

White Horse Energy

By Leigh Shambo, MSW, LMHC

The horses in my life have consistently taught me that dreams really do come true. Like seeking the buried bounty in a treasure hunt, horses give me loads of practical guidance in the art of following the subtle promptings of Spirit and intuition in order to arrive – eventually – at my bliss. On my recent trip to the British Isles I discovered a treasure of experiences, relationships and growth beyond my expectations. My heart and mind are still very full of the wonderful people, animals and landscapes we encountered.

My visit to the UK was occasioned by an invitation to present my 3-day workshop, “The Horse-Human Connection: Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and Learning”, at the Stepps Rehabilitation Clinic in Gloucestershire (<http://www.stepsrehab.co.uk/>). My traveling companion and workshop assistant was Val Hampson, editor of EquusSpirit magazine. Val deserves the badge of courage for driving – on the “wrong” side of the road – the entire trip, while I navigated!

Prior to the workshop, Val and I had almost a week for sightseeing. Our first destination was an area called the Vale of the White Horse, whose ancient treasure had first called me overseas. On a hillside there, prehistoric tribes (~3,000 BC) built from native chalk the gigantic outline of a white horse, so large that the whole figure can only be seen from the opposite flank of the sweeping valley. This is the White Horse of Uffington, near the site of an ancient hill-fort castle and an astonishing conical burial mound called a barrow. The ancient ancestral connection between human and equine species created a palpable energetic sensation as I knelt in the dewy morning grass above the giant White Horse.

But I also felt the magic of this spot in a much more personal way, having been guided to it in so many ways by two white horses, horses that I knew in life who now dwell in the Spirit realm. These guides were with me in this moment on the grass next to the White Horse, as they had been with me eight years earlier, when my best friend *showed me a picture of the White Horse* in her archeology text. I could vividly recall feeling the intention that dropped to the core of my being: *I want to go there*. On this sunny England morning, my white horses danced in my energy field as I let gratitude fill me. I gave thanks for all of the dreams that have carried me to this place – not just to this worldly place, but the inner place of wisdom that sources my visions.

From the White Horse, Val and I traveled south, taking a day to wander among the ancient stone circles and barrows of Avebury. What dreams came true for my ancestors here? Like me, their dreams must have been full of horses! In their day, horses helped them transcend the limitations of physical being. I too, know what it means to sit astride and suddenly find myself elevated, fleet-footed and strong. In our modern world, horses now guide us back through time, on an inner journey where we seek harmony with nature. Did my ancestors also know this yearning? Did they too discover that to master a horse, one must master one’s self first?

Val and I traveled on through the New Forest, where feral ponies wander the roadways along with pigs and cows. The tangled forests, colorful heaths and crooked-

street stone villages fairly dance with nature spirits and divas. A hard overnight rain gave way to a brilliantly sunny morning, and our much anticipated visit to Isle of Wight, the home of Kim Brown, my workshop organizer and a strong supporter of equine assisted therapy in the UK. We exchanged excited greetings at the ferry dock, and piled into Kim's SUV – a farm vehicle deluxe in which I felt right at home!

We toured the brilliantly picturesque west side of the Island, then convened a hilltop meeting with Kim's two horses, Leo and Roy. Leo is a tremendously dignified aging Lipizzaner, a former movie stunt horse whose past holds some fairly dramatic and abusive "training". His devotion to Kim is palpable, as is her respect for him. What an experience to stand in the aura of these two lovers, on a windswept down viewing the white cliffs and the sea in the distance! In contrast to Leo who was all dignity, Kim's newer addition, Roy, is a black Fell pony (think miniature Friesian!) with an interactive, mischievous nature. I left Kim and Val in the company of Leo and Roy, while my own white horses guided me to the center of the pasture to bask in the energy of this lovely place. I picked a spot of the sweet forage and placed it in my mouth, chewing slowly. My spirit horses held their heads high, smelling the salt air and feeling the birds wheeling in the strong wind.

On the Isle of Wight, Val and I had the treat of staying in a farm bed and breakfast run by Jackie and Todd, former event riders who now manage a diversified farm with sheep, cattle and crops. We shared horse stories, and I was especially moved by the story of Turk, a horse that Jackie and Todd had owned for many years. He was a difficult horse and a great teacher, and emotion was evident in Jackie's voice as she described what Turk taught them. His picture adorned the wall, along with other distinguished equine family members.

A night in the pub at Mottistone allowed us to meet some of Kim's local friends. I thoroughly enjoyed the ambience of a good-hearted community with strong ties to the land, to the animals that sustain us, to the web of life in which we all belong. The next day Kim took us on a trek to visit the Longstone, a hilltop standing stone in an area rich with conical burial barrows – an ancient site of spiritual significance. A rainstorm that blew me sideways and soaked my jeans and boots only added to the delight!

After the weekend, it was time to head north to Gloucestershire for the upcoming workshop. I was very happy to meet Sam Quinlan, a manager of the EAP/L programs at Stepps Rehab Clinic, whose warm and honest personality supported an atmosphere of nurturance and safety for the psychological work with horses that we were ready to explore. The next morning, I met the participants who previously were only known to me as names on a list. I was thrilled to find that my group consisted of experienced EAP practitioners and serious students, eager to explore the HEAL method which is grounded in the Epona Approach™ and which stresses an integration of methods that promote the psychological well being of the person and the horse together.

Together we created a reverent and thoughtful learning community, enhanced by the skills, experience and fund of knowledge that each participant brought with them and shared. For three days, we opened our hearts, minds and souls to each other and to the horses at Stepps – discerning the subtle clues to finding our own inner treasures

and studying how we can best guide our clients to find their treasures as well. I feel enriched by the friendships I made in three very special days at Stepps.

A few more days of sightseeing after the workshop, and it was time to let my white spirit horses guide me back home, to be with my own herd again. But there is one more thing I have learned about dreams—they really don't end! Even as one treasure is uncovered, more clues are revealed, hinting at future treasures and possible dreams to come true. Which means – I know I will return to the magical Isles! My visit to this beautiful and mysterious land could not have been more fulfilling, except perhaps to add a good gallop across one of the majestic downs! Next time!

Many thanks to Kim Brown and Sam Quinlan for all of their hard work in bringing this workshop to the UK, and to all of the participants who made it such a success. I am also deeply grateful to those who keep my home fires burning and care for my animal family while I am away!

About the Author:

Leigh Shambo, MSW, LMHC, a licensed therapist and educator, began her career as a horse trainer. Leigh is widely recognized for her articulation of the horse-human bond and its application in therapeutic and learning programs for a variety of ages and diagnostic groups. She is the founder and lead therapist for Human-Equine Alliances for Learning (HEAL), a non-profit charitable organization that supports equine assisted services and programs. Leigh is regularly invited to teach and to speak throughout the US, Canada and Europe.

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