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Not just a horse

By Nate Smelle

THERE ARE MANY PERKS TO living in this landscape we reside in here in North Hastings. Luckily for us we are blessed with a rich abundance of natural beauty in the Bancroft area. Research has shown us that the closer we live with nature the healthier we are as individuals and as a community. Biologist/myrmecologist-extraordinaire Dr. Edward O. Wilson calls this mutually beneficial relationship that exists between all creatures ?biophilia.? The biophilia hypothesis suggests that humans and all other life forms share an instinctive bond with one another and all living systems. First discovering this term while studying applied philosophy and university this all-encompassing understanding of interconnectedness in University it soon became the focus of many essays.

Never before had a single word changed my understanding of the world around me in such a fundamental and profound way. To this day this discovery continues to influence my choices of where to step and how to step on it. Visiting the Anahata Horse Centre (AHC) last week it was good to see the biophilia hypothesis in action. Walking through the pasture with Melissa Gordon and Marianne Bertrand of the AHC they took the time to introduce me to the herd of healers wandering the hills one by one. Even though I only had a couple of hours to visit the centre I could see how sensitive these creatures were to my presence within seconds of entering their 100 acre stomping grounds. Before Bertrand and Gordon could even introduce me to the first horse I was surrounded by a crew of curious and friendly creatures looking for a scratch behind their ears and a sniff of my coat. It is this hyper-sensitivity and curiosity that makes these animals such compassionate companions and powerful healers for people and families living with autism.

Petting the nose of one of the horses at the AHC named Dallas?who came to them as a rescue?I could feel the disfigurement of the bone and tissue where he had been severely beaten by a previous owner. With ample food, water and space all around Dallas could have avoided me all together out of fear, anger or hatred for my kind; instead he was one of the first to approach me. It brought me to tears just thinking of how someone could be so cruel to such a gentle, loving and intelligent animal.

Growing up around horses I feel a unique kinship with the species. Cleaning stalls with the horses still in them on many occasions I figured out early how different each individual horse is from the next. Strange as it sounds each horse has its own ?personality.? Some horses demanded a bit more space than others when helping feed, groom, water, walk and run them; others can't get close enough. Each had needs and idiosyncrasies that demanded your respect; otherwise you would pay the price. Some of the trainers would not respect these boundaries and I saw more than a few of them receive their horseshoe-shaped commuffins.

In many ways society and the evolution of the human species have been carried forward on the backs of non-human animals helping to bear the weight of our survival. Throughout this shared history humans have developed a special bond and working relationship with some species more than others: horses, dogs, cats, cows etc. Since their domestication more than 6,000 years ago people and horses have shared this deep bond. We have relied on horses to help us till the soil, extract resources and to carry us and our things from here to there. Like all animals when we show them love and respect, they give us back the same. To give them anything else is an insult to our own character and intelligence.