

Love is the Answer

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While I was out of town I received a call from my husband. He reported that three of the horses had escaped and he finally corralled them into the arena. The others were easily haltered and led to their stalls, he said, but Shelby was a different story. Shelby is a young mustang pony who was captured by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), branded on her neck, terrorized and sold at auction. She was passed through three homes in three years before I purchased her. Rumor was that she would be euthanized if somebody didn't take her by the end of the week. Apparently, she had difficulty with trust.

I run a human development business that utilizes horses in life coaching with people of all ages. Thoughts of children who have been removed from their homes for one reason or another, who also have issues with trust, were forefront in my mind. I imagined that troubled kids such as these would be able to identify with Shelby's experiences. She could be the first step toward growth and healing for these kids.

I made the call and arrived with my trailer late that same evening. Shelby was released to settle in with my other horses. For several months she was allowed to relax without human pressure. When she was fed we tried to reach out and pet her, and finally she began to accept the attention without running away. The goal of her recovery and re-integration was to be patient and wait for her to willingly participate in our requests. She refused to wear a halter or be caught, but when the other horses were taken out of her turnout, she would whinny. That was the only time she would willingly stand still and be haltered. We had progressed to grooming and wearing a light blanket when the temperature dropped below thirty degrees. She was terrified of rope, so I even started rubbing a long rope over her body and legs while she stood quietly. This was great progress!

On this day in late January, things were different. She now stood alone in the arena and refused to be caught. She looked at me suspiciously and tense. I recognized that look from our early days together. Her distrust had returned. I spoke softly to her and tried to get close to her. Off she ran in a tantrum. This continued for hours and the cold was creeping in for the night. I hoped she would find shelter from the wind and went to bed. The next day provided another chance to work with her. Although she yielded her hind end and forehead for me, she would not let me get close if I had a rope or halter in hand. I became so frustrated that I called the tack shops and announced that anyone who can catch this mare can have her! There were no takers.

On the third day I was very agitated. The temps were dropping to the low teens. It had rained and Shelby stood there shivering and miserable. After four hours of working with her I felt helpless. I sat down and took a deep breath. What was the answer? I tried everything- even achieved "join up" with her, but she remained at a distance if I had a rope or halter in hand. Then a message popped into my head. "Love is the Answer", I heard. What did this mean? It came again, even louder. Huh. I picked up the halter and just stood in the arena. I took a deep breath and relaxed. I imagined that a bright light of love was filling me and surrounding me. Then I imagined it radiating onto Shelby as well. I pictured it swelling up into a bubble around both of us, warming us and connecting us. I told her how beautiful she was and thanked her for being such a good

teacher. She let out a big sigh, licked her lips and lowered her head. I stepped toward her and she stood quietly. I lifted the halter and secured it on her head. We stood there for a moment suspended in time. Our lives were changed.

I have had no further trouble catching, haltering or grooming her. Her facial expressions are relaxed and open. She no longer tries to hide or run away. In fact, she stood freely with strangers yesterday allowing them to pet her. She is ready to participate in my life coaching programs. Love was the answer!