

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *CONSIDERING THE HORSE* AND *HORSES NEVER LIE*

MARK RASHID



*"The most important book  
that Mark has written thus far."*

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Co-Author of *Evidence-Based Horsemanship*

# FOR THE LOVE OF THE HORSE

———— Looking Back, Looking Forward ————

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# Preface

A while ago I needed to get something out of our downstairs storage room. On the wall that separates the storage room from our guest room hangs a nicely framed display of my first two books, *Considering the Horse: Tales of Problems Solved and Lessons Learned*, and *A Good Horse Is Never a Bad Color*. I can't even begin to guess how many times I've walked past that frame over the years, but I do know it's been enough to where I seldom, if ever, even look at it anymore. On this particular day in the spring of 2021, however, I felt the need to stop and take a look.

A few things passed through my mind as I stood there. The first was how well the workmanship of the framing itself has held up over the years. It was done by a friend who owned a frame shop here in town back in the day, and it took him nearly a month to complete. Then it dawned on me that both he and his frame shop have been gone now for over twenty years.

The realization that my friend has been gone that long caused me to also realize that *Considering the Horse*, my very first book, must also be over twenty years old. But how could that be? It seems like I wrote it only a few short months ago. Looking at *Considering the Horse* in the frame, I found myself doing the math:

We had commissioned the frame right after *A Good Horse...* was released, and my friend passed in 1997. That meant the frame was most likely done in 1996.

*Considering the Horse* was released two or three years before *A Good Horse...*, which would put its release date in 1993.

Really? I went upstairs to the bookshelf in our office where Crissi keeps the books we both have written and checked the publication date inside the copy of *Considering the Horse*. Sure enough, it was released in 1993. That meant *Considering the Horse* would soon be turning 30-years old!

I started thinking about how dramatically the trajectory of my life changed with the publication of that little book and over the next few weeks began wondering about possible ways to commemorate its upcoming anniversary. Initially, writing another book didn't really enter the equation. I have all but shifted away from writing books in recent years and turned my energy to writing movie scripts, one of which recently picked up a little traction and moved into the development stage.

Yet the more I thought about it, the more I started to lean toward the possibility of an anniversary book (for lack of a better term). Two big questions loomed. The first was: did I even have anything to say that would be worthwhile to a reader? The second was: if I did have something worthwhile to say, would it be enough to fill an entire book?

Not long after that, I began jotting down a few ideas about things I thought folks might find interesting. Those ideas eventually turned into an outline, and the outline eventually turned into the book you now hold.

Included in this book are many important concepts, principles, and even science-based information that has had a huge impact on my work with horses (and people). Much of this I find very exciting, and I hope you will find it equally exciting and helpful in your own horsemanship journey.

Also included in this book are a few stories that folks who have spent time with some of my books in the past might find a bit familiar. That is by design. There are certain experiences in all our lives that we can look back on, and with hindsight, understand how those moments have become important touchstones or turning points that shaped who we are today.

While I don't believe living in the past is ever a good thing, I do believe revisiting those important life moments on occasion can be a healthy reminder of

not only where we've been, but where we're going. It also gives us an opportunity to hopefully experience those past moments from a new perspective of growth and learning.

After all, what would an anniversary book be if we didn't reminisce at least a little.

Thank you for picking up *For the Love of the Horse*, and I wish you all peace, health and happiness.

Mark Rashid  
Estes Park, Colorado

# The Horse's Perspective

*“Pride is concerned with who is right.  
Humility is concerned with what is right.”*

*EZRA TAFT BENSON*

**I**t was a little after ten in the morning and already proving to be one of those days where the heat in the air was shimmering a few feet above the open fields and the gravel road in the distance. I'd just dumped out and cleaned, and was refilling the water tank to the south pasture when Walter walked through the gate and turned loose a little gelding named Mack whose feet he'd just trimmed. About that same time, three or four horses from the herd made their way over to get a drink from the rapidly filling metal tank.

Walter slipped the leather halter from Mack's nose, glanced at the approaching horses and went back through the gate, closing and latching it behind him. Mack stood about where he'd been left, the heat of the day causing him to look a little like a once inflated balloon that lost half its air.

Having finally reached the tank, the horses lowered their heads and just started to drink when the previously half-inflated Mack seemed to suddenly grow about three

feet. His ears flattened, he rocked back on his haunches and launched himself toward the horses at the tank.

A brief but animated kerfuffle ensued as the horses, seemingly as surprised as I was at the unexpected turn of events, crashed into one another, trying to escape the little gelding's wrath. Having quickly gotten themselves organized, they wheeled and jumped as one in the opposite direction of Mack's line of attack.

As they stampeded away, one of them, a paint mare named Misty, snapped her tail and gave a kick in Mack's direction with both hind feet. Mack slid to a stop in front of the tank, his back end almost touching the ground, his nose pointed straight up in the air, easily escaping contact from the kick.

The whole thing took less than a couple seconds, and still, with me being just on the other side of the fence and only a couple feet away from the activity, I found myself instinctively recoiling, while at the same time glancing at Walter. He was finishing up latching the gate, halter, and rope in the crook of his arm, looking as if nothing at all out of the ordinary happened.

The horses cantered away while Mack, apparently satisfied with the outcome, let the air out of the balloon, lowered his head and closed his eyes as if the heat of the day was just too oppressive for him to do anything else. To my surprise, having thought he ran the other horses off so he could drink, Mack didn't give the water tank so much as a sideways look.

Walter came over and glanced at the near-full water tank.

"Gonna be hot enough to complain about today," he said, taking the half-smoked cigarette between his fingers and letting bluish smoke roll from the corner of his mouth. "Keep an eye on all the waters."

He turned to walk away.

"Why'd Mack do that?" I asked.

"Do what?" He stopped, glancing over his shoulder.

"He chased those horses off and didn't even get a drink!"

"He's a horse," he took another drag. "Sometimes they do that."

It wasn't the first time I'd heard that answer, nor would it be the last. In fact, I'm not sure how many times I saw a horse do something that I didn't understand, asked

Walter about it, and got the same or some similar type of answer. “Just a horse being a horse.” “Can’t figure horses sometimes.” “Seems strange, don’t it?”

Back then I took Walter’s answers to mean he didn’t know why horses offer up what I perceived as odd or unpredictable behavior. But now I realize what he was probably saying, in his own way, was horses will always act like horses. Their motivations for doing things are different than ours. As a result, behavior that might seem strange or unreasonable to us, being that we only see the world through the lens of being human, would be perfectly reasonable to a horse because they see the world through the lens of being a horse. And those are two completely different lenses.

I also believe Walter answered the way he did because he accepted horses for who and what they were. He saw horses as horses without the need to run them through any other lens just so it would be easier for him to understand them. Because of that, he could accept their behavior for what it was. . . *just horses being horses*.

So, when he would say something like, “Can’t figure horses sometimes,” or “Seems strange, don’t it?” he meant it in the literal sense. Horses *can* be hard to figure sometimes, and horse behavior *does* seem strange to *us*—because we’re not horses.

Without a lot of emphasis put on *why* horses did what they did, what I was left with was just the behavior itself and trying to figure out ways to deal with it when necessary. So, as I progressed in my learning, that was where my focus went, dealing with behavior rather than worrying so much about where it was coming from.

It wasn’t until years later that that way of thinking shifted for me. I’d been going to see a little gelding at a boarding facility near Denver once a week for a couple months. He was a friendly little bulldog-built Quarter Horse that was great to be around on the ground, but not much fun to ride due to persistent behavioral issues. It was not uncommon for him to crowhop, bolt, refuse to move, turn, stop, or back up, all in one session. Each time I went to see him we would seem to achieve some semblance of success in getting him to feel better, but then within a day or two all the behaviors would come back. It was about that same time a young equine chiropractor had been showing up and working on some of the other horses at the facility, and I noticed the horses he worked on always seemed to go better after his sessions with them.

After watching the chiropractor work and listening to him explain what he was doing, I asked if he would take a look at the Quarter Horse gelding. To make a long



story short, after just one session with him, most of the behavioral issues I'd been trying to help this horse resolve for the past two months seemed to go away. Three sessions later, the behaviors were completely gone.

That was when I realized while some behaviors horses offer up certainly fit into the "horse being a horse" category, other behaviors, like the ones the little bulldog gelding had been struggling with, may very well be coming from some other source. Having come to that realization, I knew I needed to figure out and understand the difference.

Little did I know at the time that making that one decision would send me on a decades-long journey of discovery about horses that would allow me to learn from some of the world leaders in hoof care, saddle fit, chiropractic, dental care, acupressure and acupuncture, cold lasers, bodywork (after which I became a trained bodyworker), nutrition, ophthalmology, and neurology/brain science.



The great martial artist Bruce Lee once said, *"Before I learned the art, a punch was just a punch, and a kick, just a kick. After I learned the art, a punch was no longer a punch, a kick, no longer a kick. Now that I understand the art, a punch is just a punch, and a kick is just a kick."*

He would explain how as he progressed in his training, he sought out the help of masters to help him understand the nuances of a punch and kick, and he learned how to break down each individual component of both. He learned different ways of striking and kicking, and how many times to use each, given any variety of situations. He studied and practiced and studied and practiced some more, so much so that eventually he was no longer able to process the information he was taking in effectively and efficiently. At that point, he said, *"A punch was no longer a punch, a kick no longer a kick."*

At some point, things began to shift. His control, focus, timing, and power all began to improve to where he no longer had to think about which punch or kick to execute, when to use them, or how much energy to use. His speed and timing improved as did his balance and precision. Eventually, and after many years, he reached the point where he no longer needed to think about technique or mechanics because both were now second nature. *"Once again, a punch was just a punch, and a kick was just a kick."*

Something similar happened to me when it comes to understanding horse behavior. Early on I believed horse behavior to be just horse behavior. It was the way horses behaved in relation to how they felt. Then, as I began to study the different aspects and potential causes and effects of behavior, horse behavior no longer seemed just horse behavior anymore.

When I was learning about chiropractic, all unwanted behavior seemed to stem from chiropractic issues. When I was learning about saddle fit, I started to see unwanted behavior as potential saddle-fit issues. It was the same when it came to teeth, bodywork, nutrition, and all the rest.

Then, over years of studying and observation, things began to shift again. I started to see that while there's no question a lot of unwanted behavior can be traced back to some underlying physical or emotional issue, in the end, the behavior is just behavior. It's the way a horse acts in relation to how the horse feels.

Today when I work with a horse and rider, and almost always before we even get started, I look to see if there are any glaring physical issues or asymmetries in the horse's movement. I look for any possible signs of saddle fit, dental, or feet issues. Depending on the horse and the behavior exhibited, I might ask what the horse is being fed, what the living situation is, or even how the horse is bred (something I'll discuss in more detail later—see p. 123). I'm never looking for anything specific with any of this, nor am I making any judgments about what I see. Rather, I try to just take the information in and put it in the back of my mind. If the horse shows some kind of behavior, it is usually associated with one or more of the possible causes I've already noticed, and then I discuss it with the rider.

Much of the time, we can figure out the possible cause of an unwanted behavior just by the rider describing the behavior and then watching the horse go. An example of this happened several years ago when one of our clinic hosts, an accomplished trainer and rider, asked me to take a look at a horse she had been riding for a client.

She'd been experiencing a couple issues with the little mare she couldn't quite put her finger on. The first was that they would often be going around nicely, then suddenly the mare would put her head almost to the ground for several strides before throwing her head almost straight up and shaking it. After the head shake, she would then put her head in a normal position. This behavior usually got worse the faster the horse went.

The other issue she was having was that the mare was stumbling, which also got worse the faster she went. The stumbling had gotten so bad that they had actually fallen once while at the canter.

Stumbling can show up when a horse's feet have grown too long or from physical issues or a tightness somewhere in the body, such as the shoulders, withers, and neck. We've also seen it in horses with substantial dental issues. But this horse didn't appear to have any of these issues.

It wasn't long after the pair started cantering an eighty-foot circle in the arena that both issues the clinic host described became apparent. Within a few strides after their transition to the canter, the mare dropped her head so low her nose nearly touched the ground. She then tipped her head from side to side, lifted it so her nose almost pointed toward the sky, shook it again, then lowered it to a normal position.

About a half lap later she repeated almost the exact same behavior, something she would do numerous times over the next several minutes and regardless of the direction in which she was ridden. She also stumbled a couple times as well, although she always caught herself.

Nothing about the behaviors the mare was offering looked normal to me. Horses that lower their head while ridden might do so as a way to stretch, but they seldom tip their head from side to side while their nose is almost on the ground, and almost never follow it with sticking their nose straight up in the air and shaking their head. As far as stumbling, that is certainly not uncommon. However, what was uncommon was that when I asked the host if she'd ever seen the horse stumble while cantering around out in the pasture, her answer was yes. Not only that, but she said the mare did all the behaviors without a rider on her back, including everything she did with her head.

This was an important bit of information. Generally speaking, if horses exhibit some sort of odd or unwanted behavior under saddle, but not when they are out on their own, then the behavior is likely caused by something associated with their rider, such as training or ill-fitting tack, or possibly even something physical that only shows up when they have weight on their back. If, on the other hand, the same behavior shows up whether the horse is being ridden or not, that could very well be a sign that whatever the issue is, it's there all the time and might not have anything to do with the rider.

At face value, the mare's behaviors weren't necessarily out of the ordinary as far as things that horses do from time to time. But they didn't seem quite right, either. The problem, at least initially, was that I couldn't put my finger on what was going on. Over the years I had seen variations of everything the mare was offering, but never all of them together, and never as dramatic as what she was presenting.

As I watched her head drop to the ground for about the tenth time, followed by the raised head shaking, I started getting the impression the mare might be having trouble with her vision. I wasn't convinced this was the case. Over the years I'd seen quite a few horses with odd behavior that had me wondering if they were having trouble with their vision. Out of those, only a handful ended up being diagnosed as such.

But still, this looked pretty strange. I filmed the mare's behavior and sent it off to a friend who happens to be a leading equine ophthalmologist to get his opinion. He suggested taking close-up photos of each of her eyes after dark, using a flash. If anything was getting in the way of her vision, it would probably show up in the photos.

Sure enough, the photos showed what looked like a small, jagged-edged island, partially covering the lens in her right eye. I sent the photos to my friend, who confirmed that what we were seeing was a floating cyst. Because the cyst was floating, she was able to move it around by raising, lowering, and shaking her head. As it turned out, her stumbling was a result of her vision being impaired and everything else was nothing more than her trying to move the cyst so she could see better.

Luckily, this was able to be resolved through a non-invasive procedure by a local equine ophthalmologist and the mare was able to go back to her normal activity within a relatively short time after having it done.



Not long ago I had an interesting situation come up regarding horse behavior. In this case, the behavior itself was relatively innocuous and not really an issue. However, the owner's understanding about the behavior, and its perceived cause, became so troubling for her that she was considering getting out of horses altogether.

It was lunch time, but Mary was already standing in the middle of the large indoor arena when I came in to get ready for the afternoon sessions of the clinic. Her horse,