

THESE ARE FOALS on the range land. Against the high-sky heat of midday they are flopped on their sides, tails twitching, soaking up sun on their flanks. It's a reminder, I suppose, of mother heat not so long past.

Driving by later, in early evening, I watch them cavort. They race about in bursts of speed that end abruptly, as though they're suddenly puzzled at the glee that drives them to kick up their heels and run. They pause and look outwards at the road with their heads held high and still. There's pride in them, nobility, and a staunch sense of identity that's fractured by yet another crazed dash.

My people were bush people, and they never cultivated a horse culture. But there is something about the animals that has always appealed to me. Horses are called Spirit Dogs in some native cultures, and maybe it's their loyalty and good-heartedness that makes them special to me.

I was thirteen when I learned to ride. My adopted family had left for a summer vacation, and I was dropped off to stay with relatives for three weeks. Uncle Wilf and Aunt Peg had a small farm outside of a southwestern Ontario town called Teeswater. I'd only been there a handful of times, and I felt out of place and alone.

But they had animals. It wasn't a large farm, but there was stock, some chickens, a few dogs and a knot of barn cats. Uncle Wilf assigned me barn chores to do every day. Every morning I gathered eggs from the henhouse. I shovelled stalls in the afternoon and helped hay and feed the cattle in the evening. It never felt like work to me. The presence of the animals was comforting, and even the huge Hereford bull in the back stall didn't faze me.

It was the pony that fascinated me most. She was a small Shetland cross. The first time I saw her she was dirty, with a knotted tail and mane. She started when I approached her, shrank to the back of the stall and eyed me nervously. Still, I felt drawn to her.

Aunt Peg told me that the pony's name was Dimples. They'd bought her from a neighbour for their daughter Kathy to ride, but the neighbour hadn't told them that Dimples had been beaten as a colt and so was unrideable. She was bareback broke and halter broke, but the heavy-handedness of her training had made her distrustful of people. They told me not to go near her, except to let her out into the big pen every now and then.

"She'll bite you," Aunt Peg told me, "and she'll kick."

But there was something about Dimples that drew me. I knew nothing of horses or ponies, but at thirteen I understood the feeling of being displaced and lost and frightened. I saw that in her, and I started to visit her.

At first I just stood by the rail of the stall and talked to her. She didn't move, but after a few days of this she

seemed to calm. Then I opened the gate and stood there, talking soft and low and gentle. It took another few days for her to get used to this. Eventually I moved a yard or so closer.

The day I touched her for the first time was magical. She shivered, twitched. I kept my voice low, moved slowly and rubbed her flank. I could feel her anxiety, but the more I stroked her the more she calmed and settled. Within days she let me curry comb her mane and tail, all the while talking soft and low.

Uncle Wilf showed me how to put the halter on. He had to demonstrate on a pillow, because Dimples wouldn't allow anyone but me in her stall. When I came back alone, she let me slip the halter on. I led her into the big pen and walked her around it slowly. Everyone was amazed.

I got on her back the next day. I mounted off the fence rail, easing down onto her. She shivered, shifted her feet nervously, but she stood still and let me find my seat. We didn't move. I sat and rubbed her and talked to her for half an hour and did the same the next day. Then I walked her out into the field.

Riding Dimples was pure joy. We walked around that forty-acre field for a couple of days, and she relaxed. Soon, I got courageous enough to push her up to a trot. And one day, after a week of this, she cantered for me. Coming back one evening she broke into a full gallop. It scared me at first, then filled me with glory.

I rode her every day of that vacation, and Dimples learned to love it as much as I did. Finally, she let Kathy ride her. Watching them from the stoop of the farmhouse, I felt like an adult for the first time in my life.

My adopted family moved away shortly after that, and I never saw Dimples again. But I still think about her whenever I ride. Riding her was a challenge that I met and won. But it was more than that. It was the first time I'd felt kinship with a creature, a joining that went far beyond mere domestication. It was a union of spirits that transcended earthly things such as loneliness, sadness and hurt. I felt like a healer, even though I didn't have the words for that yet.

We heal each other with kindness, gentleness and respect. Animals teach us that.

EFP 10

Read the story "A Kindred Spirit" by Richard Wagamese. In paragraph form, respond to the topic:

Describe the narrator's connection with animals.

Remember the basic expectations of a paragraph (intro and concluding sentences, transition words etc.)

You must include 2 direct quotes from the story.

Due today.

Space to Plan

Topic sentence in the story "A Kindred Spirit" by Richard Wagamese:

Supporting Examples (ways Richard shows a connection to animals):

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

Conclusion: _____

