

# **Training A Geriatric Horse Case Study**

Equine Psychology Course Project

Reach Out To Horses  
Holistic Horsemanship Comprehensive Program – Part I

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7/27/14

## Introduction

This paper explores the implementation of a training program designed to address the anxiety a geriatric horse exhibits when confined to an indoor space. The intention of the project is to detail and explore the following parameters:

1. Changes to a learned response (fear of confined indoor spaces). This is what the horse is to (un)learn.
2. Changes to the training program itself as it unfolds in real time and insights gained into the learning pattern of an older horse. This is what the human learns.

The subject of the training plan is a 35 year-old mare named Fancy. Fancy lives at the Zuma Rescue Ranch in Littleton, Colorado, with her paddock-mate Cookie.

This case study presents the daily activities of Fancy's training plan. The definition/intent of the labels used in the following training log are as follows:

**Plan** – Presents the training session as developed by self, approved by Jodi Messenich, and reviewed by Anna Twinney.

**Actual** – Identifies the events of the day as they actually occurred.

**Factors** – Extraneous information, events, or other considerations occurring that given day that explain the difference between the Plan and the Actual training.

**Observations** - Any reflections or descriptions from the day. Also will present any learned behavior – for both human and horse.

**Day 1, Monday 7/21/14**

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<b>AM</b> - None. <b>PM</b> - None.			The morning classroom discussion was first introduction to our assigned horses. The afternoon was spent developing the training plan as presented herein. The hand-written paper was handed to Anna Twinney after evening training session with Honeybrook.

**Day 2, Tuesday 7/22/14**

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.  <b>PM</b> – Lead with halter.	Only one half hour long, but otherwise went as planned.  Grooming and mucking paddock.	Personal issue – not being organized enough to be at the paddock at the desired time of 8 AM. Because of abbreviated morning session, I did not lead on halter as planned. Compensated by spending more time with Fancy in the evening.	

**Day 3, Wednesday 7/23/14**

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.  <b>PM</b> – Aromatherapy, lead with halter.	Mucked paddock.  No aromatherapy. But lead with halter and mucked paddock.	Did not have aromatherapy to apply to Fancy. Added additional task of cleaning/mucking paddock as a gesture of love/respect to Fancy and Cookie. Also felt this was important for the bonding process.	Adjusted for previous days' error by being prepared in the morning and being at paddock at 8 AM. Sue Forst reports a warm spot on Fancy's left front leg. She later indicates it may be coming from Fancy's heart chakra.

**Day 4, Thursday 7/24/14**

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.	Mucked paddock, brushed and groomed.	The incoming storm altered the original evening plan to lead Fancy outside of the paddock. I felt it would not be safe or wise to do so.	
<b>PM</b> - Aromatherapy, lead outside of paddock.	Mucked paddock. Stayed with Fancy in her heart space.		

**Day 5, Friday 7/25/14**

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.	Mucked paddock, brushed and groomed.		<p>Cookie is incredibly bonded with Fancy. As Fancy disappeared into the hay barn, Cookie whinnied in distress as she could no longer sense Fancy.</p> <p>She is enjoying the hand grazing and the time we spend together.</p>
<b>PM</b> - Hand graze further from paddock.	Mucked paddock. Lead Fancy on halter outside of paddock. The first time we approached hay barn entrance, she turned away. However, the second time we did so, she willingly went into the barn despite the shadows and darkness.		

**Day 6, Saturday 7/26/14**

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Observations</b>
<b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.	None.	Felt obligated to work on individual and group projects. Hence, I did not go down to the barns in the morning and I was late arriving in the evening.	<p>Jodi informs me of Fancy's history. She was brought to Zuma's as part of a hostile divorce. She and Cookie were adversarial when first introduced – to the point where Fancy forced Cookie to the ground.</p> <p>Cookie's attachment to Fancy was a strong consideration to not lead Fancy into the hay barn. Cookie was distressed and I was apprehensive to get her, or the rest of the herd agitated. Fancy is the dominant of the two and did not appear to</p>
<b>PM</b> - Feed next to indoor arena.	Mucked paddock. Lead Fancy on halter next to paddock. Did not walk her into the hay barn.		

			be troubled by their separation.
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### Day 7, Sunday 7/27/14

Plan	Actual	Factors	Observations
<p><b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.</p> <p><b>PM</b> - Feed in indoor arena doorway.</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>Mucked paddock, groomed Fancy, and observed herd dynamics.</p>	<p>Worked until 3:30 AM on group and individual assignments. Was literally too exhausted to make morning training session.</p> <p>Legal protocol; despite having a written plan to lead Fancy outside the paddock today, I felt it was best not to because of the direction given the first day of class. Without explicit verbal approval from someone with legal authority, I felt it was safest and best not to take Fancy out of the paddock.</p>	<p>Realized Cookie may be part of the solution rather than a problem to Fancy's training. Cookie could serve as an effective distraction. The revised plan is to potentially alter training to include Cookie when Fancy is led into smaller indoor spaces.</p> <p>Much time was spent observing herd dynamics today.</p> <p>I noticed stalls in the far back of the hay shed. I felt these stalls would be a quieter and safer alternative to the ones in the main barn.</p>

### Day 8, Monday 7/28/14

Plan	Actual	Factors	Observations
<p><b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.</p> <p><b>PM</b> - Feed in indoor arena next to doorway.</p>	<p>Mucked paddock. Groomed and picked Fancy's feet.</p> <p>Hand-grazed Fancy outside of paddock. We walked to the far back of the shed and she sniffed the open stall door. We then walked out to relieve the pressure, and I let her hand graze as a reward. Afterward, we walked back into the shed and this time I led her into the stall and let her hold space for a fraction of a minute. We walked out and repeated the cycle one more time.</p>	<p>Did not have a buddy to walk Cookie so I had to walk Fancy by herself.</p>	<p>Rachel is no longer assigned to Cookie.</p> <p>Cookie was initially distressed by Fancy's absence, but calmed down relatively soon. This gave me an indication I could work with Fancy without Cookie being presents. Fancy did not hesitate to walk in the barn or the stall. She was appropriately aware but not fearful.</p> <p>Because of today's events I feel she is ready to go into the stalls in the main barn.</p> <p>As of today Fancy is ahead of her training schedule.</p>

**Day 9, Tuesday 7/29/14**

Plan	Actual	Factors	Observations
<p><b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.</p> <p><b>PM</b> - Feed in indoor arena.</p>	<p>Mucked paddock. Quiet time with Fancy.</p> <p>Led Fancy to an open stall in the main barn. She sniffed the entrance and her hay (placed there as a distraction) and then we walked away. We came back a second time and I led her into the stall. She was quickly agitated (was pawing) so I led her out. On the third pass, she was put into the stall and the door was closed. When the interior stall door was opened, she would approach that, seeking release. At this point she was led outside and given a chance to hand graze. When led back a fourth time, she stood in the stall with little visible agitation.</p>	<p>Unscheduled daytime opportunity to work with Fancy proved to be vital. Having Jodi present to assist and provide input was very insightful and productive.</p>	<p>Fancy did a great job today. She displayed a high degree of willingness and patience.</p> <p>On the fourth pass into the stall, Fancy circled a little bit, but her breathing appeared to be normal. When Sophie opened the inside stall door, Fancy did not go to it (she did not seek out the escape). Rather, she stayed by me. I took this as a turning point in the training program. After 10 minutes in the stall by herself, I felt this was a very successful note to end on for the day.</p>

**Day 10, Wednesday 7/30/14**

Plan	Actual	External Factors	Observations
<p><b>AM</b> - Brush and groom.</p> <p><b>PM</b> - Feed in indoor arena, expose to stalls.</p>	<p>Mucked paddock and had a little quiet time. By class time, Cookie was led into the barn and Fancy was also given the go ahead to be moved into a barn stall. Beginning at 9 AM, Fancy spent the remainder of the day in the stall.</p>	<p>Heavy rains, Cookie being led into the barn because of her shivering.</p>	<p>Fancy was distressed by Cookie's absence and was also shivering from the cold. For Fancy's sake, the day's events could not have unfolded any better. Yesterday Fancy prepared herself by standing in the stall with relative calm. Today it was literally necessary to pull together all of the skills she previously learned to avoid potential health complications from the cold weather.</p> <p>Her performance today far exceeded anyone's expectation.</p>

Day 11, Thursday 7/31/14			
Plan	Actual	External Factors	Observations
<b>AM</b> - Brush and groom. <b>PM</b> - Feed in stalls.	TBD TBD		

Day 12, Friday 8/1/14			
Plan	Actual	External Factors	Observations
<b>AM</b> - Brush and groom. <b>PM</b> - None.	TBD TBD		

## Conclusion

First and foremost, I am extremely proud of Fancy and tremendously enjoyed working with her. This was an incredible educational experience filled with the highest degree of personal gratification.

Ultimately, there were many take home lessons from this training experience. But foremost is a degree of flexibility that was crucial to the success of this plan. This concept is best described in the Compromise and Conflict section of the class notes; "It is wise to have a plan, but foolish to fall in love with it."

Associated with the aforementioned flexibility is the insight to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities. For instance, an unassociated walk to the back of the hay barn reveals stalls that are perfect for initial exposure, or an unseasonal storm presents itself as the ultimate opportunity to stall Fancy with purposeful intent.

I did not learn the extent of Fancy's phobia until Wednesday, July 30<sup>th</sup>. This was intentional as I did not want to be biased or influenced by Fancy's past performance. As explained by Zuma staff, Fancy would spin in her stall to point she was worked up in a lather. Since this behavior never subsided, she would have to be turned back out into her paddock with a blanket.

Because of her advanced age and relatively low body fat, this was a life-threatening predicament in extreme winter conditions. The fact that Fancy can now stand in a stall all day without incident may prove to be a life-extending skill.