

Atwood Ranch

The Painting of a Picture

by Kalley Krickeberg

Where we left off last time was at the finale of the Atwood Ranch Open House and the painting of a picture of the future, for the young horses of Atwood Ranch.



After the Atwood Ranch Open House it seemed a resounding hush fell on the ranch. When all the dust settled from the Parelli tour team packing up their gear and heading down the drive aiming for their next destination on the map, followed by the sound of the roaring engine of Pat and Linda's bus fading into the distance, I knew it was time to re-focus. It was time to get ready for the next chapter we were to write on this journey. It seemed kind of surreal, we have had all these big events we've been attending and preparing for – Tour stops, the 2007 Savvy Conference, and most recently the Atwood Ranch Open House. We had survived all these big events and, if I may

say so myself, quite gracefully. It seemed now was the time, as they say, to get into the "meat and potatoes" of it all.

There comes a time when we are tested. I do not believe it is so much when it is all on the line, but actually when we are preparing for that time. It takes a certain sort of commitment, and discipline. Pat always says; "Practice does not make perfect, only perfect practice makes perfect." This I believe to be true, and when that last tail light faded into the distance I knew that it was time for perfect practicing. We are in the "middle" as they say. Some people enjoy the excitement of the "beginnings" where everything is big and new and shiny, but

may have trouble when that shiny-ness wears off and it gets to the day-to-day grind of putting systems, structure, and communication into place. Some people really do not like beginnings; it is too new and scary and unknown, but love the security of day to day structure and same-ness, the “middle”. Then there are others who love the “ends,” the feeling of completion, accomplishment, and a job well done...or at the very least: survived. I love them all. There is a certain gratification in all of them; it is just a matter of a willingness to change gears...sound familiar? Pat also says, “Take care of your Horsemanship and it will take care of you.” Everyday, to be a good leader for our horse, we have to be willing to change gears in our leadership to accommodate him and where he is on the Horsenality™ chart, and at times we have to be so fluid, it is a moment by moment shift.

On my way home from the Redmond, Oregon tour event, I had six hours of beautiful country and plenty of inspiration fresh from Pat and Linda’s weekend presentation to keep my mind busy thinking about the future. I was thinking about something Pat had told me, and if he told me once, he told me a thousand times; systems and communication are keys in building a good team and help in bringing a plan to fruition. So, on the Young Horse Development side of things, I had to start thinking about building a team. There were 15 yearlings and 60 foals that were ready and waiting for Preschool to start and I needed a team to help with the task. We had a big sale in August that we needed to prepare mares and foals for, not to mention the 2008 Savvy Conference. Over the course of several months, we had several Parelli instructors visit for a length of time and a few Parelli students who came on-board for a few months that helped with the task.

Pat says the first question people ask after they say “Wow!” is “How?” So now we are on to the “how” part of things, the day-to-day process. With the young horses we follow the first two parts of the Parelli Colt Start Skeleton™, (the second two parts involve the actual mounting and riding). The first two parts of the Parelli Colt Start Skeleton goes as follows: accept the human, first as a friend, then as a leader. Then, accept the saddle (or bareback pad) first with the placement, then with the application of the cinch. They are simple words, but have big meaning to a young horse’s life and future.

Once the young horse accepts the human as a friend, the positive learning process can begin. The Seven Games are introduced in the multitude of ways that they can be played. The Seven Games are as important to a young horse’s set of life skills, as it is for human children to learn their A, B, C’s and 1, 2, 3’s. It is how we humans can make sense, function, and thrive in our society. Humans-ville is far different than Horse-ville. In Humans-ville we have ropes, fences, and scary plastic bags that sound like predators in the bush...amongst other things that go against a horse’s nature to accept as a part of

daily life. A horse can get into a lot of trouble with these things and it is our job as humans to help the young horse make sense of his life, and help him become a good puzzle solver that thinks instead of reacts. The Seven Games are pivotal in this process.

Once the young horse has a basic understanding of the Seven games we start giving them small tasks and puzzles to solve. Pat says, “Principles, purpose, and time are the tools of teaching.” So this is where the purpose comes in and ownership of skill starts to take effect. This is also where the picture of the future begins. To me, there is nothing more beautiful than watching and being a part of this process. When the young horses start thinking differently by using their skills, and their language and understanding of life becomes further developed, there is nothing more special in my mind. By comparison, it is like watching a child go from singing their A, B, C’s and 1, 2, 3’s, to reading “See Spot Run” and adding 1+1, to reading novels and doing high school to college level algebra. The best part of all, with either horse or human, once a set of life skills is owned, they should not need their teacher anymore other than for a little support now and again. And this is how we paint the picture of the future – we start it and they finish it. To me it is a beautiful analogy, but it is also serious commitment. Pat says every weekend at the tour events, “Most horses only have a past, very few actually have a future.” With the Parelli Pre School at Atwood Ranch, we hope to do our part in changing that truth, one individual at a time. 🐾

