

A close-up photograph of a brown horse's face, looking slightly to the right. The horse has a dark brown mane and is wearing a black halter with a colorful braided pattern. The horse's eyes are dark and expressive. The background is a wooden fence.

“Basic human
contact - the
meeting of
eyes, the
exchanging
of words -
is to the psyche
what oxygen is
to the brain.
If you’re feeling
abandoned
by the world,
interact
with anyone
you can.”

—Martha Beck—

Taking the Lead

a Horse Whisperer's Journey

by Gabrielle Saveri

Ambling down a bumpy, dusty stretch of road on the way to Prescott, it's a blistering 98 degrees. Koelle Simpson, 30, Scottsdale-based horse "whisperer" bounces along slowly in her giant silver quarter-ton diesel truck, avoiding potholes and making her way towards the Circle "L" Ranch, a privately-owned horse rescue farm located just off Highway 17.

Just past Wigwam Road, desolate, dusty pastures appear as far as the eye can see – a hodgepodge of barbed-wire fences, rust-colored metal horse pens, some ramshackle houses, a church and a smattering of horses in every size, shape, color and age you could possibly imagine. She pulls into the front chicken-wire gate of the ranch and prepares to halter-break a wild 18-month-old Bay Quarter Horse named Wildfire, who's been at the rescue outfit ever since he was born.

"He's totally 'green,'" quips Simpson, pointing to the muscular black-maned horse as we enter onto the ranch grounds. In horse-talk, "green" means nobody has ever even put a halter on him. For rescue outfits like Circle L, that is an important factor in determining whether or not a horse is ready for adoption. "If you can't get a halter on him, then he can't be adopted," she says.

Breaking a horse is nothing new for the small-framed, dark-haired Simpson, who has been working with horses and using natural horsemanship techniques for more than 15 years.

"The more untouched horses are, and the more trauma they've been through, the more they challenge me to be present. You have to be aware of every micro-move you make because that matters a lot," she explains. She admits the challenge keeps her on her toes.

Simpson began working with horses while growing up in Florida. Having struggled with unhealthy relationships as a child, horses provided an escape from abuse in her daily life and enabled her to minimize her interaction with people.



"I had developed a lot of distrust, and struggled with negotiating around people's hidden agendas," Simpson recalls. As she spent more and more time around horses, Simpson began to notice that they were extremely sensitive to her energy and that often, they reflected back the same energy she was putting out. "I found that if I came to the horses from that place of being a victim, they wanted nothing to do with that kind of energy. In order for me to get close to them and enjoy interacting with them, I had to learn how to act differently," she adds.

Simpson believes she learned to communicate better by balancing her own energies when working with the horses.

"As a child, I didn't realize that these majestic and powerful teachers would not only help me rebuild trust within myself, but also to rebuild healthy relationships with people in my life." The lessons she learned from her four-legged friends were pivotal toward shaping her own behavior: "I learned to really embrace being a leader of my experience, to be compassionate and understanding, and to set healthy boundaries for myself."▶