

#1997.09B

FULL
Becky

The Horse is the noblest
conquest man has ever
made.

-George Louis Leclerc de Buffon
L'Histoire des Mammifères Le Cheval

CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY FOR HORSES



Bailey with Filly.

By
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Photos by
Todd Harless

The craniosacral therapy system was established by John E. Upledger, D.O. It involves the membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. It extends from the base of the skull, face, and mouth, which make up the cranium, down to the sacrum and coccyx.

It also has a rhythm, like the heart and lungs, which is used as a tool for evaluating and treating medical problems associated with pain and dysfunction.

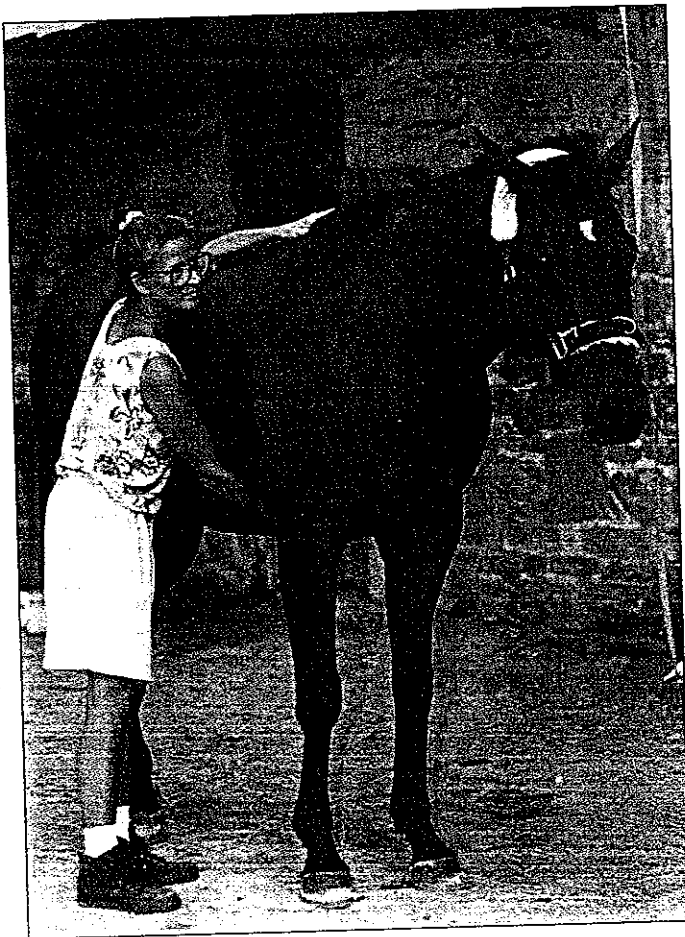
A key component in the body which is most likely accessed through the craniosacral system is the cell memory mechanism. The term that best describes this groundbreaking awareness of self-

healing is referred to as Somato Emotional Release, also discovered and developed by Dr. Upledger.

Craniosacral therapy is a light touch, noninvasive osteopathic manipulative process. It encourages the self-healing mechanism of the body and strengthens the immune system and the central nervous system. It restores flexibility to the Autonomic Nervous System and dissipates negative effects of stress and repetitive motion syndrome. It also serves as an interstate into the cellular memory with the muscles and connective tissue.

My fourteen years of working with horses has led to some personal theories concerning them and their experience of life, humans, and domestication.

Energy blocks and tissue restrictions are spiri-



Bailey and Squirrel. Thoracic diaphragm.

sensitivity in these places. Ears can be a powerful place for energy work and/or unwinding, especially if they were ever bitten or twisted. Overall, if one is comfortable with horses, knows the profession, and listens carefully, the animal will fall into your hands and melt.

The following case histories are good examples of the alternative approach of looking at the whole picture.

Case 1—Galileo

Galileo is a brilliantly handsome 16-hand, 9-year-old gelding who had been lame in the left front for a couple of years. Despite traditional opinion that the problem was in the foot, the owner and I both felt it was showing in the shoulder, but coming from the right hind. I strongly suspected some sort of castration problem. Joyce Harmon, a veterinarian who practices alternatively agreed that something was "not right" about the castration.

The story here is a long, drawn out, and sometimes frustrating course of two years to get this horse sound. The factors involved were time, patience, trust, and, of course, money. The owner and I agreed Galileo was definitely worth the investment. We crossed our fingers for a positive outcome.

The process was craniosacral work once a week for a couple of months, then once very two weeks and finally, once a month, after deciding to put Galileo on pasture board for the second summer.

After the first year there was a significant change in his response, definitely a good sign.

Finally we had done all we could with the shoulders that was humanly possible considering the weight-bearing potential. This, together with Galileo's total reluctance to surrender either

CRANIOSACRAL THERAPY

of his back legs to me for some unwinding, brought the owner to a choice among three decisions:

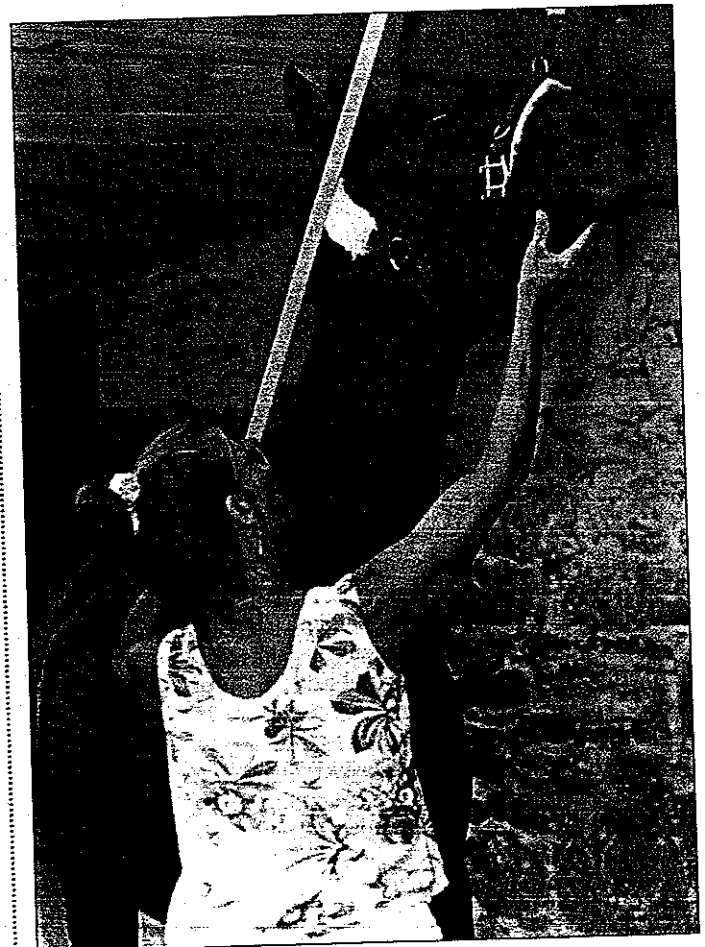
1. A shoulder operation that was well-regarded at the time;
2. Give the horse away for pasture, companionship, and occasional trail riding;
3. Ask a vet to tranquilize him and lay him down so that I could work with his legs more freely.

Well, the brave and smart owner chose the third option. This called for a team of workers. We chose Joyce Harmon, DVM, myself, the owner, and Jan Snodgrass, a TTEAM (Tellington Touch Equine Awareness Method) practitioner.

Joyce tranquilized Galileo and he dropped down beautifully. She carefully monitored him and stayed in perfect communication with all of us. Jan and I worked swiftly and quietly to unwind his left front leg and shoulder to finish off any energy blocks I had been unable to get because of standing weight. Then we moved to his hindquarters. Unfortunately, the right hind was on the ground, but we did what we could with it, and then worked with the left hind, which had been compensating all these months.

Within a short time, Galileo was back up on his feet. He was generously supported by all of us, given Homeopathic remedies to help move the toxins of anesthesia out of his body, put in his stall for a couple of hours and then back out to pasture for a

(Continues...)



Hanging head.

couple of days.

Within a week, the owner gradually put Galileo back to work and once again his lameness returned. His call and request to repeat the process was not a surprise. It had gone so well and there was such a change we agreed to try to get him down on the opposite side.

Two weeks later, the team met again. Galileo was not quite as happy to see us this time. The whole process was a bit more difficult, I think due to anticipation and resistance, but we carried on.

Once again, he went down on the right side. I wanted so badly to have access to the right hip and leg. I took the right foot, Jan took the left one and he completely surrendered them to us. We had this 2,000 lb. horse in a spread-eagle position. This was obviously a major release.

At that point we put his legs back down on the ground and immediately he lifted his head up, put his front legs out in front of himself and proceeded to fall over to the left with his head and shoulders.

I was totally aghast, as I feel certain the others were, at this huge horse being completely torqued. It looked so painful. However, within a minute Galileo was back up on all fours looking at us, as if to say, "What'd ya'll do to me?"

Within days Tina had him back in work. Finally, his lameness showed up behind. It took two more regular sessions to clean up the blockages that had kept this dream horse out of both work and successful competition. In the last session, I got the very distinct feeling that it was, in fact, a castration problem. And not from the procedure, but one from his mind. The horse felt he was far too beautiful not to have offspring and was holding that feeling in his right hindquarter, producing chronic lameness.

Case 2

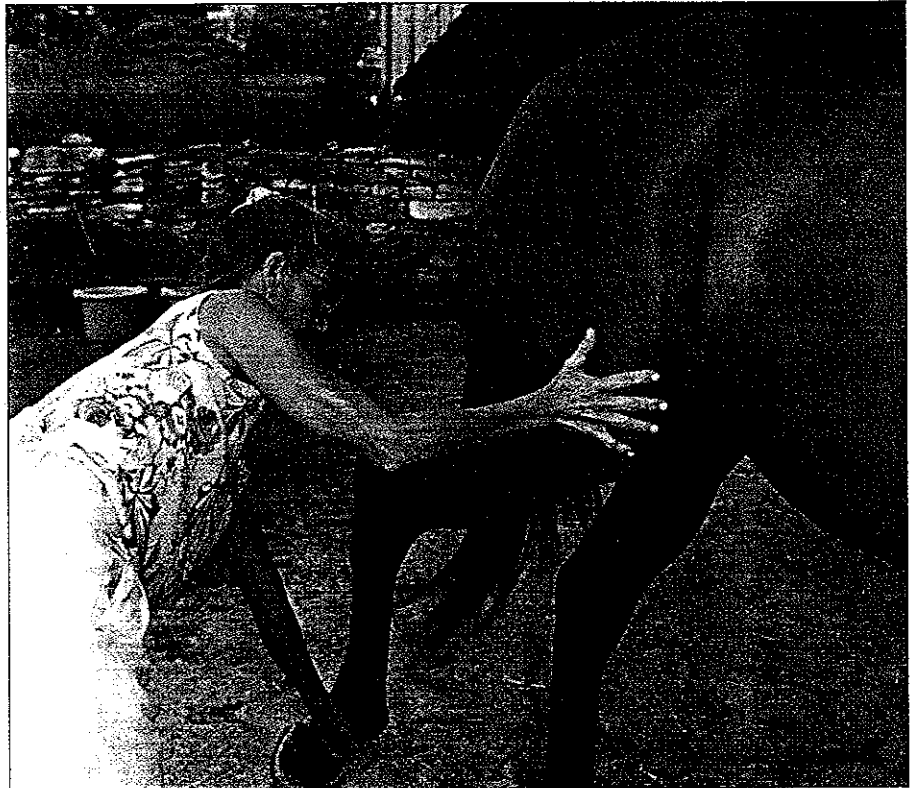
A friend of mine was managing a breeding farm and the owner was out of town when a foal was born with a very twisted spine, shoulders going one way, hindquarters another, contracted tendon on right hind, and flexor tendon laxity on all other three legs.

The vet had told my friend it was hopeless and the most that could be done was to wait two weeks to see if it got better. Basically, he suggested putting the foal to sleep.

My friend called and was sad. I said, "Well, why don't you let me work on him." (This was his first job as manager and he had only been there a month and felt like the owner should make that decision. I assured him the owner trusted him.) I went out immediately. The foal was twelve hours old, my first baby horse.

This is really when you can see the specialness of craniosacral work, because of two things. One, when they are so fresh out of the womb, twisted spines are more visible as are other things, and two, the mares really tell the story.

This mare backed up in the corner and watched with complete trust as I worked. Every once in a while, she would take a



Unwinding hind leg.

couple of steps forward and nuzzled my head, then stepped back.

It took five sessions, one a day, to straighten this baby out. I would like to have done one more session on the contracted tendon but the owner returned and thought the foal looked great.

I also heard that the vet went out in the field with his hands on his hips looking at the foal about a month after our work, shaking his head.

Case 3—Clydesdale Cross

A horse client of mine had a Clydesdale/TB cross at her barn that she was training for one of her clients. This big guy was sweet but very scared of anything behind him. He was well behaved and she is excellent with horses, especially training and gaining the trust of young ones.

Well, she wanted a craniosacral session for him, so I worked energetically all over his body. The next time she rode him and several times after that, he started running through fences with her.

Now this is a story that's sad but good. She asked the owner to finance more sessions to work him through this, but the owner didn't know about craniosacral work and did not want to make the investment. He basically just wanted to sell. The good part is the trainer was smart to not continue riding this horse and possibly get hurt. ■

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E. Bailey-Tune, a licensed massage therapist and AMTA member specializing in Craniosacral Therapy, maintains a private practice