

MUSINGS

Horses Also Deserve Our Respect and Love

Animals, no doubt, trigger our emotions and have contributed to medical knowledge and human life.^{1,2} In many respects, the horse is very peculiar. It never occurred to me the feelings and communication that can be established with it. It is extremely sensitive and clever, showing a tremendous learning capacity, especially when properly treated and taken care of.

As a kid, I loved summer vacations because frequently I enjoyed the opportunity of riding horses. Those childhood days vanished in the past until one day, as a physiology graduate student at Baylor College of Medicine, I encountered the horse as experimental model, under the guidance of Drs. Hebbel E. Hoff and Leslie A. Geddes, in laboratory exercises run at the Veterinary School of Texas A & M. It was a new perspective, rich in history and physiology.³

A third stage in my relationship with this outstanding product started out in December 1986, when my daughter Veronica (then a zootechnical engineering student) showed up with a very young motherless filly (a *huachita* in the local slang of *quechua* origin), not more than 2 months old, undernourished, scared, and facing a bleak future if left alone. "Daddy, can we keep her until we find a better place?" was Veronica's request . . . and she stayed 5 years with us!

Since her color was brown reddish, her name could not be other than *Puka* (literally "red," also in *quechua*, the still spoken language of the Incas). A white mask adorned her face. We fed her and she learned to eat essentially all sorts of food, from cookies, candies, and ice cream to apples, pears, and carrots, soon becoming quite a character in our yard and also in the neighborhood.

During the first 2 months of 1987, we gave her the antitetanus and equine encephalitis vaccines plus and oral dewormer while she started to grow fast to become a nice filly, showing quite a personality, and getting strongly attached to us, especially to me and to my daughter, clearly demonstrating once more Konrad Lorenz's imprint phenomenon. She did not like strangers around and, indeed, never was too friendly with them.

One day, I noticed a nasty bleeding bump behind one ear and, since it did not heal with medication (antibiotics and cicatrizing ointments), surgery was left as the only way out. Thus, a

sunny May 1, 1989, with the help of a local expert, she was carefully and skillfully put down lying on her left side in the piece of land where she usually stayed, the legs tied up, while my wife and I caressed her neck and talked softly into her ear. She was held with ropes by a couple of guys but she remained remarkably quiet. I infiltrated subcutaneously all around the ear with lidocaine and, by means of a thermocautery, the cyst (about 1.5 square cm and 6-mm thick) was removed. Bleeding was minimal. The pathologist reported it as a dermatofibroma. Recovery took 3 weeks, and thereafter, she was easily broken in less than 10 days.

The time for a new series of vaccine reinforcement came about and, since her behavior with the vet had been rather hostile the first time, I decided to do it myself from the top, just riding on her. It went fine. The following week, a second dose was due and I proceeded as the week before: my wife handed me over the syringe and . . . surprise . . . *Puka* said 'NO' by standing up on the hind limbs . . . obviously, she remembered the "inhumane needle prick" I had inflicted her!

The kind of communication I developed with her was outstanding: saying her name was enough to elicit a cheerful neighing, or to come by so that a rope could be placed around her neck. Many times in our house yard, she came from behind just to gently chew my shoulder. She was stolen and recovered after a 3-week search and a police adventure that deserves in itself another chapter, for it was by calling her by name that she came out of the dark place she had been hidden in.

After 5 years, we had to give *Puka* away to a neighbor who owns a wide place and several other horses. She foaled twice, is now 18, and enjoys a happy life pasturing and leading a herd of 6 or 7 other younger horses. It makes me sad visiting with her for she was a true love for me.

MAX E. VALENTINUZZI

Department of Bioengineering
Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, Argentina

References

1. Valentinuzzi ME. The serpent's tale, PACE 2003; 26(Part 1):125–126.
2. Valentinuzzi ME. Honor thy Dog, PACE 2004; 27:667.
3. Hoff HE, Geddes LA, McCrady JD. The contributions of the horse to knowledge of the heart and circulation, Conn Med, Part I, 29(11):795–800, Nov 1965; Part II, 29(12):864–874, Dec 1965; Part III, 30(1):43–48, Jan 1966, Part IV, 30(2):126–131, Febr 1966.

Address for reprints: Max E. Valentinuzzi, Ph.D., Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, Argentina. Fax: +(54)381-436-4120; e-mail: mvalentinuzzi@herrera.unt.edu.ar