

Weeklong Clinic Report by Shannon Rae Brown, Texas

When I loaded my 4-year-old paint mare into the trailer in late July of 2005 and headed north from Texas exactly 1,000 miles to Loveland, Colorado for a week long clinic with Mark Rashid, I was looking for a new start in many ways. I had left my career as a pilot in the army just days before leaving for the clinic and was finally living my lifelong dream of working with horses. I was also looking for help with my mare who just seemed to be hanging onto something, primarily fear. I thought I was taking Roanie to help her understand how to overcome fear. However, the majority of the lessons that week needed to be learned by me, not Roanie.

Roanie had spent her life in a 70 acre pasture until she was brought in the day before I showed up to buy her and “taught” how to lead, load in a trailer, and experience a saddle all in one day. When I arrived the next day in late March of 2005, she was trembling in her stall and could not be touched. I was told she had just been “roughed up” a little the day before, but her fear continued for months. I worked with her for three months trying to help her overcome her explosive fear. It took her about a month full of late nights to decide she would begin to trust me, and I still had to work with her fear of anything that was attached to a human.

On day 2 of the clinic, I was working with Roanie on her ground manners. Mark approached us and asked “How are we doing?” I realized the answer in my head was, “Well, I’m not sure?!” but of course I said, “We’re doing OK, fine.” Then I followed up with the honest answer. “I’m not sure.” I realized in that moment that up to that point, I had assumed my mare was ‘stuck’ somewhere, but it was me who was stuck, and admitting I wasn’t sure was like lifting a weight off of my shoulders. (Of course, Mark could already see that.) I had worked so hard on getting her to trust me that I was not asking for what I wanted with appropriate focus and intention, and I wasn’t sure where I wanted to go next. It seemed I had assumed the job of carrying Roanie’s fear around for her. (In case she needed it later, I had become her bell hop. “Your baggage ma’am?”) I had placed an enormous amount of pressure on myself that I needed to succeed with this horse and my horsemanship. After all, I had just left a ‘great’ job and stepped off the diving board with my eyes closed. Guess who else I had placed an enormous amount of pressure on? Roanie. Then I had to say those words. “I am afraid to scare her and go back down that road again.” WHAT?! I was afraid and not Roanie? Mark quite simply stated, “Then don’t go back down that road. She trusts you and is waiting for your direction.” We spent the next couple of days working in the round pen, preparing her for the saddle at a later date. Roanie was still very fearful, but she got a different answer from me this time and she started really trying. I had learned I was not *really* listening to her. She would say she was afraid and I would tell her there was no reason to be afraid of me, I

wasn't going to hurt her. So she would feel the need to get louder and farther away. I wasn't listening. In a sense, I was saying "Yeah, yeah, I hear you, now let's try this again." When I started giving her a real say in the matter, she started trying.

One day while working on my groundwork I finally verbalized to Mark what I really felt about Roanie. "I really want to ride this mare and have her trust me." Mark's response was, "You will." He also left me with some very important thoughts that I am very aware of each time I work with Roanie. It is my responsibility to know how far I can take my sessions with her in order to help her overcome her fear. It is also my job to listen for her to tell me when it is time to take the next step. Now, being a very driven, goal-oriented person, I thought this guidance would make me crazy, so I was amazed that it had a calming effect on me. When we came home, I was relaxed, yet had direction. I was listening, and I mean *really* listening to my horse. I forgot about saddling her and others immediately stopped asking, "When ya gonna get a saddle on that mare?" On August 28th, I slid onto Roanie's back for the first time with just a rope halter and lead rope. I have no idea why I chose that day, but it felt like she was waiting and telling me to go ahead. She was brilliant, and I did not end up in the dirt! Sitting up there on her back I felt like I had when I was a kid, very lucky to share this secret that she and I have: TRUST. I must admit, I was overcome with emotion. Mark was right, the minute I gave Roanie a say in what we were doing, she started to offer me the world. Now, we still have a long road to go down, but I think she is thrilled that she took me to the weeklong clinic....you know, the one I took *her* to so she could get some help.