

Student of the Horse

LESSON #1: November 6, 2013

TEACHER: Angelica

"No matter how good a rider you are, you are going to have to use force to control your horse if he/she doesn't see you as a True Equine Leader."

I brought Angelica in from the field, groomed her and saddled her up. I was pretty excited about doing this and especially happy about riding after such a long hiatus. Angelica was her usual self, respectful on the ground, and didn't move when I asked permission to get on, i.e. she was okay with me riding her. Then, she "piaffed" most of the time, reared up, shock her head a lot and let me know that she was not happy about me asking her to go left or right and deciding on what trail we were riding. Slowing her down was a challenge so I had to tighten up on the reins. I ended up using a lot more reins than I normally would. I don't like using force when riding, even if I ride bitless, but Angie didn't see me as a leader so my boundaries, created by the reins, meant nothing to her. Twice I had to physically pull her head around in order to stop her from running off and joining the herd. No matter how much weight I put in my seat, she was not having any of it.

When a horse sees me as their leader, the same way they see their herd leader, they trust me and follow me. They don't worry about where we are going or at what speed. They don't try to make the decisions themselves and they don't try to get rid of me in the process. Because I have proven to them on the ground that I have the same "qualifications" as a herd leader and I continue to do so in the saddle, they trust me to provide food, water, shelter and safety. When a horse feels safe, they can think and be less reactive to most things that can spook them. For a horse, feeling safe is everything. As a True Equine Leader, as taught in the Relationship Riding method, earning leadership in order to make a horse feel safe is what it is all about.

Enjoy the journey!