

## **Equine Communication Through Natural Horsemanship**

by Alison Barr

Every discipline of equine enthusiasts, from English to Western, dressage to ropers gathered to see Jonathan Field on Thursday, March 30 at the Hebson arena. What Field brought to every person present was a respect for the relationship that is possible between a 1100 lb horse and a human being, when that horse is waiting for the shift of hip, a turn of the head to respond because he wants to work with you not for you.

In a community that lives and breathes equine activities Field seeks to breach the gap between force and willingness and for humans to understand the horse and his instincts.

“Knowledge will lead you to become fascinated instead of frustrated when you run into a problem,” said Field as he demonstrates how his horse responds to his requests.

Field teaches based on the Pat Parelli ‘natural horsemanship’ concept.

Parelli’s website states as one of the goals “...break down the prey-predator barrier, create a language with which to communicate with your horse...” using the animals instincts and responses as a prey animal to create a synchronicity between man and horse.

Thursday evening was a demonstration to approximately 300 people of Field’s own horses and how he works with them. He and his wife Angie are on the road for 200 days this year teaching people with clinics, demonstrations and camps throughout Western Canada, helping people bond with their horses. Through his own life experiences Field has learned to communicate with his audience using humour and honesty.

“Believe me, I’m not saying I haven’t made the mistakes but from each experience I’ve learned and continue to learn,” Field laughs as he relates some of his own training trials and errors. Making those mistakes along the way has taught Field where he wants to go with his animals and how much he wants to share this knowledge with others so they can enjoy their horses and the horses can enjoy their human partners in return.

Field invited everyone to watch a group of horses, any horses and how they communicate with each other with a glance, a movement, teeth bared in warning, a lifted back leg that says “you’re too close and you’re going to get in trouble.” and that’s the communication he hopes to create between a horse and its rider, subtle but meaningful.

His philosophy starts with ground work and creating a relationship before you try and take it to their back.

“If it won’t happen on the ground, it won’t happen on the horse,” Field says as he demonstrates by moving the horse backwards, sideways, walking when he walks, stopping when he stops without the aid of any restraints. He wants the animal to be ‘with him’ mentally as well as physically before climbing on the horse’s back.

The primary concern for Field is ‘safety first’ and setting small, realistic goals before moving on to more difficult challenges.

“Be firm, fair and friendly,” were words repeated by Field throughout the evening.

There are no gimmicks, understanding comes with the realization that no matter how much training, how many clinics, how many times they’ve done this before this horse only responds because he’s willing to work with his rider.

The audience of men, women and children were quiet, leaning forward in their

seats as they watched Field gallop around the arena performing sliding stops, side passes and jumping three foot barrels — bareback with only a string around the horses neck.

“Be a student of the horses,” said Field, “it’s not magic, everyone can have it,” and for few hours everyone shared it.