive future. Clients participate in ground-based activities concurrent with Gestalt experiments designed to help them connect with emotions and process feelings, behaviors, and patterns. The intended outcome for the client is clarity and closure.

Later that day, I told my husband that I had filled out the TBAH application and was going to get certified. I started in the very next class that July. By September, I had begun going

to CORE trainings, weekend intensives during which I was learning the methodology, experiencing the healing firsthand, and learning to coach the method.

I would come home after a CORE totally exhausted and never feeling more fulfilled, amazed and emotionally moved by what had occurred during the weekend. I did my best to find the words to describe how incredibly wise the horses were and the healing power those sentient beings had.

“Wow! That sounds really interesting” he would reply.

I knew he wanted to understand, yet he wasn't getting the magnitude of it at all. I loved him for being open to getting it and for his total support of me. As it happened, he did come to understand the TBAH work, but not through my attempts to explain it. An event occurred that was so profound, it forever changed my husband's understanding of, and appreciation for, the work.

It was early the next fall when it happened. My husband is a first responder in service to our small mountain community. It is not uncommon for him to be out late or to be called out to critical incidents that occur in our town. He came home that evening looking completely different. His body language told me that something significant had happened. There was an expression on his face that I had never seen before. When he made eye contact with me, I could see that he was trying hard to control his emotions. And I could see them clearly—not only in his eyes, but also in his face and body. My husband was visibly moved!

It took a while for him to compose himself and begin to share what he had experienced that day. “I was touched by a horse today,” he said. “An experience the likes of which I have never had, nor witnessed before, and it has forever changed me.” He went on to recall the events

that had occurred that day. Moved by the powerful emotions the experience had generated, he was meticulous in the sharing of every detail.

What follows is a story about a horse, told by my husband; what he witnessed that day, and what has happened since. It changed our lives forever—just as it did for all those present that day.



As a first responder for our small mountain town, I had received a page from dispatch, directing me to respond to a code black, which refers to a dead body. When you live and work in a small community, you're bound to have a connection to everyone there. So when I received that page, I knew I would be dealing with the death of someone familiar to me. It's times like these that make serving as a first responder emotionally challenging. Try as I might to shield myself from the emotional and psychological impact of a crisis situation, I never come away from such an experience unscathed. There would be unanswered questions for me to attempt to resolve. Everything at the scene must be examined and documented for future reference. Evidence would need to be collected and preserved if there was a question of foul play. I would prepare a detailed written report documenting all the facts of the case. And of course, the community would respond to its collective loss, including planning and preparing for the opportunity to bid farewell to someone known to them. As I drove to the scene, I thought about what I could say that would somehow ease the pain of losing a family member, friend, or neighbor. Those words escaped me.

Upon arrival, I was informed by law enforcement that the body was found inside a detached garage on the secluded residential property. I turned to see the sister of the deceased

standing alongside the driveway, and my heart sank in my chest when we made eye contact. It was my responsibility to make the death notification. What could I say or do that would bring some modicum of peace to a family member in that time of crisis? I was struck by my limitations and left with a feeling of emptiness and inadequacy.

Before that dreaded notification could happen, I needed to secure the scene and assist the coroner with his investigation and the removal of the body from the garage. It was a particularly difficult task because I knew that the man who had died was the only living relative his sister had left in her life. With great reverence and respect, we placed the body on a gurney and secured it in place next to the coroner's vehicle. His sister remained across the driveway, sobbing in anguish over the unexpected loss of her brother. Grief is pervasive and tears at the very fabric of one's heart. What mortal can change the course of such suffering and fill that void with hope to go forward? That task requires a spiritual intervention done by a spiritual being.

Conversations were happening amongst the other police and fire first responders. Then time seemed to stop as silence settled upon the scene. I looked up and saw a horse making its way down the mountain and out of the woods, and he seemed to be walking with a purpose as he came down the driveway. The horse had a disheveled, unkempt look about him. His mane resembled dreadlocks. Clearly, it had been some time since his hooves were visited by a farrier. Although sorely lacking in basic care and thin in stature, this horse projected a regal presence. He held his head high as he made his way towards his destination. All eyes were fixed on that horse, and not a word was spoken. Everyone there watched the horse walk right up to the deceased man's sister and place his muzzle gently on her chest, directly over her heart. I saw a look of confusion flash across her face. That same look rapidly appeared on the faces of everyone else there.

My chest tightened and tears came to my eyes as I realized what was happening. Everything my spouse had shared with me about the mystical and spiritual capabilities of horses came flooding through my mind. Here was Equus, man's partner over the course of thousands of years, reaching out to once again help and heal a human. In that moment, I was confident in my belief that I was witnessing an event that, heretofore, had never been a part of my consciousness. I had an awareness that this horse had felt the energy of emotional pain and loss emanating from the heart and soul of this grieving relative and, being moved by empathy and compassion, was drawn to her. The horse was not doing this as a result of training or conditioning. As an equine, it was a natural, spiritual response to the emotional suffering of a human being. There was a God-like quality reflected in the essence of this sentient creature. To create space for his work to occur, I requested that everyone remain in place and allow the horse free rein.

I approached the man's sister, and as I did, I saw the horse rubbing its muzzle on her chest and moving its nose up and down the length of her body. I recalled hearing from Jaclyn how horses could open chakras and bring balance and harmony back to troubled individuals. Was that what this horse was doing?

Once I arrived next to her, the horse stopped his work. He seemed to have paused so I could share what I knew in my heart to be true. He was there for *her*. He was there to help bear the pain of her loss and to reassure her that her brother was in a good place. Choking back my feelings of empathy for this man's sister and a profound sense of gratitude towards the horse, I told her what my wife had wanted me to understand about the healing abilities of horses: She could lean on Fyre. She could give her feelings of hopelessness and helplessness to him. She could accept his gift of calm and peace. And she could trust in his message that she was not

alone, for we are all one—humans, animals, and all of nature connected energetically. Fyre sensed the energy of a soul departed and a loved one left behind in emotional pain.

I watched as her crying subsided and she embraced Fyre's neck. He responded by wrapping his head and neck around her. There they stood, hugging each other. She surrendered her grief and angst to him, and Fyre infused her with the strength to endure. Fyre was patient, allowing her all the time she needed to seek equilibrium. Once I shared my understanding of what was happening, he continued his work, balancing chakras and grounding her to the earth. Silence continued amongst the crowd. When Fyre was satisfied that she had found her emotional strength and balance, he turned and walked towards the body!

Stop for a moment and visualize this: A horse who had materialized from deep within the woods, who had gone right up to the grieving sister, singling her out from all those who were present, was now heading directly towards the remains of the deceased. Fyre approached the body demonstrating what I felt to be a distinct "knowing." He seemed to know who it was, what had happened, and where the essence of that man was at that time. It was as if he could see beyond what was there, beyond our consciousness. I felt that he had a message for all of us: What we were seeing was not the end, but a transition to a new beginning.

We all stood there and watched as Fyre walked up to the gurney. He stood there for just a second before placing his muzzle on the deceased man's chest. He let it rest there for a while, then he raised his head and bobbed it twice in reverence to the man's departed soul. Were they communicating? Did Fyre "hear" that the transition was complete and that the man was at peace? Could he "see" the whole picture, including when the two loved ones would once again be together? It sure looked and felt that way to me! When Fyre seemed satisfied that his work was

complete, he turned away and slowly began his ascent back up the mountain, eyes fixed straight ahead as he disappeared into the woods.

All those present that day during Fyre's visit commented that they had never seen or heard of a horse behaving in such a way. The collective emotions of the group were palpable.

I continued talking with the woman who had just lost her brother. I shared all the information I could recall from Jaclyn about the spiritual capabilities of equines. Because of my wife's training, her work done in partnership with these sentient beings, and her willingness to share that information with me, I was able to recognize what Fyre had been called to do. He had brought the woman to a place of emotional healing by grounding her and raising her vibrational energy level. He had brought calm to a chaotic situation. He was operating on his instincts—a divine gift possessed by all horses. And it had been his choice to be there in support of her.

My life has forever been changed by this experience gifted to me by Fyre. In that moment, I was touched by a horse.

When I shared this story with my spouse, she wanted desperately to meet this horse. Some investigative work on my part led to identifying his owner and residence. I recognized the name of the elderly woman who owned him and asked my wife if she would like to pay a visit to Fyre. She enthusiastically replied that she would, so I reached out to Fyre's owner and requested a meeting.

The day of our visit, we made our way up the mountain, arriving at the beginning of a dirt road that was heavily rutted and covered with loose rocks and overgrowth. Gingerly, we trekked up to a small cabin. The cabin was lacking a front door and parts of the roof were conspicuously missing. We could see the remnants of a wood stove that sat in the exposed corner of the room with ashes aglow in its belly.

We were greeted by the gray-haired woman who lived there with her equine companion, Fyre. She was dressed in what appeared to be a pajama top and bottom, sweat socks, and worn slippers. She had layered multiple threadbare sweatshirts and a tattered jacket on herself in defense against the cold. Anyone could see that any attempt at personal hygiene and self-care had long been abandoned in favor of survival. Yet, despite the difficult living conditions, she was pleasant in her demeanor and welcomed us with a smile.

Jaclyn introduced herself and explained her interest in Fyre. “I am pursuing certification as an equine gestalt coach and would like to know if Fyre has a desire to partner with me for the purpose of helping humans heal.”

His owner admitted that it had been hard to provide for him and that she wanted for Fyre to have enough food and shelter. It was obvious to us that those words were extremely difficult for her to speak and that they came directly from her heart. We sensed that Fyre was the reason she continued to survive her meager existence on that mountain without having her own adequate provisions and shelter. Years earlier, she and Fyre had forged a bond of love and affection that transcended their physical and environmental hardships. It was as if a spiritual marriage had occurred between human and equine. They had become one. Gazing out towards the pasture with an expression of love radiating from her face, she gave her blessing to Jaclyn to have a conversation with Fyre about a possible partnership. So, Jaclyn went off to find Fyre.



I found Fyre in a makeshift pasture adjacent to the cabin. There were no gates or barriers restricting him from being at liberty anywhere on that mountain. He remained there because he wanted to be there. When I approached, Fyre greeted me by making eye contact. I sensed he had



something in mind, and in that next moment, he invited me to follow him down through the woods to a clearing past the ravine. I saw a tree stump in that clearing, and I felt it was there that he wanted me to sit. I settled on that stump, and Fyre began to nibble on what little roughage was available.

I sent Fyre mental pictures of my work and how partnering with a horse completes the process. I told him how much I admired him and thanked him for his compassionate work at the death scene. I told him I was in need of an equine partner to do the work and asked him directly if he would like to partner with me?

Fyre turned his head and riveted his eyes on me. I heard his response loud and clear in my mind. "No. I already have a partner." He told me that he wasn't at all worried about himself and that he already had a human partner whom he had no interest, whatsoever, in leaving. Though emaciated and with nothing to eat and standing on barren ground, he was operating from a place of peace and serenity. He made it perfectly clear that he would prefer to die from starvation than abandon his human soul mate, whom he felt would perish without him.

I was in the presence of an angelic being whose behavior was comprised of selfless acts of kindness towards humans. I thanked him for taking the time to meet with me, and with Fyre following close behind me, headed back to the cabin. When we returned to the cabin, Fyre positioned himself next to his partner. I shared Fyre's decision to remain on the mountain with her, and I pledged to do whatever I could to help with their challenging circumstances.

I was never given the chance to act on that pledge. Shortly after that visit, the authorities became involved in the welfare of both Fyre and his owner. Fyre was taken to a horse rescue and his owner was put in contact with a social services worker.



What Fyre did impacted us at a core level, and we had long conversations about what we desired for him in relationship to us. What we felt could be described as a compulsion to take on the responsibility of being guardians for him. Fyre already occupied a part of our hearts, and we committed to making him a part of our herd. Acting on those feelings, we made contact with the horse rescue housing Fyre and scheduled a visit to discuss his future with us. We had decided that our only purpose was to give this beautiful spirit a forever home.

When the scheduled day came, we arrived at the rescue with much excitement and anticipation. Joy rushed through our hearts as we entered his space and he saw us. Fyre came from literally acres away to greet us with sniffs, nose kisses, and an invitation to be with him. It felt wonderful to be in contact with and feel the connection to him. After exchanging energy and affection, as well as the pleasure of being in one another's presence, Fyre turned and headed in the direction of the herd. On his way, he stopped and looked back at us one more time as if to say "I know you. I will remember you." Our hopes soared with the thought that Fyre had remembered us.

At that time, we were told by the trainer at the rescue that Fyre had multiple psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems due to his extreme isolation on that mountain. He was also dealing with multiple physical issues. They thought it questionable that he could ever get to a place where he could be adopted. The trainer believed that Fyre would most likely spend the remainder of his life at the rescue. Hearing this made our spirits come crashing down. Could spending the rest of his days at the rescue really be his fate? In that

moment, we made the decision that such a destiny would not befall Fyre. We told the trainer that our commitment to Fyre was to see him come to our home, and we asked what we needed to do to make that happen.

The trainer advised that we should see what could be accomplished with him at the rescue over time. So we waited patiently, continuously petitioning the universe for some indication that Fyre was making progress towards coming home with us. Almost two years later, we heard those magic words from the trainer: “Fyre is ready.” The staff at the rescue were now confident that he could make the transition to a new family. And, we heard about a new development.

True love was contributing to Fyre’s improvement. A beautiful, sweet, nine-year-old Quarter Horse mare named Arrow had captured his heart at the rescue. Arrow was having a calming effect on Fyre and contributing to his sense of safety and security. We were told by the trainer that in an ideal world, Arrow would accompany Fyre to his new home to make it a smooth transition. And to the universe we said “So mote it be!”

Fyre captured our hearts with his compassion and kindness. Witnessing and remembering his demonstration of unconditional love led us to seek him out at the horse rescue. We have joyfully become guardians for Fyre and Arrow, and they both will be coming home soon. Fyre will have the option to do the equine Gestalt coaching work if he so chooses, and we will honor him for all that he has already contributed to this world. We too live in the mountains. So when he and Arrow come home, Fyre will once again be on the mountain!

Jaclyn Manzione, MS, is a certified EGCM coach. She provides professional equine assisted coaching to clients of a nonprofit organization serving homeless, displaced youth in crisis. Jaclyn helps clients heal through a powerful relationship with her equine partners. Her goal is to bring the traumatic experiences of her clients to clarity, closure, and peace.

Jaclyn has a Master of Science degree in clinical physiology and is a Reiki Master. She is certified as an Integrative Therapist through the Urban Zen Integrated Therapy Program (New York). She is the board Secretary of a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited therapeutic riding facility. Jaclyn is the founder and CEO of the Xanthus Equine Gestalt Center, LLC.

G. Thomas Manzione, PhD, LPC, CAC III is a licensed and certified mental health clinician with over twenty-five years of experience as both a psychotherapist and chief administrator for various mental health organizations. His clinical background includes treating adolescents, adults, and families challenged by psychosocial and mental health issues. He is known for his work with both forensic clients and clients with co-occurring disorders. Dr. Manzione is a PATH Intl. certified Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning.

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