

# OrthoHorse© Newsletter

Newsletter about Ortho-Bionomy© - bodywork for equines and humans  
Issue 2

March/April 2011



*The winds, warmer temperatures and shedding horses are sure signs of spring around here – not to mention the spring ahead with the time change.*

*In February I enjoyed a sunny weekend at the inaugural Santa Fe Equestrian Center Horse Fair, where I did some demos of Ortho-Bionomy bodywork. Many thanks to Susie Spicer who shot some videos of the demos. Thanks also to all those who participated in the demos. It was an opportunity to meet a lot of people and visit with friends.*

*See videos by searching for OrthoHorse on YouTube or go to my website – [www.susith.com/orthohorse](http://www.susith.com/orthohorse)*

*Here is a direct link to the videos:*

*[Bodywork demo – Dandi, a young Andalusian](#)  
[Mustang Kodi](#)  
[OrthoHorse - Donkey receives bodywork](#)*

*I'm going to try to post them regularly, so if you are interested you can subscribe to receive notices when one has been posted.*

*For those not yet familiar with Ortho-Bionomy, it is a form of bodywork based on structure derived from osteopathy, that works with and enhances the body's self healing capacity. It is not a replacement for veterinary or medical care.*

*This issue features a piece about geriatric horses, and a short review of a lecture given by Temple Grandin at St. Johns College. Also included is a story that was published in the Society of Ortho-Bionomy trade newsletter about a program I have been involved in using Ortho-Bionomy with children in the city schools.*

-----



## Geriatric Horses

I have a soft spot for older horses, maybe because I'm not so young myself, or because I have two older horses, or both. I also see a lot of geriatric horses in my practice, and I'm grateful to their owners for the care they give their older companions.

When horses get older their joints begin to ache just like ours do. If they have had athletic careers, they may have some problems resulting from whatever discipline they've been trained in.

Older horses may exhibit signs of distress such as change in attitude, biting, pinning ears, refusal to work or go downhill, stiffness, profuse sweating during exercise, windedness, loss of energy, refusal to drink water on the trail, overall stress. Of course, younger horses can show some of these symptoms as well.

Common problems for geriatric horses are back pain, hock or knee pain, stiffness in the joints, stiffness in the neck, diseases such as arthritis, Cushings, EPM, EPSM, founder, colic, respiratory illnesses. Some of these affect younger horses as well, but they are more prevalent among older horses because their systems are not as resilient as they once were.

Arthritis is common but manageable. About the time we notice some resistance in our horse about going downhill, we might notice the knees are weakening as well as the hocks. Exercise and careful management can help slow the advancement of arthritis.

With older horses, there is a balancing act of getting an appropriate level of exercise commensurate with the horse's level of fitness.

One of the most important things for owners to figure out is what their horse can do.

Not too long ago, I met an owner who could not figure out why her 25-year-old gelding did not want to do flying lead changes anymore. She had not noticed his aging, his restricted spine and hindquarters. She figured that since she still wanted to do these things, he would too. This horse looked pretty grumpy, not only because he was physically restricted, and couldn't meet her expectations, but he was not being heard.

A more sensitive owner had noticed recently her horse did not want to go down hills anymore. She got off and walked him. She had no idea that the hocks were sore, but she simply recognized he was in some discomfort. She wanted to know what more could be done for his comfort.

Another owner said her horse had begun pinning his ears and was resistant to just basic handling like removing his blanket.

That ability to be attentive to the changes in a horse's body and attitude are really the underpinnings of good horse care. It's a little hard sometimes to face the fact that the horse you used

to gallop around on isn't able to do quite what he or she used to, but it's important to understand that reality.

In endurance riding, it was easy to tell when a horse might be ready to retire from active competition because you would try to bring him back the next season after an injury or layoff, and he wouldn't quite come back all the way, or would get re-injured. This would happen a couple of times usually before other metabolic signs would begin to appear – the horse would colic during or after rides, tie up, or go into other metabolic distress. Once you retired him, his nervous system could relax, and many of those problems would disappear.

By providing bodywork, herbs, supplements, nutraceuticals, etc. to older horses, we aim to give them greater longevity and quality of life.

A horse whose body can move freely without restriction is going to enjoy being ridden and not stiffen up as much after the ride. He is also going to have better circulation, which means his body systems are going to work better and keep him well.

Once the horse passes the point of enjoying being ridden, or becomes an unsteady mount, then it's time to scale him down to reduced activity.



What can horses do at that stage? Perhaps mentor a young horse, be a companion horse, teach children to ride if he is not unsteady.

Even if they can't do much, many horses just enjoy activity around them, and being included as much as possible. They never stop being herd animals.



**Temple Grandin  
at St. Johns College**

In March, animal science professor from Colorado State University Temple Grandin spoke on the topic of "Autism, Animals and Different Ways of Thinking" at St. Johns in Santa Fe. She contends that animals see the world visually, just as autistic people do. She is a "high functioning autistic." In the 1970s, she became well known for her methods of developing humane animal-handling equipment in slaughter houses and for her understanding of animal behavior.

The talk focused on autism and other learning differences. Temple also spoke about how it was valuable for children to learn to do what comes easily to them, in her case it was drawing, and pushing the envelope so

the child will always feel they can broaden their horizons.

She encourages people to have pets so they do not develop unfair expectations of them. "It's all sensory based thinking for animals – visual images, auditory, touch and smell. Each sense has its own database."

Grandin's books include *Animals Make Us Human*, *Animals in Translation*, *The Way I See It* and *Thinking in Pictures*. There is also an HBO biography called "Temple Grandin" available.

-----

## **Ortho-Bionomy in Schools – From a Practitioner's Perspective**

By Susan Smith



Photo credit Liza Sziklas

*As this article was created for a trade publication, some terms may not be familiar to everyone. Please feel free to contact me [susith@aol.com](mailto:susith@aol.com) or visit [Ortho-Bionomy in Schools](http://Ortho-Bionomy.in.Schools) website if you are interested in knowing more about the practice or the program.*

School can be a harsh environment for some children. The children who come into our Ortho-Bionomy in Schools program are chosen by teachers as

those who will benefit from it the most. Sometimes parents find out about it and ask that their child be included in the program too, even though the child hasn't been diagnosed with any particular "problem." Either way, all the children seem to benefit.

We have children who have been diagnosed with all the modern conditions – ADHD, bi-polar, dyslexia, learning disabilities, autism, Asbergers, anger issues or other social problems. Some children have physical disabilities as well. Many have become identified with their "story," and all the worry and exasperation expended by teachers and parents as a result. It may come as a surprise to the children that through the body, they can become more balanced, focus better in class, stand on a balance board in a more solid way, track better with their eyes. They get to know their bodies in a new way.

We work in settings that are not always perfect, yet Ortho-Bionomy allows us to create an environment of well-being and safety, sometimes in a room that is full of distractions, or a school schedule that often changes. We work on the premise that within one half hour, each child can have the opportunity to feel met, to have a space of his or her own, that doesn't demand anything of him or her.

The tools we employ are simple – balance board and disks, a few well chosen toys, books and art materials, a couple of massage tables, blankets and pillows. We have found some children are particularly interested in anatomy, so we bring books and a skeleton model for them.

Some children are so hyperactive that we have virtually run around the room with them, as a group, managing

energy and holding a container for them until their energy settles. One child reminded me of a butterfly caught suddenly in a glass jar, fluttering around the edges in a desperate attempt to get free. We found that what he really wanted was a container. We found that he wanted someone to put their arms around him and lift him off the ground. After this introduction, he sought that from his practitioner, and once that was established, he was able to settle better into his time there.

As practitioners, it has been very important to check our energy. If we are having a bad day or low energy, we need to clear it before the children come in. Even doing this, sometimes we can be caught off guard.

I have had the experience with a child diagnosed with autism, where he has been quite engaged, then suddenly goes inside himself, and I have felt as though I was being pulled in, sucked into a vat of despair with him. I learned to work on myself to keep that from happening each time, checking in with my instructor, checking my dimensions, making sure I come to him whole so I don't get lost. After I recognized this, I was able to be a solid presence in relationship to him, holding my own space and allowing him to be in his. When he goes off into that deep space, I am like a tree; my branches can extend out and include him, but I won't become uprooted.

It has been a delight to see how children evolve over the school year. Some children learned to track their bodies – for example, one girl noticed that when I worked on her cervical vertebrae, she felt a response travel to her pelvis and into her leg. Teachers and parents report that some children have an easier time focusing in class

after an Ortho session with us. One boy who was loud and disruptive at the beginning of the year, became quieter and able to go deeper during a session. By the end of the year he had dropped a lot of his bravado and posturing as though it was an ill-fitting suit of clothes. He still refers to Ortho as his “massage.”

We don't know what happens to the children during the rest of their lives. We sometimes receive glimpses, but we don't have a lot of solid information. For many, they could be experiencing repeated traumas, so what we can offer is a respite from those traumas, a space between the notes, a recognition of who they are. To be in a household where relationships may be tenuous or strained, to be in a school where you are one of many and struggling to keep up, are challenges that these children, ages five to twelve, are dealing with on a daily basis.

The group of Ortho-Bionomy practitioners is an essential ingredient to the success of this program. We meet once a month to discuss what's going on with the children, our perceptions, our problems. Our group has become a cohesive unit, that we can add or subtract from as needed. Also, when one practitioner has a hard time with one child, another one might be able to form an easier relationship. Sometimes it may require that two people work with one child. Those who are not working with a child during a segment hold energy for all the others.

What is beautiful is that Ortho-Bionomy allows us to have a container, yet it also allows for creativity and freedom. Each school will have its own nervous system, its own tempo, to learn to shift with. This experience shows me that Ortho-Bionomy can go

anywhere, with anyone, it is not confined to the practice room. It is out in the world, touching more than bodies, through right relationship.

- *reprinted here with permission of the Society of Ortho-Bionomy© newsletter, January, 2011.*

## Odds & Ends

My horses enjoying their Natural Feeder with continuous feeding, grazing "in a box."



"How-To" videos from Julie and Mark Olsen demonstrating their Natural Feeder.

[Introduction to the Natural Feeder](#)  
[Acclimation to the Natural Feeder](#)

Available at Desert Wind Saddlery.  
505.474.7795  
lorraine@desertwindsaddlery.com

For more information on Ortho-Bionomy and additional work, see

[www.susith.com/orthohorse](http://www.susith.com/orthohorse)  
Susan Smith  
505.983.2128  
505.501.2478 (mobile)

Cindy Roper has established as a free service, a website database to help horses find new homes.

Serving the New Mexico counties of Santa Fe and Bernalillo, A Home for My Horse works to bring horses and people together.

[www.AHomeforMyHorse.com](http://www.AHomeforMyHorse.com)

## Reading List

*The Art of Riding*, by Philippe Karl

*Gallop to Freedom*, by Magali Delgado and Frederic Pignon

*Horses Make Us Human*, by Temple Grandin

*A Lifetime of Soundness*, by Hiltrud Strasser, Dr. med. Vet., PhD & Sabine Kells, The Keys to Optimal Horse Health, Lameness Rehabilitation and the High-Performance Barefoot Horse (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)

*The Psoas Book*, by Liz Koch

## Calendar of Events

### March

**27- Yard and Barn Sale** - Casa de Brio (Helene Asmis & Patty Levi)  
145 County Road 55A, Cerrillos, NM  
505.474.6113; 1:00- 4:00 p.m.

### April

**2 – Veterinary & hauling clinic**, Back Country Horsemen, Santa Fe Rodeo Grounds, 9 a.m. –12 noon email Julie at [fsjulie@gmail.com](mailto:fsjulie@gmail.com) or call (505) 231-6373

**14 EPR** Free Demonstration, NMAHA, Santa Fe, NM USA – Zarna Carter  
See [EPR Ortho website](#) for more info

**16-17 EPR/EO I**, NMAHA, Santa Fe, NM USA [EPR Ortho website](#)  
**26- Tack Swap** – Desert Wind Saddlery, 505.474.7795

## May

12-13 EPR II [EPR Ortho website](#)

## June

3 EPR Application of Anatomy & Physiology

25-26 **EPR/EO I**, NMAHA, Santa Fe, NM USA

[EPR Ortho website](#)

## July

**6 EPR Study Group**, Rancho Mariposa, Santa Fe, NM USA

**7-8 Fusion for Horse and Rider**, Rancho Mariposa, Santa Fe, NM USA

**9-10 EPR Isometrics New Class**, Rancho Mariposa, Santa Fe, NM USA

[EPR Ortho website](#)

## August

**6-7 EPR IV**, Rancho Mariposa, Santa Fe, NM USA [EPR Ortho website](#)

6 – Valles Caldera Endurance Ride  
[Ride details](#)

## Letters

In response to the article about suspected Blister Beetle toxicity in Issue 1:

*The collective 'we' (down here) are very knowledgeable on blister beetles. Vicki Sexten's horse died at one of the endurance rides on the east side of the state. They swarmed and landed in the horse water.*

*I have them here every year, sometimes in swarms and sometimes just a few. They are hideous and they come in 2 or 3 different colors. Some are black with*

*white dots some are tan colored. They swarm onto my wisteria when it's in full bloom and devour it in hours. They love lambsquarter when it flowers. I've poisoned them and then had to cover their bodies with a thick mulch to be sure my horses would never come in contact with their bodies. The acid never goes away. One beetle can do what it did to Zuzka. They are hideous and they especially love alfalfa when it blooms. Some growers have traps so they know when they've entered the fields and they wait for them to leave before cutting.- Beth Menczer, Glenwood, NM*



*Zuzka says she is feeling a lot better now.*  
photo credit: Susie Spicer