

Weeklong Clinic Report ***Crissi Tomlinson, Loveland, CO***

July 10-14, 2006

Zephyr and Crissi

July 10

Feel, timing, blending, balance, breath.

Goal is to ride from our centers.

Saddle fit/biomechanics with Dr. Dave

Want to work on for the clinic: softness (mine and Zephyr's), awareness and timing (mine!), jumping, canter to trot transitions, having fun.

Learned today with the centering exercises that our bodies intuitively know what is going on before our minds do. Want to work on trusting that first feeling and not over-analyzing it.

July 11

Riding from/being in our center happens all the time and then we bring it to our horses. It is not something we turn on and off.

"As soft as you can be may not be as soft as you want to be."

Mark asked that I focus on less thinking, and more feel. (geez, ME?! Over think??)

There is no difference between our teaching, learning or riding with a group or by ourselves. There is no difference between our lives and our horsemanship.

Muscle = strength, but power comes from softness.

Asked Mark, after watching him help with a bridling issue what the difference in behavior was when a horse was in pain and objecting to something, and when they just didn't understand. He said that a pain response will be bigger than a resistance/not understanding. Don't get caught up in the horse's drama, pursue one thing until they understand. So often we get sidetracked by our horse's response to something, instead of helping them to understand the one thing we want.

Also asked Mark about a gaited horse I had seen, whose owner wanted help with his pacing. Mark said that he usually asks how the horse moves by himself out in pasture. If

he paces out there, he is probably "married" to the gait, meaning, that it will be more difficult to ask him to change that. If he moves in another way while at the trot, we could probably find a way to let that come through with the rider. What struck me about this, is the same thread we had started talking about on Monday: there is no difference between any of this stuff we do with our horses, or ourselves. If we see something happening when a horse is free to move how he likes, why would it be much different when we are on them?

My goals today with Zeph were to be aware when he checked out (to feel it) and just ride like I do at home. I wasn't sure where he was going to be today, so I approached him as though we were at home. He came out of his stall a little rushed, and on the way over to the trailer, I did the same leading work with him that we did in Arroyo Grande in March. Within minutes, he was settled and leading fine. He stood tied quietly, whether or not there was another horse at the trailer, I groomed and saddled him up then bridled him, which he also did quietly. I took him over to the fence, climbed up and he walked up beside me and stood quietly until I got on, and waited until I was ready to move off. All morning, he was WITH me-not once did I feel him check out. And I made it a point to notice where I felt any braces in him or myself, on feeling the spirals from him and mine to him, feeling his breathing, his footfall, the sun on us, the breeze that cooled us off. We worked on transitions in different gaits, which he did with softness. We went over cavaletti, worked on some lateral work, walked over and stood by the cows (which he had never seen before in his life) quietly. He stood still while I watched others work with their horses. Mark rode over, and I remarked that after three years, Zeph was the horse I could now do things with. Mark said that it was all about consistency, and when Zeph saw the same Crissi show up day after day he could start to rely on that. He said that I didn't need to be at home for Zeph to be calm, because I had become his home. I about cried. I asked Mark when he could tell when a horse had reached his threshold, when they had done everything they could do inside of themselves. He said that they quit trying. And then he said that Zeph has been trying for me for years, that he hadn't ever quit. He also remarked that the three years it took to get here with Zeph was time well spent. The whole day was one filled with quiet for both Zeph and I. It was a connected day, one that I saw and felt just how soft Zeph and I could be together. I told the group at the end of the day that I had underestimated my horse, that I was happy that he had found some calmness inside, that I was impressed with how far he had come. Mark interjected that he would have only been "impressed" had he thought Zeph couldn't of done this. It got me to thinking about how I could miss a potential in a horse by seeing them only through my judgment of their behavior, instead of believing that they could work through an issue and come out on the other side of it just fine.

July 12

"When we shut the door on an option, we have shut the door on an opportunity for the horse to fix himself."

Winning and losing sets up an adversarial relationship.

"We have a different mentality when we are on the horse than when we are off." This started a discussion about how we, as humans, are emotionally/mentally built to operate only one "machine," [ourselves]. When we get in a car, or on a horse, etc we are now operating THAT machine, instead of the one we are designed to use (us). The trick is, to be the same on or off our horse--operating our own machine while riding.

Thinking is always appropriate, **overthinking** is where we get into trouble.

Holding our breath weighs the horse down, makes it difficult for them to move.

"Doing nothing is not the same as not doing anything."

As I fed Zeph this morning, he was pacing in his stall. Instead of walking up and throwing him the hay, I stopped and waited. About a minute passed, and then he stopped, with his head toward the corner where I usually threw the hay. I started walking, he started pacing. I stopped. He paced for another minute, and then stopped in the same place. I walked toward him, he shifted his feet, but didn't move. By the time I got to his stall, he had his head down and was quiet.

Zeph and I were quiet again today. No trouble with anything. Mark brought the cattle out while everyone saddled up, and since Zeph and I were waiting outside of the arena, I let him take a good look as Mark moved the cattle back and forth. He was interested; ears up and breathing evenly. When all of us got into the arena, Mark had Zeph and another horse who hadn't ever seen cattle walk about thirty feet behind the two people who were on experienced cow horses. They both did great; interested and alert.

In the afternoon, Zeph and I went to playing with jumping with Kathleen. She had me inhale toward the jump, exhale over, inhale to the next jump and exhale over. We were working on a small cross rail set about 4 canter strides apart. It was really interesting working like this, and getting my breath in sync with his locking onto a jump, and the takeoff over it. I remarked to Kathleen that I felt a "jolt" from him when he locked onto a jump, and thought that this was excitement. Mark commented that he thought I was holding my breath through the turn to the first jump, and the Zeph, feeling me holding my breath AND seeing the jump had him questioning if I REALLY wanted to go there. Mark had me add an exhale through the turn before Zeph locked onto the jump, in addition to the breathing through the jumps. Combined with timing the breathing through the jump pattern, this made a huge difference for Zeph. As we came through the turn, I exhaled while looking at the jump and when we turned for it, Zeph was much softer. Everything got very quiet, steady and rhythmic. The last set of jumping of the day, we approached at the trot, landed at a canter (after Kathleen had said to start thinking of the canter **before** the first jump) and took the second jump after four canter strides. It felt flawless, Zeph and I knit together in a tapestry of breath and movement.

We were the last ones in from the field. Zeph and I had been standing quietly, and continued to stand as the last rider headed in. He was not the least bit concerned about being the only horse out there. I couldn't even feel any movement in him; he was completely still until I asked him to move, and then we moved off together.

July 13

"All horses are just looking for direction. 'Just tell me what you want to do.' "

Look at things realistically.

It is just behavior that our horse's offer up; it is not good or bad. We quit thinking once we are frustrated or mad. There aren't any shortcuts with our horses (our ourselves for that matter). Things have to run their course. No matter how fast we want them to go, they will only progress at their own pace.

Movement is movement--keep options open because even though we would like forward, there is also sideways, back, etc.

You get more done by going slowly than by going quickly.

Redirect our horse's anxiety, instead of rewarding it (i.e. petting a horse after he spooks, thinking we are calming him).

Physiologically, a horse's heart rate will drop when his head goes down.

Softness is when nothing is an issue and everything is available. Everything that is available to the horse, is also available to you. However, we also offer that from ourselves, to our horse.

Most horses are born symmetrical, it is only after we influence them that they develop a dominant side.

"Softness starts in your heart."

Cow work again this morning. Zephyr remains quiet, soft and responsive. His backing up is noticeably softer, as is his turn on the hindquarters and stop. He is walking with all four feet square on the ground, and I feel him completely in his body, and enjoying the cows.

In the afternoon we again work with Kathleen on jumping, especially my timing the breath with Zeph's approach and take off. I find that my breathing is off, and Kathleen caught me breathing, but only into my chest instead of down into my belly. So the next time I went around, I put my right hand on my belly, to make sure I felt it expand and contract. The jumps were much different; Zeph felt as though he took off and landed more softly. His patience with me is humbling.

Also worked with Kathleen on the left lead canter. Showed her the transition from trot to canter on the left (Zeph's stiffer side). Her first observation was that my cue was too long: "c-a-a-a-a-a-a-nter." Instead of "canter." She also noticed I was dropping my gaze down onto Zeph's withers, which pretty effectively weighted his front end. I laughed (caught again!) and said that I had also been thinking "Don't pick up the right

lead." (As an aside, Mark had told me awhile ago that horse's don't think in negatives. I had asked him why one of my geldings kept wanting to go back to the barn, even after I thought we had worked through that issue. He asked me what I was thinking when we were headed out on the trail. I replied, "Don't go back to the barn." He said all that my horse heard was, "Go back to the barn.")

Zeph and I tried the transition again to the left, and again he picked up the right lead. Kathleen said that she thought I was also weighting my left seat bone more than my right. We tried picking up the left lead canter again, and again Zeph came through with the right, though I did feel the transition come through more balanced and smooth. Kathleen then had me trot and work on feeling when Zeph was on the right or left lead in the trot. This was my opportunity to stop thinking and feel what was going on in Zeph's body. I felt that he is most always on the right lead, with only a stride or two of the left lead coming through. After having felt the left lead come through in the trot, I tried twice to ask for the canter, and twice he came through with the right lead again. So we went around once more, and I felt the left lead being offered before his left leg came through--and I don't even know how to explain that one. So I cued, and he rolled into a nice left lead canter. We went around in a large circle for a couple of laps, and then stopped.

Talked with Mark briefly about weight underside; used this idea when asking Zeph for softness. I would think about the bottoms of my forearms being heavy, like they had weights attached, but keep everything else relaxed. Zeph would respond, every time, with lowering his poll and softening to the bit.

July 14

We worked with cows in the morning, taking them through an obstacle course. It was interesting to feel how the gaps in their energy; where they were spilling out, and where they were too compressed. Zeph had a lot of fun and felt very soft throughout. I felt him really offering me everything that was inside of him, and it felt natural for us to share that space together. I focused on feeling where he was, and not thinking too much...which didn't serve me when Mark told us the pattern for working the cows, because that left my head in short order. Speaks to me about the balance between thinking and feeling.

After Mark put the cows away, we all went back out to the field. There were three of us who wanted to play with jumping, so Mark gave us some things to work with. He sent Zephy and I off, and after we went over the jumps the first time, incorporating everything we had been doing the past three days, Mark had us try again, this time with the thought, "There is no jump." Zeph and I felt like we floated over together. It was like being in the ocean; a gentle rise and fall of motion, a riding of the swells. We came back and Mark asked me how that felt. I told him the above and he repeated, "There is no jump." I replied, "Only a cue where to put your energy." (I got a big kick out of this whole exchange, because one of my Aikido teachers told me the exact same thing: there is no jump. He says that whether it is a jump or working with your partner, all of these external things are cues where to put your energy.)

The next time Zeph and I went around, Mark had me think about extending Zeph's stride. Don't cue for it, just think about his stride lengthening, picture his left shoulder moving into a space about a foot in front of it, like a boat with a wave coming off of the bow. When we went over the jumps this time, there was a float plus a lift through his withers over the jumps, like the bow of a boat bouncing off of the waves.

Finished the day watching a couple of different horses trot and canter, and learned how to see the shortness in stride on one side or another in the front end, which cropped up as the horse having difficulty picking up the lead that was wanted. Saw how if we overlooked, or didn't know about how to feel if a horse is unbalanced through the trot (or walk, for that matter) we could mistake his **inability** to pick up a lead as a refusal, instead of the horse being physically **unable** to give it to us. I asked Mark if we could help with the canter by getting the horse more balanced in the trot, and he confirmed that. It is really exciting for me, to be able to FEEL where the horse is in his body, and set things up so that we ask at the time when he can give it. I also see how it could be easy for a horse to get worried when we ask at the wrong time, and how we can bypass that if we simply feel the information we are being given.

This whole time, most of my life, I have valued my brain more highly than my body. Valued analyzing and thinking above gaining information through feeling. These five days gave me the opportunity to realize that there is a balance, and how important it is to feel the flow of something before reacting with our brains. In just five days, there were countless opportunities to get the feel of not only my horse, but the cows, as well as the other people and their horses. I feel like there is a whole new world opened up again, and the really good news for me is that it is available to all of us, at any given time. I feel like I am seeing who Zephyr is for the first time, and that we are friends. I am seeing all of those teachers who have helped along the way, and feel thankful to every one of them-horse and human alike.