

PHOTO BY JOI DANEHY

# NATURAL BEGINNINGS

## Jeanie's Journey to Atwood Ranch

by Jeanie Shepherd, 2-Star Parelli Professional

Little did I know when I filled out that application for an Externship with Parelli Natural Horsemanship what the outcome would be! At the time of my application my life was taking a huge detour from the norm, so where else would I fit in as well as the Parelli Campus? My original intention was to leave the cold north country and head to the Florida campus in February or March. However, life situations dictated that that was not to be the case, and I had to postpone my departure long enough that I ended up asking Ann Kiser if I could just go straight to the Colorado campus when it opened in May. When she said that would be acceptable, once again, little did I know what I was walking into!

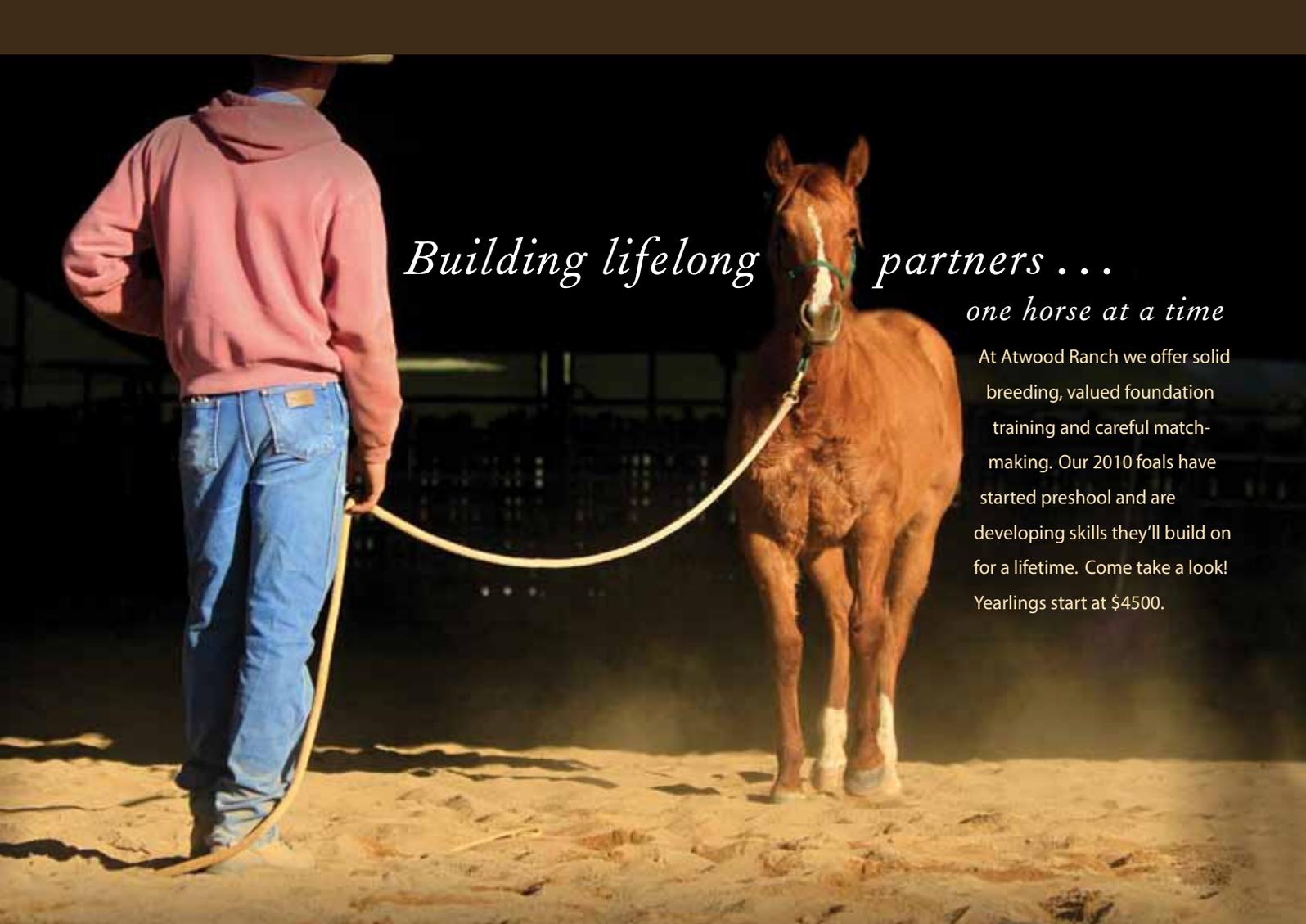
Not only was the Externship more of a challenge than I anticipated as relates to my horsemanship skills, but I soon found out that I would be a participant in the recording of a new adventure: the production of *The Horseman's Apprentice!*

We were told right away that we were expected to be honest and "tell it like it is" so the public would get an idea of the grit it takes to be successful in the Parelli Professional program. Since I was so excited to be in Pagosa Springs and to be part of the team at the University, it was hard to find anything less than positive to say. Sure, we had to work hard, but I was used to hard work. Sure, we had personality conflicts, but that happens in every school, home and workplace. That's my perspective, and I'm sticking to it! At any rate, the process of being part of the filming and the special lessons was enlightening and a great deal of fun! I was totally amazed at the work Stephen's crew did

on the production. I'll never forget the Wednesday nights in the lodge with the room full of people enjoying the latest episode together. Yes, even the episodes where I was "Patted" and "Baared"!

During the summer I was able to meet and chat with Mike and Catherine Sapienza when they came to Pagosa Springs delivering horses, and again when they came for the Performance Summit representing Atwood Ranch Naturally. I expressed an interest in the possibility of joining the Atwood Team to further my studies. At that time I was thinking possibly of the spring. Consequently, I made plans to go on to the Florida campus. The day after I arrived in Ocala I went to Jacksonville as part of the team working at the Rendezvous. When I went to the Atwood Ranch Naturally booth to visit with Mike and Catherine, they informed me that they were looking for a staff member for the foaling team. My heart skipped a beat as I "casually" mentioned my interest in that position! Within a few days my resumé





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with the foundation they need,  
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# Atwood Ranch Naturally

In addition to yearlings, we have a select group of two-year-olds available starting at \$7000. Come to Ft. Worth for Colt Starting Naturally and see the participating Atwood Ranch horses. Additional AR horses will be shown during intermissions.

### **ATWOOD RANCH**

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was submitted, and I was offered the position! Back on the road I went with my lovely mare, Freedom, who was really becoming a road warrior. An interesting side note: when I reviewed my prior year's Externship application, one of the things I had written was that I would like to achieve a position working with mares and foals in a breeding operation. As a young girl I had always dreamed of working on a ranch in the west, too! Isn't that interesting?

Since I arrived at Atwood Ranch in these beautiful rolling hills near Orland, CA, I have appreciated all the things that I learned or re-learned while I was at the Parelli University. Being part of a team can naturally have its challenges but can also be extremely rewarding. Here at Atwood I am honored to be working with a team whose members not only care about one another, but also show a great effort to put the horse first. Right from the day of my arrival here

I was made to feel a part of the Atwood "family" and have been coached and guided through a sometimes-intimidating work schedule. The pride taken in these athletic, beautiful horses requires extra hours of care and vigilance for their comfort and safety. With a talented on-staff veterinarian, Dr. Jessie Koenig, we are being diligently tutored on everything from routine vaccinations to collecting the stallions and inseminating the mares. My learning capacity is taxed daily, and it is very gratifying! I feel blessed to be able to study under 4-Star Parelli Professional Helen Topp and 3-Star Instructor Jake Shoemark, especially since I am striving to achieve Level 4 Horsemanship and 3-Star Instructor status. As the new foals arrive I watch Jake show us how to put the first touches on these beautiful creatures. I marvel at the fact that I am a part of it all, thanks—in a big way—to Parelli Natural Horsemanship!



PHOTOS BY JO DANBHY

## An Amazing Apprenticeship

by Sarah Grimm, 2-Star Parelli Professional

Two-year-olds, yearlings, weanlings, newborn foals, playing with horses all day long, alongside 3-Star Professional Jake Shoemark, the beautiful Atwood Ranch setting and the dynamic Atwood Ranch team... who could ask for more? How did I get so lucky?

Often during my year in Pat's Mastery Program I heard Pat say, "There is horsemanship and there is horse development, and when you have Level 4 savvy you can start to do horse development." Well, ready or not, here I am at the Atwood Ranch in a new and exciting horse-development learning opportunity.

I've also heard Pat say that horses can learn a hundred times faster than we think they can, and my experience here has given me a picture of what is possible; Jake Shoemark is an incredible horseman and is generous and humble with his knowledge. He will tell you, "I'm not going to try to impress you with anything, because it won't last long," and then you will be blown away by what you see him do with horses. Don't try to impress Jake, either. He would rather see the basics done well. During my stay we practiced the basics daily on groups of 10–20 horses, and every day was unique. I learned so much from Jake's

leadership because every day there was a detailed plan that incorporated variety for the horses and for us, and it was awesome to see how to practice the basics daily and keep it interesting.

Here are some of the big lessons I learned from my time with Jake in young horse development at the Atwood Ranch.

### High Expectations

We often hear Pat say, “Expect a lot, accept a little, reward often.” A big key to horse development is to have a deeper understanding of what it means to “expect a lot” from the horse. When you have high expectations for a horse, it doesn’t matter if he is spooky or sensitive or scared or playful or pushy or Right Brain or Left Brain. It doesn’t change what your expectations are for the horse, as you can help a horse through issues and make big changes.

When you learn to expect a lot, accept a little and reward often, you learn to put phases on slowly enough that you can reward when the horse is thinking about trying, you notice the small steps of tries along the way (which means a lot to the horse), you ask for more effort when the time is right and you set it up so the horse is always searching for the answer.

I know I expect a lot of myself, and as Parelli Professionals we are expected to exceed expectations. So next time you play with your horse, ask yourself, “Do I expect a lot from my horse? And if so, what would this look like?”

### Principles, Purpose and Time

Everything we do in young horse development is about preparation for riding. Whether working with yearlings or two-year-olds, weanlings or even foals, when we are playing on the ground we are always thinking about how this is preparation for riding. With the foals we use the principle games to ask for turns toward us and use the Feather Lines to turn the hindquarters the way your leg will do someday. With the yearlings and two-year-olds, when we are playing on the ground we want to always be asking the question: “Would I accept this behavior from this horse if I were riding? Would I feel safe if my horse did this while I was riding?” An excellent Catching Game, having a horse stand still for saddling, being able to pick up all four feet and having a horse able to stand tied are a few of the things that impress Jake. Even with all the preparation we do on the ground, there is no guarantee of success when it comes to the first saddling or the first ride. Things can still “get a little Western,” as Jake likes to say. We

prepare them with the bareback pad, flank rope, mount from the fence, and other extreme types of Friendly Game, but with certain horses it will just take time to help them through things.



*Sarah Grimm working with Jake Shoemark, Atwood's Head of Horse Development*

### Horses Teach Humans

Next to Jake, my best teachers have been the fantastic Atwood horses. You probably know this already if you are lucky enough to own one! They all taught me valuable lessons about being flexible with your approach to things, especially when you are playing with ten horses a day. You learn to go back and isolate because you may have the same symptom, but the cause is really different for each horse. From Buddy I learned that Left-Brain Extroverts can become balanced, graceful and responsive if you ask the right way. From Billy I learned that Right-Brain Extroverts may take some time, sweat and Jake-savvy to become calm and brave, but when they make the change, it is big. From Nemo I learned the importance of the Friendly Game, especially in the transitions between the games, and from Alice I learned to read the look in her eyes in order to know what is about to happen before what happens happens. I am grateful for the lessons these fabulous horses have given me.

### Highlights

My time at the Atwood Ranch includes many other highlights that are the stuff of dreams. Trail riding on one of the most stunningly beautiful ranch properties in Northern California, moving cattle with Jake, learning all about horse reproduction from the fabulous on-staff veterinarian, Dr. Jessie Koenig, fantastic lessons from 4-Star Parelli Professional Helen Topp and morning rides on the world-class Atwood ranch gelding, Lukie in the Sky by Mr. Skyline Peppy—who could ask for more? How did I get so lucky? Thank you, Atwood Ranch, for being part of our Parelli journey! 🐾