

Horse of Fire: The Story of an Extraordinary and Knowing Horse

JJ Luck

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Animal lovers try varied approaches to understanding and bonding with their pets. People and animals can't converse so communication choices seem limited. Simple body language might not be an obvious choice but this technique does give important clues to animals about what humans want them to do.

Horse of Fire tells the story of a woman and her beloved horse from the horse's point of view. JJ Luck is a high-strung thoroughbred forced into retirement from racing at the young age of three because of behavior problems. Despite previous owners' failed training efforts Pruitt recognized JJ's inherent spirit beauty and intelligence and decided to buy him. A few training misadventures and near-fatal accidents for both horse and human serve to reinforce their desire to understand each other.

A lifelong lover of horses Pruitt holds a doctorate from Brown University and teaches Mechanical and Biological Engineering at UC Berkeley. Her work with JJ led to an ongoing interest in natural horsemanship and equine-guided education.

Author and horse attended their first natural horsemanship clinic to overcome a fear of jumping with her spirited horse. Pruitt learned that humans instead of the animals must correct their behavior problems. "Horses are herd animals and we rely on body language for communication" JJ says. Pruitt learned to communicate commands to him by moving in ways he understood and responded to.

The author also became educated in equine somatics which offers horses release from muscle tension just as yoga helps people relax. Once trained in this method horse and human gave public demonstrations of equine somatics. When planning their routine for the shows the author explains "We should also show JJ's movement...before and after releasing tension in his muscles so that people can see the benefit for their own horses."

Pruitt introduces new horses to the reader by explaining personality traits according to their respective astrological birth signs. She believes that both horse and human can use the energy of intuition to help them communicate. To prove this point she asks a horse psychic to help her contact her horse when she isn't there. JJ's reaction to the experience: "out of the blue an image of Fire Horse [Pruitt] came into my mind...images and questions were being presented to me."

The author achieves uneven results by anthropomorphizing the animals in her story. In their words she tells their inner thoughts and conversations with each other and humans. This dialogue may strike some readers as unbelievable but the technique does lend a sense of immediacy to the horses' difficulties as they attempt to adjust to human expectations of them. Less use of the passive voice would add vitality to this heartfelt story.

Pruitt explains the reasons behind each step in the process of equine care and training which will appeal to young adult readers eager to learn about horses. *Horse of Fire* succeeds at expressing the emotions that inform a growing bond between horse and human engaging adult readers as well.

MARGARET CULLISON (January 22, 2009)

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