



Jean-Jacques Joris

Relational Implicit April 2012

A native of Geneva, Switzerland, Jean-Jacques Joris founded Twin Oaks Farm with his wife Isabelle, a center for equine-assisted psychotherapy, near Boulder, Colorado. Jean-Jacques holds a Law degree from Geneva University and an MA in Transpersonal Counseling Psychology from Naropa University in Boulder. In offering mindfulness-based psychotherapy with horses to his clients, Jean-Jacques brings together his three lifelong passions: the human body-mind, contemplative practice, and the healing power of the human-horses relationship. For fifteen years, Jean-Jacques was a diplomat with the Swiss foreign service, and worked in conflict and post-conflict environments around the world, as well as in the field of war crimes and international justice, gaining first-hand experience of individual and collective trauma. Jean-Jacques speaks several languages and is currently learning the wordless language of his 13 equine co-therapists.

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Relational Implicit* project (<http://relationalimplicit.com>).

For better or worse, this transcript retains the spontaneous, spoken-language quality of the podcast conversation.

Serge Prengel: So, unlike most of the people who listen to this conversation, you actually have some helpers when you conduct therapy?

Jean-Jacques Joris: Right. I have about thirteen co-therapists. All of them are very hairy, four-legged and most of the time, when not working with me, are grazing on my pasture. I work marginally with goats and llamas but mainly with horses.”

S P: So horses are your co-therapists?

J-J J: Right. I do equine-assisted psychotherapy, and it is also called equine-facilitated psychotherapy and counseling, depending on the type of the session we are having. It is essentially an experiential work where we bring a horse into the session. The idea behind it- well there are many ideas- but one of the main ideas is that whatever the client brings into the space-the arena, the pasture or wherever it is where we are working- whatever they bring is what manifests elsewhere also in their life. So instead of talking about a particular complex or a difficult pattern they experience in their relationships or at work, we can see it manifest in relation to the horses and the work we do with the horses. This gives the client the opportunity to work on it directly.

S P: They are not talking about it, but since they bring these issues with them, they are going to manifest in their relationship with the horse. So you are going to be addressing it directly when you address how they are dealing with the horse.

J-J J: Exactly. And the beauty of it is that people get the opportunity to test their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as they can try new beliefs, new thoughts, and new behaviors with the horse and see what happens. So it is like a massive, larger-than-life biofeedback, where you have an animal reacting to something that you do that you have never done before. Let me give you an example. Many people come to this field, enter a pasture, and are afraid that the horses will see

through them and will reject them. As you know, a lot of people carry a very low self-esteem. They get into the field and they say, "These horses may be nonjudgmental and what have you, but they also see through us. They will see that I am a bad person or I am not good enough, and they will turn their back and leave." Sometimes these clients will get into the field, and these horses will do the contrary; they will gather around them. So it kind of shatters their assumption about who they are, which is a good way for us to start the session. In other cases, horses will actually enact what these people have experienced in their lives, meaning they will reject those clients, they will turn their back, and they will not let those clients get into their space. This is where we have the opportunity to ask people to try a new thought or try a new belief. Because my work is mindfulness based and strength-based, I do a lot of visualization and I help clients work towards acceptance. Then I invite them to speak their truths. So in that moment of being abandoned, of experimenting, and of living in that abandonment and rejection they feel in their life; they can have the courage to turn towards it and to their own feelings- the "What is it you are feeling right now? What is going on in your body?" As people open up and admit to something, which they probably rarely do since it is not a safe thing to do in life; they are able to say, "This is what I am feeling. This is my fear. This is my sadness. This is what is in my memory." And in 99% of the cases, Serge, horses come to them and stay with them. So there is something almost magical about it. Horses react negatively to our inner fights. When you push down or try to suppress emotions and feelings, when there is something in you that is very strong, and you put the lid down on it, horses react to it. They feel it. It is almost as if there is this type of dissonance. This is quite disturbing for horses. On the contrary, when you turn towards it and create some space for that thing that is happening inside you-that you don't like or may be afraid of or that makes you sad or has that deep roots in your childhood- when you turn towards it and accept it, the horses come. And I have seen that happen countless times. Clients who were alone with their fear, sadness, anger or grief, by just turning toward it, they suddenly become surrounded by horses. This is a huge validation that my co-therapists are not only big, warm, and fuzzy, but also there is something more to them. There is this massive animal life that is nonverbal but highly communicative. We know that horses have mirror neurons and there is something activated between horses and humans. So by just finding yourself in that moment of touching your deepest pain, being surrounded and having witnesses in your presence is something extremely powerful.

S P: So I can understand how at the beginning of the conversation you spoke about "emotional biofeedback". That is what we speak about in the triune brain layer, the mammalian brain, which is where that communication can happen on an emotional level. Without being in a way short-circuited or distorted by words, that emotional communication gets through in a very powerful way.

J-J J: The thing about words is interesting. I invite clients to speak to the horse. It may be that some clients, especially in the earlier sessions, may have resistance to sharing painful, deep, and raw wounds with their therapist- especially if their therapist is a new therapist. But they will have less resistance to sharing with a horse. So what I will do depends on what happens between a client and a horse in a given exercise. If I see the horse is reacting in a certain way, I can be almost certain that the client is resisting something, trying to suppress something or trying to ignore something that is happening inside him or her. So that is when I step in and ask them to share that with the horse. I step back. I step away. I want you to tell the horse why. The point is that when you describe, when you put words out loud to your thoughts, emotions, feelings, and bodily sensations; you activate another part of your brain. You fully engage your cognitions and you align it with your emotions and bodily sensations. That is your congruence with cognition, emotion, body, and behavior that the horses react positively to.

S P: So very important- we are not talking about avoiding words but really talking about that moment when you engage your whole person: the intellect, the emotions, and the behavior. That whole gestalt is what the horse is going to react to.

J-J J: Right. I am going to go into some anecdotal elements. For me, it was very interesting. Before I came into this field, I was in the foreign service of my country for 15 to 16 years. At one point, I was given an assignment that was particularly taxing. I was working in the field of war crimes, genocide, and international justice. So I bought a horse. The horse was in a stable in the middle of the city, and I had to ride that horse everyday or else it would be confined to that small stall for days. So everyday I would come to the stable at 8 or 9pm, try to put on a nice face, try to sound engaging and happy, where actually I was a bundle of unresolved emotion, anger, and frustration. It was work-related mainly. So each time I was coming into the stall, all the horses would peak their heads out of the stalls except mine. When she would see me, she would cringe. She would literally put her ears back, which is a bad sign with horses, and literally shrink up and hide in the most distant corner of her stall. That happened for days and days and days. I would ask myself, "What is wrong with this horse?" One day, I just turned around the question. I said, "Okay. What is happening right now?" I started talking to the horse, and I said to the horse, "I bought you. I want to ride you everyday. This is really not fun for you and it is not fun for me. I am feeling sad." And I went on and on and on. As I went on, the horse started getting closer and closer. At the end, she had her head against my chest, completely relaxed. I was talking to her and caressing her ear, and I realized, "Oh my gosh! What is happening here?" So that was the first time I experienced this. At that time, I was a diplomat and I did not even know that anything like equine-assisted psychotherapy even existed. It was amazing. With this horse, I started a real friendship. So that is how I first experienced it myself.

S P: Yeah. I love that story. That turn around of "what is wrong with this horse" and that "wait a minute", that started the communication. Very nice.

J-J J: I see that, of course, one of the beautiful things in this work is that because they react to that congruence of cognition, emotion, and behavior; we can say in a way that the horses do see through us. But they are extremely forgiving. They don't react on the basis of your socioeconomic status, whether you are male or female, rich or poor, white or black, religious or not. They could not care less. All the categories that matter so much in human society are absolutely irrelevant for horses. But they do react to what is most sensitive within us. So people and clients when working with horses will practice that self-awareness. They can say, "Oh. What is happening in the environment and what is happening within me?"

S P: So let me just check something with you. Part of the work you have described must have been happening in the stables. What exactly is the setting?

J-J J: Well, no. The setting is we are on a farm, and the horses live 24-7 and year-round on the pasture. When we have very cold weather, blizzards, etc., we put blankets on them, they have shelters, and we give them twice as much hay, but basically they are outside. This means that, with my clients, most of the time we will go into horse territory, meaning the pasture, and either we work with the horses at liberty in their own environment or the client may choose their own horse. In this case, the client will halter the horse, take the horse out of the pasture, and take the horse into the arena. We have a small round-pen. I would say it is round and about 60-foot diameter. We have a large ring outdoors. We also have a smaller, covered arena for psychotherapy work. So when

the weather is not good, windy, rainy or too hot, we are in the covered arena. Other than that, we are outside. We have many possibilities. One, as I said, is the client comes into the pasture and the horses are at liberty. The horses are free at all times to engage with the client or not. They are on a huge pasture and if they don't want to be with that client they can just leave. When we take a horse off a pasture to go into the arena, usually the client will choose the horse, and we look at what it is that this choice was based on. What is it that you see in that horse that makes you choose that horse? Sometimes clients will choose a horse, the horse will not look too enthusiastic about it, and clients will fall back to another horse that looks more enthusiastic. We can look at that too because, more often than not, this is something that has happened in their life. You are in a relationship with a person who has chosen you, rather than being in a relationship with the person you want to be in a relationship with. The third possibility is when the weather is not good and before the client comes I want to make sure we have one or two horses in the covered arena. The covered arena is a little bit of a distance from the pasture, and if the weather is not good or if we work at night, I need to choose a horse. So, in the beginning, I would go "client X has been presenting with this, so I think this horse would do well with that." I take it and see what happens. The closer I became to my horses and the more I started communicating with them, and the more I realized they had a say in this. In a way, that may sound a little bit out there. When I choose a horse for the client, I try to hold an image of that client in my mind as I walk around the horses and see what happens. It has happened to me where I was thinking of a particular client and I thought, "This would be a perfect match. She is a sweet mare. She is very gentle. This man is a little bit afraid of horses so this would be good for him." But, she would not let me come near her! Although she is very friendly and comes to me when I am there, that day when I was thinking of the client and walking behind that horse, she would have none of it. As I was trying to cast that horse, another horse was behind me following me; one who never follows me. So I need to pay attention to unusual behaviors. When something unusual happens, I need to pay attention to that. So it was really that horse that was the right one, which would have been the last one I would have chosen for that client. So I asked it to come and he was completely relaxed, licking and chewing, which is a sign of contentment for horses. So I haltered that horse to come to the arena, and I think it was one of the most beautiful and transformative sessions that I have ever seen in my life.

S P: Really, so it is that sense of really paying attention to whom they are, the communication that happens, and all that unsaid emotional stuff that can be around that person.

J-J J: Right, because horses are sentient beings, and they experience almost the whole range of emotions that we humans experience. Horses experience this. They can be in grief. They can be depressed. They experience and manifest joy, something between affection and love, desire, companionship, friendship, sadness, fear, and anger. So they do experience these emotions, and there are a lot of things that happen in the contact between humans and horses, some of which are being investigated and researched. We know, for instance, that close and loving contact between horses and humans affect the heart rate variability of horses and humans alike. We also know that it seems that in physical contact between horses and humans, humans are able to trigger the release of oxytocin in horses, which in turn, triggers a release of oxytocin in humans. So there are a lot of things.

S P: All of that implicit emotional communication that functions in a way that we are not able to exactly understand how but does happen.

J-J J: Keep in mind also that horses and humans have a way shorter life in common than humans and dogs for instance. We go a long way with dogs- maybe 20,000 years. With horses it is about 6,000 years. But still, horses...that is the coevolution of genes and horses may have been to some extent influenced by our growing up together, if you will. Humans must have selected horses that could best read humans so they thrive better. Horses that were domesticated fared way better than those out in the wilderness. The ones in the wilderness ended up being humans' lunch or dinner.

S P: You were saying also that people who use horses a lot became so close to them. The horse and the rider have such a close communication. I can imagine evolution playing a role in selecting those that can best communicate and perceive what humans feel.

J-J J: Absolutely. Absolutely. Another element to knowing that mutual understanding and reading of each other's cues and nonverbal cues, is that horses seem to pick up our images and our visualization. If you think of stopping somewhere or stopping when you are riding your horse, or cantering, the chances are the horses will do that. Many people will tell you, "I was thinking of stopping there and I didn't do anything but my horse stopped." Some professionals in this field go as far to think that the great advances made in horses with people on the autism spectrum may be linked to that - because people within the autism spectrum disorders tend to be visual thinkers, not conceptual. It could be that horses may pick up that and vice versa.

S P: So what I am hearing is definitely something about the visual, but also underlying it is attunement and the capacity for the horses to be attuned. So in a way we are talking about what a lot of therapy is about; it is about that attunement as an experience of communication and also a repair of the things that didn't go right in our upbringing. So really a lot of what you are focusing on is attunement.

J-J J: Yes. Absolutely. Attunement for a variety of reasons, and particularly for abuse survivors, may be for the mind something dangerous. So they get the opportunity to work on that, to practice that, and to open up with the horses because it is safer. Yet, a horse can step on your foot. A horse can bite. A horse can buck. A horse can stampede. A lot of things can happen around horses. Another field that is highly intricately woven into our therapy is the experience of safety. How do you stay safe...

S P: In the presence of very real potential danger. So there is that danger that the horse is not a little cat, but there is the possibility of staying safe.

J-J J: Exactly. So far I have not experienced any of my clients having any accidents. A few people in workshops, against my repeated warning, have put their hands inside the horses' mouths. A couple of them were bitten, not badly. A horse can squeeze a steel water bottle flat, so if a horse wants to break your hand, it can, but they don't want to. They are grass eaters, not meat eaters. They do nibble quite a bit. A couple of people were nipped. Unfortunately it was not in a therapy setting and was in a workshop, since I would have liked to see what these people do in their lives that is also bringing them into dangerous situations. Like I said, safety-wise nothing has happened here, but still, it is a learning process for clients. Safety as an experiential process and a self-awareness process, not one in which we can try to control our environment or one in which we receive as a list from a therapist of "Do's" and "Don'ts" that will keep you safe if you follow it. For clients who work with those horses, they will practice attunement and hone those observation skills as well. They will, little by little, know, "Oh. If the horse has stopped, that doesn't mean it doesn't like me. It may have seen

something.” So they hone their observation skills, and they are also better able to monitor what is going on within them. Now all these are skills, of course, which they take after the sessions into their lives. The point is not to teach people horsemanship skills. My point is not to teach people how to go about handling or leading horses. It is really about self-awareness about what is going on out there and self-acceptance. Also, it is about living a more fulfilling life, which they can do if they practice outside the arena what they have learned with the horses.

S P: Yeah. Yeah. Do you integrate talk therapy without horses and sessions with horses or is your work entirely done in the presence of horses?

J-J J: It depends. For some clients, the whole session will be spent on the pasture with the horses. Some of the clients will be talking and at some point we will take what the client is discussing to the horses. Sometimes we will do the contrary. We will start with the horses and then process inside. Sometimes we might practice some mindfulness skills and movement, and then we will take that to the horses. I have some clients with whom I may do one session inside without horses and two or three sessions outside with horses. It depends. It fluctuates. Some clients come to see me not to work with horses and they end up working with horses and vice versa. I also work with couples, families, and adolescents. With adolescents, we definitely spend a lot of time with the horses. We don't do therapy; we just do things with the horses. As the rapport is being built and as they observe the horses, they start opening up and telling me about themselves. So it is a very wonderful work.

S P: I am a little curious about what happened with the couples. I have just seen there are a lot of differences between couples. Do you bring them together in the field? What happens?

J-J J: We do that. We can work with communication and the other things to do with couples, but it is a hands-on work. We will look at all the underlying assumptions. Again, when a couple is sitting in front of me in my office, they tell me about what happened, what happened yesterday, and about that huge argument. That she did this, and I did that. She said “no”, and I said that. Anyway, when we are with the horses, I get a direct opportunity to see what is going on. I assign them a task, sometimes an impossible task. It is never about doing it right or wrong. Again, I am not teaching horsemanship skills. It is really about anything that comes up during the interaction with the horse is grist for the mill. So I can assign them an impossible task and see what happens and how they communicate. I can highlight that directly in the moment. What we also do a lot, which I think is beautiful and very effective, is not so much focus on what is not working but on what *is* working. Sometimes I do it with my goats. A lot of couples work with the goats. It brings an element of playfulness and child-like fun. It is useful for couples, especially those who come to therapy in the very last stretch of a degrading relationship and are a few miles before a divorce, so we are already quite late in the process. But playing with horses brings back a sense of playfulness and aliveness, and they may reconnect at a level they might have forgotten was present way earlier in the relationship, like when they started to date each other. It is that giddy, happy element in their relationship. We can rekindle and reconnect that also.

S P: Yeah. So it is like a part of them is reawakened. Very Nice. So, Jean-Jacques, as we are coming to an end, is there anything that you'd like to say to conclude this?

J-J J: What I have learned with this work, not just with the horses but with being outside with nature and observing all sorts of animals, is that I am rediscovering something that is available to each of us, which is the beauty of the interrelatedness of humans and the environment; humans and

animals; and humans and nature. Animals- even including birds-, nature, the sky, and the clouds have such amazing beauty that we don't see because we are so much engaged in our tunnel-vision-like approach to life and work. Yes, our lives are stressful. Just taking that pause, looking around, and dropping into our five senses opens a world of beauty that is available to each of us.

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started talking to the horse, and I said to the horse, "I bought you. I want to ride you everyday. This is really not fun for you and it is not fun for me. I am feeling sad." And I went on and on and on. As I went on, the horse started getting closer and closer. At the end, she had her head against my chest, completely relaxed. I was talking to her and caressing her ear, and I realized, "Oh my gosh! What is happening here?" So that was the first time I experienced this. At that time, I was a diplomat and I did not even know that anything like equine-assisted psychotherapy even existed. It was amazing. With this horse, I started a real friendship. So that is how I first experienced it myself.

S P: Yeah. I love that story. That turn around of "what is wrong with this horse" and that "wait a minute", that started the communication. Very nice.

J-J J: I see that, of course, one of the beautiful things in this work is that because they react to that congruence of cognition, emotion, and behavior; we can say in a way that the horses do see through us. But they are extremely forgiving. They don't react on the basis of your socioeconomic status, whether you are male or female, rich or poor, white or black, religious or not. They could not care less. All the categories that matter so much in human society are absolutely irrelevant for horses. But they do react to what is most sensitive within us. So people and clients when working with horses will practice that self-awareness. They can say, "Oh. What is happening in the environment and what is happening within me?"

S P: So let me just check something with you. Part of the work you have described must have been happening in the stables. What exactly is the setting?

J-J J: Well, no. The setting is we are on a farm, and the horses live 24-7 and year-round on the pasture. When we have very cold weather, blizzards, etc., we put blankets on them, they have shelters, and we give them twice as much hay, but basically they are outside. This means that, with my clients, most of the time we will go into horse territory, meaning the pasture, and either we work with the horses at liberty in their own environment or the client may choose their own horse. In this case, the client will halter the horse, take the horse out of the pasture, and take the horse into the arena. We have a small round-pen. I would say it is round and about 60-foot diameter. We have a large ring outdoors. We also have a smaller, covered arena for psychotherapy work. So when the weather is not good, windy, rainy or too hot, we are in the covered arena. Other than that, we are outside. We have many possibilities. One, as I said, is the client comes into the pasture and the horses are at liberty. The horses are free at all times to engage with the client or not. They are on a huge pasture and if they don't want to be with that client they can just leave. When we take a horse off a pasture to go into the arena, usually the client will choose the horse, and we look at what it is that this choice was based on. What is it that you see in that horse that makes you choose that horse? Sometimes clients will choose a horse, the horse will not look too enthusiastic about it, and clients will fall back to another horse that looks more enthusiastic. We can look at that too because, more often than not, this is something that has happened in their life. You are in a relationship with a person who has chosen you, rather than being in a relationship with the person you want to be in a relationship with. The third possibility is when the weather is not good and before the client comes I want to make sure we have one or two horses in the covered arena. The covered arena is a little bit of a distance from the pasture, and if the weather is not good or if we work at night, I need to choose a horse. So, in the beginning, I would go "client X has been presenting with this, so I think this horse would do well with that." I take it and see what happens. The closer I became to my horses and the more I started communicating with them, and the more I realized they had a say in this. In a way, that may sound a little bit out there. When I choose a horse for the client, I try to hold

an image of that client in my mind as I walk around the horses and see what happens. It has happened to me where I was thinking of a particular client and I thought, "This would be a perfect match. She is a sweet mare. She is very gentle. This man is a little bit afraid of horses so this would be good for him." But, she would not let me come near her! Although she is very friendly and comes to me when I am there, that day when I was thinking of the client and walking behind that horse, she would have none of it. As I was trying to cast that horse, another horse was behind me following me; one who never follows me. So I need to pay attention to unusual behaviors. When something unusual happens, I need to pay attention to that. So it was really that horse that was the right one, which would have been the last one I would have chosen for that client. So I asked it to come and he was completely relaxed, licking and chewing, which is a sign of contentment for horses. So I haltered that horse to come to the arena, and I think it was one of the most beautiful and transformative sessions that I have ever seen in my life.

S P: Really, so it is that sense of really paying attention to whom they are, the communication that happens, and all that unsaid emotional stuff that can be around that person.

J-J J: Right, because horses are sentient beings, and they experience almost the whole range of emotions that we humans experience. Horses experience this. They can be in grief. They can be depressed. They experience and manifest joy, something between affection and love, desire, companionship, friendship, sadness, fear, and anger. So they do experience these emotions, and there are a lot of things that happen in the contact between humans and horses, some of which are being investigated and researched. We know, for instance, that close and loving contact between horses and humans affect the heart rate variability of horses and humans alike. We also know that it seems that in physical contact between horses and humans, humans are able to trigger the release of oxytocin in horses, which in turn, triggers a release of oxytocin in humans. So there are a lot of things.

S P: All of that implicit emotional communication that functions in a way that we are not able to exactly understand how but does happen.

J-J J: Keep in mind also that horses and humans have a way shorter life in common than humans and dogs for instance. We go a long way with dogs- maybe 20,000 years. With horses it is about 6,000 years. But still, horses...that is the coevolution of genes and horses may have been to some extent influenced by our growing up together, if you will. Humans must have selected horses that could best read humans so they thrive better. Horses that were domesticated faired way better than those out in the wilderness. The ones in the wilderness ended up being humans' lunch or dinner.

S P: You were saying also that people who use horses a lot became so close to them. The horse and the rider have such a close communication. I can imagine evolution playing a role in selecting those that can best communicate and perceive what humans feel.

J-J J: Absolutely. Absolutely. Another element to knowing that mutual understanding and reading of each other's cues and nonverbal cues, is that horses seem to pick up our images and our visualization. If you think of stopping somewhere or stopping when you are riding your horse, or cantering, the chances are the horses will do that. Many people will tell you, "I was thinking of stopping there and I didn't do anything but my horse stopped." Some professionals in this field go as far to think that the great advances made in horses with people on the autism spectrum may be

linked to that - because people within the autism spectrum disorders tend to be visual thinkers, not conceptual. It could be that horses may pick up that and vice versa.

S P: So what I am hearing is definitely something about the visual, but also underlying it is attunement and the capacity for the horses to be attuned. So in a way we are talking about what a lot of therapy is about; it is about that attunement as an experience of communication and also a repair of the things that didn't go right in our upbringing. So really a lot of what you are focusing on is attunement.

J-J J: Yes. Absolutely. Attunement for a variety of reasons, and particularly for abuse survivors, may be for the mind something dangerous. So they get the opportunity to work on that, to practice that, and to open up with the horses because it is safer. Yet, a horse can step on your foot. A horse can bite. A horse can buck. A horse can stampede. A lot of things can happen around horses. Another field that is highly intricately woven into our therapy is the experience of safety. How do you stay safe...

S P: In the presence of very real potential danger. So there is that danger that the horse is not a little cat, but there is the possibility of staying safe.

J-J J: Exactly. So far I have not experienced any of my clients having any accidents. A few people in workshops, against my repeated warning, have put their hands inside the horses' mouths. A couple of them were bitten, not badly. A horse can squeeze a steel water bottle flat, so if a horse wants to break your hand, it can, but they don't want to. They are grass eaters, not meat eaters. They do nibble quite a bit. A couple of people were nipped. Unfortunately it was not in a therapy setting and was in a workshop, since I would have liked to see what these people do in their lives that is also bringing them into dangerous situations. Like I said, safety-wise nothing has happened here, but still, it is a learning process for clients. Safety as an experiential process and a self-awareness process, not one in which we can try to control our environment or one in which we receive as a list from a therapist of "Do's" and "Don'ts" that will keep you safe if you follow it. For clients who work with those horses, they will practice attunement and hone those observation skills as well. They will, little by little, know, "Oh. If the horse has stopped, that doesn't mean it doesn't like me. It may have seen something." So they hone their observation skills, and they are also better able to monitor what is going on within them. Now all these are skills, of course, which they take after the sessions into their lives. The point is not to teach people horsemanship skills. My point is not to teach people how to go about handling or leading horses. It is really about self-awareness about what is going on out there and self-acceptance. Also, it is about living a more fulfilling life, which they can do if they practice outside the arena what they have learned with the horses.

S P: Yeah. Yeah. Do you integrate talk therapy without horses and sessions with horses or is your work entirely done in the presence of horses?

J-J J: It depends. For some clients, the whole session will be spent on the pasture with the horses. Some of the clients will be talking and at some point we will take what the client is discussing to the horses. Sometimes we will do the contrary. We will start with the horses and then process inside. Sometimes we might practice some mindfulness skills and movement, and then we will take that to the horses. I have some clients with whom I may do one session inside without horses and two or three sessions outside with horses. It depends. It fluctuates. Some clients come to see me not to work with horses and they end up working with horses and vice versa. I also work with couples,

families, and adolescents. With adolescents, we definitely spend a lot of time with the horses. We don't do therapy; we just do things with the horses. As the rapport is being built and as they observe the horses, they start opening up and telling me about themselves. So it is a very wonderful work.

S P: I am a little curious about what happened with the couples. I have just seen there are a lot of differences between couples. Do you bring them together in the field? What happens?

J-J J: We do that. We can work with communication and the other things to do with couples, but it is a hands-on work. We will look at all the underlying assumptions. Again, when a couple is sitting in front of me in my office, they tell me about what happened, what happened yesterday, and about that huge argument. That she did this, and I did that. She said "no", and I said that. Anyway, when we are with the horses, I get a direct opportunity to see what is going on. I assign them a task, sometimes an impossible task. It is never about doing it right or wrong. Again, I am not teaching horsemanship skills. It is really about anything that comes up during the interaction with the horse is grist for the mill. So I can assign them an impossible task and see what happens and how they communicate. I can highlight that directly in the moment. What we also do a lot, which I think is beautiful and very effective, is not so much focus on what is not working but on what *is* working. Sometimes I do it with my goats. A lot of couples work with the goats. It brings an element of playfulness and child-like fun. It is useful for couples, especially those who come to therapy in the very last stretch of a degrading relationship and are a few miles before a divorce, so we are already quite late in the process. But playing with horses brings back a sense of playfulness and aliveness, and they may reconnect at a level they might have forgotten was present way earlier in the relationship, like when they started to date each other. It is that giddy, happy element in their relationship. We can rekindle and reconnect that also.

S P: Yeah. So it is like a part of them is reawakened. Very Nice. So, Jean-Jacques, as we are coming to an end, is there anything that you'd like to say to conclude this?

J-J J: What I have learned with this work, not just with the horses but with being outside with nature and observing all sorts of animals, is that I am rediscovering something that is available to each of us, which is the beauty of the interrelatedness of humans and the environment; humans and animals; and humans and nature. Animals- even including birds-, nature, the sky, and the clouds have such amazing beauty that we don't see because we are so much engaged in our tunnel-vision-like approach to life and work. Yes, our lives are stressful. Just taking that pause, looking around, and dropping into our five senses opens a world of beauty that is available to each of us.

 *This conversation was transcribed by Jillian Farrell..*

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