

In Perspective: TNH, HOG and LOS

TNH = *The Natural Horse* by Jaime Jackson

HOG = *Horse Owners Guide to Natural Hoof Care* by Jaime Jackson

LOS = *A Lifetime of Soundness* by Dr. Hiltrud Strasser & Sabine Kells

by **Jaime Jackson**

For the sake of historical accuracy, I've been asked to clarify things from my perspective, as few understand the actual relationships between LOS, the HOG and, especially, TNH in the chronological timeline.

Foremost in my mind, the issue should not be “who said what when,” or “what or who came first,” as though some kind of competition or jockeying for “top position” was in the works between Dr. Strasser and I, and others. Helping horses has never been a competitive matter with me, nor Dr. Strasser, as I understand from having met her. Accordingly, my purpose here, then, is to place each work, TNH, LOS, and the HOG, in the light of the times when the works were created, and to reveal some of their influences on some of the more notable characters in the burgeoning barefoot movement we all know today. I doubt seriously there are less than half a dozen persons on the face of the earth who truly know and understand the facts: Dr. Strasser, Sabine Kells, and myself, being over half of them.

The decision to refrain from saying, “everybody take off the shoes and have your horses go barefoot,” in the 1992 edition of my book, *The Natural Horse: Lessons From The Wild*, came after considerable deliberation and discussions with colleague and fellow farrier Dr. Leslie Emery (author of *Horseshoeing Theory and Hoof Care*, pub. 1978) in the late 1970s and early 1980s. There was no “barefoot movement” or “natural hoof care” then, just as there was no “natural horsemanship” or “natural boarding” revolution happening, either. The connection to the wild horse and “nature” was just beginning to be laid by people like Emery, Gene Ovnicsek, Pat Parelli, myself and a few others. The unique language and charismatic personalities we all know and follow today were still several decades away. Most importantly, no one—and I say that categorically—knew what the consequences would be of telling everyone, wholesale, to “deshoe your horse” in the early days. The pinnacle of irresponsibility would be to have said just that—back then. Think about it.

The first discussions of natural hoof care actually preceded my entry into wild horse country in 1982, ten years before the publication of TNH, some fifteen years before the arrival of LOS. As early as 1978, Emery and I had met and discussed the concept, including the vital implications of diet, boarding conditions,



Jaime's base camp in wild horse country, central Nevada, 1984.

horsemanship—and wild horses. What was missing, indeed, was the actual wild horse, the physical “link” to nature that Emery speculated on in “Horseshoeing Theory and Hoof Care,” and which I personally investigated, with, I will add, Emery’s full support. It was the following passage, however, on p. 65 of his great work, that both inspired me and brought us together as advocates, and which, in my mind, laid the actual foundation for the modern “natural care” movement:

“Lack of understanding of the natural state and function of the hoof is the primary deficiency in shoeing theory and practice, and in the treatment of lameness. To fully illustrate the natural state and function of the hoof, the origins of the horse must be examined. Thus, the reasons for the development of the single-digit foot must be considered. The horse’s life style has been altered drastically through domestication. In order to take proper care of him, we must understand how and where he lived in a wild state. From nutrition to hoof care, this concept is important.”

Foremost on our minds was our mutual concern that horse owners would act (to desho) without thinking of the full consequences of their actions. As everyone in the barefoot movement should know by now, the complexities of genuine natural hoof care require depth of understanding and technical skills to execute without causing harm. Further, and just as important, we recognized that there was no real support network coming from farriers (there were no barefoot practitioners yet) to help horse owners, and that veterinarians (whom we had surveyed) would widely condemn the practice as inhumane, if not insane. In fact, we were unable to obtain any support for the idea of deshoing horses from either the veterinary or farriery communities. Even well-known trainers we confronted were unresponsive or very negative. To our surprise, even equine veterinary researchers whom we both respected outright rejected the “wild horse model”—including some years later, believe it or not, contemporary barefoot advocate Dr. Hiltrud Strasser! And that was after the TNH was published and brought to her attention by

Photo courtesy Jaime Jackson

me personally. To my knowledge, Dr. Strasser has not changed her opinion, either—at least, she hasn’t said as much to me. Readers are now probably asking themselves, how is this possible?

I first became aware of Dr. Strasser after she contacted me through an interpreter in 1996, following my presentation at the Bluegrass Laminitis Symposium in Louisville, KY, to express her interest in my research. I understand that Sabine Kells initially met Dr. Strasser in 1996, at which time I then received a letter from Sabine Kells (who writes and speaks fluently in both English and German). She very thoughtfully praised *The Natural Horse* for its invaluable information, and informed me that the two of them were collaborating on a new work, LOS, and that my research would be included. I even sent them a wild horse hoof cadaver, to help them better understand what a naturally-shaped hoof from the U.S. Great Basin actually looked like!

Prior to Sabine’s arrival, Dr. Strasser had authored several papers and books in German. One of her assistants had mailed me photocopied pages for my review in 1996. I was impressed that she was actively engaged in barefoot trimming, and that she was very vocal against shoeing, and I told her so. One of her papers that I received dated back to 1989. Moreover, she had formed a teaching school, called the European School for Hoof Orthopedics (ESHOP), in 1993, to teach others her method of trimming. (The latter hardly resembled what I would call a “natural trim,” but by 1996, others, whom I’ll identify a little later, were already embracing barefoot trimming and putting their own spin on things.)

Eventually, I accepted an invitation to travel to Germany to meet with Dr. Strasser. LOS had proved to me that the two of them were serious about promoting our common ground—getting horses out of shoes and into better hoof care. This would also be my opportunity to see exactly what they were doing at the hoof, and to discuss specifics about working together in the future.

Off I went to meet her—the first American to do so—and it was during that visit that Dr. Strasser rejected the wild horse as a viable model for hoof care. More to the point, she had developed her own “physiologically correct trim,” as Sabine explained to me, and wanted me to embrace and promote it. I could only surmise that TNH had served her in other important ways, enough to be referenced in LOS anyway. Nevertheless, my understanding of what they were doing then with the hoof, was, while not exactly what I was doing, close enough to try to

work together in the future, for the sake of horses. I agreed to promote LOS in the U.S., and to help promote her first clinic tour the following year, as well.

Differences between the “Strasser method” and what I actually advocated began to surface over the next year. Eventually, it became clear to me that her style of trimming was not something I could advocate or recommend to others, and I withdrew my public support altogether. Rather than criticize Dr. Strasser publicly, I moved to form the AANHCP and promote what I considered to be genuine natural hoof care, based squarely on the wild horse model. This marked the first splintering in the barefoot hoof care movement. So be it.

LOS is an inspiring work, nevertheless. You can see its many influences from reading it, namely, papers written by the 19th century British veterinarian Bracy Clark, my book (and other unpublished exchanges between us), Xenophon, and many others, most unfamiliar to Americans. Dr. Strasser’s experiments in barefoot hoof care are also obviously a part of LOS. But if one reads LOS with a critical eye, one can see that the wild horse is more of a supportive, side-bar attraction than an inspirational centerpiece, as it is in TNH and in all my published works. Dr. Strasser had her own ideas, and that is a fact.

In my opinion, LOS is not about “natural hoof care,” at all. Nor does it ever really state that it is, although the language is suggestive. Nor is it a precise text in any way about how to trim hooves. Less than a page and a half are given to describing her method, identified in LOS as “Physiologically Correct Trimming.” To emphasize my point, she and Sabine had created an 800+ page training manual to detail Strasser’s trimming method.

LOS is, simply, and very effectively so, an introduction to the benefits of barefoot horse care, purported natural lifestyles, and a condemnation of horseshoeing. In all respects, too, LOS is not the first such text to condemn the “evil necessity of shoeing.” Nor is it the first to advocate or describe barefoot hoof care, natural horsemanship, or natural boarding conditions. Yet, LOS is an important contemporary work, in that it categorically calls for the removal of shoes from all horses—because, and I stand directly at Dr. Strasser’s side in saying so, horseshoes always damage hooves; and, because it advocates responsible horsemanship in the broadest sense. Moreover, it is particularly inspirational in that it is coming from a veterinarian! We are all asking, aren’t we: why does the veterinary community as a whole, continue to bury its head in the sand? But, there, I draw the line. TNH/HOG and LOS really, accurately, have nothing more in common. Any more than do the hoof care methods of Dr. Strasser and Jaime Jackson, and their respective inspirations.



Left to right: Sabine Kells, Jaime Jackson, and Dr. Hiltrud Strasser at Dr. Strasser’s Hufklinik in Tuebingen, Germany, November 1999.

The Natural Horse is unique in that it takes us out of our domesticated egos, pet theories, pseudo-sciences, and caged equine lives, and straight into the horse’s natural world for its invaluable lessons “from the wild.” Nothing in it is based on domestic practices or contemporary science, only applications of the “wild horse model” in domestic horse care; where knowledge of the model was lacking in specifics because no credible research existed, such as diet, I said so. In fact, the original, and complete title of the book was, *The Natural Horse: Lessons From The Wild For Domestic Horse Care*, coined after considerable debate over two years between the editorial staff at Northland Publishing and myself.

No one knew exactly what to call it, for sure, as nothing like this had reached the publishing industry heretofore. With the exception of Dr. Emery, every authority in the domestic horse world I approached (and there were many), rejected the very premise of TNH prior to its publication. That is another fact. Then president of the American Association of Equine Practitioners told me in a phone call to his office in TX, “I can’t think of a single reason why our veterinarians would be interested in your research.” The Science Editor of *Equus Magazine*, responding to my query, wrote to say, “If there is anything of value in what you are saying about the wild horse, *Equus Magazine*, not you, will lead the way!” And so it went, again and again. It wasn’t until after TNH was published—and that after receiving over 150 rejections from various publishing houses—that it began to receive some positive press from reviewers.

But *The Natural Horse* never rose to popularity in the horse world because it is complex, and, unlike LOS, not very easy to read for most people. I didn’t intend that to be the case. The book is an inspired work—meaning one “listens and composes,” like a composer of music or an artist

Photo courtesy Jaime Jackson

at the easel. In fact, it went out of print in 1995, because few in the horse world were really interested in trying to figure out what it means. “Too many 50 cent words,” complained one critic. One large book chain returned 225 copies all at once, explaining: “no interest.” But TNH was never intended to be light “coffee table reading,” or a simple, “how-to” piece like Pete Ramey’s “Making Natural Hoof Care Work For You” (which I published a decade later, in hopes of making natural hoof care more accessible to readers, and because Pete was genuinely inspired to do good in the world and was up for the task). Still, relatively few have read the book, TNH. As a pathetic example of this, I was astonished to learn from several graduates of an earlier incarnation of the AANHCP training program, that they had never read or heard of the book!

Here the reader should know that another of my texts had already come along, the *Horse Owners Guide To Natural Hoof Care*. There were different editions, the first penned in 1996, after my initial contacts with Dr. Strasser, sensing that her method had very serious conflicts with the wild horse model. I also, by then, recognized that the “natural trim” had not really been treated in its own right as a method, anyway, free from the restrictions self-imposed in TNH. I had concerns also that LOS’s audience might readily construe that Strasser’s method and the wild horse model were one in the same. They weren’t and aren’t. And, here, let the record stand—the HOG (as I call it) is the first published instruction book dedicated entirely to natural hoof care using the wild horse model, and the deshoeing of all horses. Pete recognized the difference, and also the importance and proper position of the HOG in the stream of educating oneself about genuine natural hoof care, warning readers in his book’s introduction, “Reading the *Horse Owners Guide To Natural Hoof Care* is prerequisite to learning anything from this book.”

But, really, even before Pete’s book, or the HOG, or LOS were conceived and published, the recommendation and very vocal message in one long breath to pull the horse’s shoes, trim the hooves according to the wild horse model, and ride one’s horse barefoot was born of first—and not that it is important in the stream of things—in *The Natural Horse*:

“My advice to horse owners interested in developing the natural horse in their own horses is some rather unconventional changes in barnyard management: first, tear down the stalls and fences and let the horses run about and mingle... contour the pasture to get rid of all the flat spots...then spread rocks of all sizes and shapes... abandon the use of feed mangers and feed the horses on the ground ...stop using paste wormers...pull the watering contraptions down off the wall and kick the water troughs over, and then water the horses at ground level...make sure they

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have to stand in the mud if they want to drink. Pull off the horseshoes...and ride the horse barefooted until it is lean and muscular...if you want the hooves to be really tuff— stop washing them in soap and water, stop painting them with 'blackout' and throw away the hoof dressing." [TNH, C3, p. 35-36]

It was this, and I assume the lure of "nature," that struck a chord within people like Dr. Redden, Dr. Strasser, and others. Other than myself, at the time, there was no palpable professional support for barefoot horses in the hoof care community, or anywhere else, and I know Dr. Strasser sensed an ally in me. I had also just become quite visible in the veterinary community, having been one of the keynote speakers at the aforementioned Laminitis Symposium in KY. My lecture notes, published by the symposium's host, Dr. Ric Redden, had reached her through one of the trails of the many European scientists and veterinarians in attendance.

But while Chapter 3 of TNH contains probably the most radical advice for hoof and general horse care published to that date (1992), Emery prevailed on me to counter it with caution. We had also jointly introduced my Great Basin research findings at the 1988 Annual Conference of the American Farriers Association in Lexington, KY, and understood the resistance that lay ahead from the professional farriery community. Nevertheless, we struggled together to find a way to cross link my data to the domestic horse's foot, and get that into the book. In the end, the decision was made to infuse my data into shoeing guidelines, and, in the same breath, caution horse owners to work closely with more "open-minded" farriers if they dared to venture into barefootedness. My "radical" advice was extracted and moved to a different chapter (3), so as not to aggravate farriers whom we hoped would read the book.

Our operative theory was, first bring professionals to the trim guidelines, have them apply them to shoeing, and then, in the next section of the same chapter, "Riding a Barefoot Horse," include them in the process of deshoeing. As late as last year (2009), when I spoke about natural hoof care before the European Federation of Farriers Annual Educational Fair, at the Dutch Equestrian Center (Helicon), the head of the Farrier School told me he uses the trim guidelines of TNH, but "never for horses to go barefoot." Other farriers have told me the same thing. I guess Emery and I half succeeded!

One has to understand the risks at that point in time. Emery and I knew well the damage caused by shoeing and that some form of transition had to take place, to make it work at the equestrian level. We harbored many more questions than solutions. Readers must appreciate



2002 AANHCP instructors: (front) Cindy Sullivan, Jaime Jackson; (rear) Ruth Green, Steve Dick, Charles Hall, Pete Ramey. Photo by R. Drewry.

that there was no support structure at all at the time for horse owners.

Know too, that the predisposition of most horse owners at the time was very resistant, if not hostile, to barefoot hoof care. In 1982, it was virtually impossible even for me—as a professional farrier and (closeted) barefoot advocate—to make headway with my own clients. One of my shoeing clients, when confronted with the opportunity to pull the shoes and try (what I called then) the "wild horse trim," recoiled in actual terror, "You will not put anything wild on my horse!" It was that single episode that inspired me to dump the "wild trim" moniker and invent a new term, "the natural trim." "Wildness," I learned, signaled fear in horse owners. It is a miracle, given that negative influence, that Northland managed to persuade me to add "Lessons From The Wild" to TNH's title!

Dr. Strasser is not the only vet, barefoot advocate, or cross-over farrier that I introduced to natural hoof care based on the wild horse model, nor the first. What I'm about to say may come as a shock to readers, but the facts are what they are. First came Dr. Barbara Page, who as President of the Denver Area Veterinary Medical Association, invited me to speak about the wild horse model at her organization's annual conference in 1993. Not long afterward, she wrote to say that my lecture had inspired her to form a non-profit organization to promote the well-being of horses, with the wild horse as an important centerpiece; it was cofounded with Gene Ovnicek (who later created the Natural Balance Shoe), and the frequent contributor to *The Horse's Hoof* and controversial researcher, Dr. Robert Bowker. Dr. Lisa Simon-Lancaster, a Colorado farrier, and later vet and understudy of Dr. Bowker, approached me during this period also, to give thanks for bringing her to a greater appreciation of barefoot horse care; this influence is reflect-

Photo courtesy Nancy Jackson

ed in her book, *The Sound Hoof*.

Gretchen Fathauer came early too, in 1996—one of her horses was severely foundered, and I guided her out of the darkness. She soon formed a website to promote TNH; and soon, I introduced her to Dr. Strasser, and before long, Gretchen was promoting both of us!

Martha Olivo, a farrier, came also to me in the mid-1990s, wanting to be involved with what her own intuitions told her was coming. Her sister, an equine vet in Texas who had for several years recommended TNH to her own clients, had urged Martha to contact me. Martha began by promoting TNH, buying a box at time and selling or giving them away, such was her enthusiasm! Later she too was referred to Dr. Strasser, and became certified by ESHOP. Still later, Martha formed her own organization, United Horsemanship, and a hoof care training program, to promote her own ideas at the hoof.

About the same time, I was approached by K.C. LaPierre, also a farrier, who wanted me to consider what he wanted to do; but, telling me in an email that he "never thought of the wild horse hoof as a model," I encouraged him just to do whatever he thought best.

Michael LaGrone came to me also in the 1990s, via another vet from Oklahoma (this vet was, at the time, President of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association). Michael, a very talented and upbeat person, trained with me (this was before the AANHCP), and I helped promote his first clinics and recommended him to horse owners needing on-site help through my consultation service.

By 2000, Pete Ramey and Cindy Sullivan had arrived, and with their participation, I formed the AANHCP. Eventually Cindy, and other members of the AANHCP, including Steve Dick and Todd Jaynes, wanted to do things their way, forming the Equine Sciences Academy. Pete needed to do the same, eventually founding the American Hoof Association, with his wife Ivy Ramey, several years later.

Also during this period, I was approached by another ESHOP graduate, Marjorie Smith, also wanting to spread the word about natural hoof care. Her now famous website, "Barefoot For Soundness," was a direct result of my counseling her, and she has steered many into the barefoot movement.

Ove Lind, another graduate of the AANHCP, departed to form the Swedish Hoof School in 2008. At nearly the same date, Kirt Lander, who trained privately with me before the AANHCP became a non-profit, and later as a member of the AANHCP, left us to free-lance, and more importantly, create the Renegade Hoof Boot. British AANHCP graduates, Nicola Barker and Sarah Braithwaite departed, too, to form their own UKNHCP. Richard Drewry,



AANHCP instructors at the 2002 Annual Convention. Clockwise from front: Pete Ramey, Steve Dick, Jaime Jackson; Ruth Green, Charles Hall, Cindy Sullivan. Photo by R. Drewry.

whom I also taught natural hoof care to back in the 1990s, and who helped me legalize the AANHCP as a 501c3 in 2004, left just last year to join other former AANHCP CPs at “Liberated Horsemanship” with Dr. Bruce Nock.

And there are many others, in other countries too, whom I won’t mention here, but I’ve had my hand in helping them get started or providing impetus to form their own hoof care organizations. Even Yvonne Welz has written that her inspiration for *The Horse’s Hoof* was its chronological predecessor, *The Hoof Care Advisor*, which I published until the formation of the AANHCP. And I don’t want to overlook, more of late, my good friend Joe Camp (of Benji fame!), who approached me in December of 2006, regarding what would become his now widely-read, *The Soul of a Horse*, “Hi Jaime, I come asking a favor. I have finished (still tweaking) my new book... and would very much like your comments.”

My hope is that this narrative will set the historical record straight and counter the many unfounded claims made about how all of this happened and who did what, and when. What is important is the recognition that many people have been involved with the evolution of the barefoot movement. If I were to say who came first in modern times with the idea that “going natural” is a smart thing to look at, that would be Emery in 1978. But, what to do about it? Understandably, people will disagree and have their own way of seeing and doing things. Just like Dr. Strasser and me. Nothing wrong with that! It’s a free world we live in. Efforts to characterize this diversity for the express purpose of “factionalizing” the barefoot hoof care movement in the name of “one-upmanship,” however, is counterproductive, fuels “Gurism,” and only confuses people. For me, I will stay the course with our natural horses thriving in the U.S. Great Basin, and do my best to represent them as invaluable models for anyone to emulate. 🐾

Visit Jaime’s website at: www.jaimejackson.com

Photo courtesy Nancy Jackson

My Barefoot Percheron Draft Stallion

by Deb Jayne

I am 5 ft 2, 130 lbs, and 46 years old. My equine partner is Mark, a black Percheron draft stallion that is 17 years old, 17 hh and weighs 1,578 pounds!

We train and compete in Dressage. Our favorite past-time and training tool is trail riding. I have found we can accomplish correct dressage training within the relaxed environment of the trail.

Our rhythm and forward from the seat and leg have improved dramatically on the open trail. The hours together have strengthened our partnership and provided us with muscle tone and stamina that is needed for the horse and rider to stay in harmony during the rigorous and exacting dressage work. We work once a week with my wonderful trainer/mentor, Maggy McHugh (Hebron, KY), to stay focused and on the training scale. She is often surprised at how much we have accomplished in a week; this is largely due to Mark’s willing nature and intelligence, and also him being comfortable in his work.

I bought Mark as a 7 yr old who had been trained by the Amish to work equipment and do logging. He had not been ridden and was afraid to canter (cantering is not allowed when hooked to equipment!) I have never had him shod, as once his feet were trimmed, they seemed in good shape and healthy. I did have a problem with his farriers, as they always left him too long, and did very little trimming up of the sole and frog area. When I would clean his feet, I could see that there was a lot of thrushy black material left behind, and he would soon have chipped, cracked feet and quarters. I did not want shoes, but needed sound feet!

That is why I started experimenting with my own trimming on Mark. My husband Charlie and I went to an Equine Affaire, and watched a seminar on “mustang” or Natural Trimming, and it made so much sense! As time moved on, I became more sure of my trimming skills, as I have worked with my horses’ feet since I had a foundered pony as a child. I also always gleaned all I could from the farriers, and have even reset a few shoes that have been loose. The more I studied and applied the natural trim to Mark’s and our other horses’ feet, the sounder and better they became. No more split hooves a week or two after paying to have them done, or worrying that I have a show or lesson planned,



Deb Jayne & Percheron stallion, Mark.

and he is already forging because of long back toes.

My biggest help in trimming came when I began to use power tools to trim. I have very small hands, and using the hoof nippers was difficult, and rasping hurt my shoulders. At my husband’s suggestion, I tried a grinder and “flap disc,” or sanding wheel, and it worked well. Mark was not at all worried about it.

Shortly after, I watched James Welz doing power tool trimming on the website “The Horses Hoof” and knew I was on the right track. This website has been the best and most correct information I have found. I am now using a more aggressive Carbide wheel for trimming, and the sander for finishing, as I am now much more comfortable and sure in my trimming method.



Mark’s right front after a trim.

After this winter of 2009-10, I was amazed at all of my horses’ feet! In September, I began feeding Nutrena Safe Choice again, instead of sweet feed, as I have read several articles on starchy feeds leading to thrushy conditions of the hoof. After super wet and soggy/terribly rough and frozen/wet again conditions, my horses’

hooves were perfect! With solid walls, no chips or cracks, and evenly worn toes. I found this quite exciting, as I had not even touched their feet for most of the winter. Mark’s feet showed no signs of thrush and had no chips at all.



Mark’s front hooves after a trim.

Remember, if you decide to take this journey, the results will be profound. Ask questions from knowledgeable natural hoof advocates, don’t get discouraged, and most of all, believe in yourself and your horse. If I can master this, so can you! Happy hooves and trails! 🐾

For lots more photos of Mark’s hooves, see **Online Extras Page 26**, and Deb’s website at www.windfallfarm.net

All photos courtesy Deb Jayne