

# The Picture Puzzle

Written for Horsemanship Magazine. Below is the full article before it was edited.



We all set out on our own personal equine dream. In our mind we have images and aspirations which fuel our equine journey. Last year saw my journey with my horse Merlot come to sad end. This special horse gave me so much. The journey we both shared was incredible. Beyond his death his pearls of wisdom I find myself sharing with others daily. One such story I shared with Jacqueline, who came down from Scotland to have some intensive natural horsemanship and confidence building lessons.

It was clear that Jacqueline was starting out like many of us with an image, a dream and aspirations. I said to Jacqueline “When we start out it is like we walk into a store of dreams and we select the picture of a horse and rider we aspire to. We pay at the till and take it home. Delighted we remove the clear proactive film to discover we hadn’t bought a picture but a puzzle. A jigsaw puzzle of a thousand tiny pieces that land softly at our feet. You have to fit the pieces together to make up a personal dream picture.” She related to this, as she had already discovered that some pieces of her jigsaw she was struggling to fit together. Plus she was very aware that understanding the horse is essential in assembling her picture.

With this in mind we selected some pieces of her picture to work on, mindful of how they fit into her picture. Over two days we worked on intent, energy, soft touch, relaxation, rhythm, breathing patterns, assertiveness, fluidity, and language of the herd. That’s a lot I hear you say. Have you seen the circus trick in which they spin plates on the ends of a pointed sticks? They end up with twenty or more plates on sticks spinning and just effortlessly move between them to tweak each stick when needed keep the plates spinning and stop them from falling. Wow what a skill. When you learn horsemanship it is a bit like learning to spin plates on sticks. Now you wouldn’t try to spin all twenty plates in lesson one. If you did try, imagine how many broken plates. We worked on one plate at a time. Looking at one piece of the jigsaw at a time and then how they interlocked.

I also said to Jacqueline “On your journey you will meet people and horses who will help you understand different parts of your puzzle. Be open-minded. Learning to listen will open up to your picture changing. The picture isn’t fixed, it is fluid. You and the horse create the evolving pictures.”

Merlot and I often used to work on tiny bits of our puzzle. Enjoying the layers we found, the refinement, the relationship and the fun. It got me thinking about how my personal journey with Merlot our picture changed over the years and took on new meaning. Many essential parts of our picture were invisible to others.

A new journey has just started for me and my new horse Ruby. We are getting to know each other and building our bond. We have enjoyed just being together. I learnt so much by watching her settle into her herd, the conversations, the inter-relationships and bonds. Spending time being part of the herd is so enjoyable. Mostly observing the herd and sometimes interacting with the horses. I am learning about her personality, temperament and what she enjoys. Helping her settle into her new home and feel safe has strengthened our bond. We have started positive reinforcement training to complement our ground games and ridden work. I am keen to learn from Ruby and she is proving to be another excellent tutor. Together we are embarking on our journey and creating our shared personal changing pictures.

