

## HORSE SENSE

by Paul M. Riley MD: FACS, John Riley's son

Sixteen year old John Riley could not stop the tears. He ran behind the barn and the floodgates of his soul let go. The suppressed emotions from the past two years had to be released! John had kept a stiff upper lip two years previously when his father, George Henry Riley, became ill with severe middle ear infection. John had to help his uncle tend the crops on his father's homestead in Eastern Colorado near Simla. Unfortunately the ear infection spread into the skull bone and Henry (as he was called) had to have an emergency mastoidectomy. No antibiotics were available in those days so the infection spread to the spinal fluid causing meningitis. Henry died unexpectedly in 1921. He had borrowed a lot of money using his farm as collateral. John was a high school freshman when his dad died. He had been studying hard and planned to become an engineer, so it was very hard for him to quit school and work to support his mother and six children. John had to keep a straight face through it all since he was now man of the house. John and his uncle worked hard to try to save the farm. The weather cooperated and a large crop of beans was harvested. It was estimated that the crop would sell for enough to pay off the debt. Then the bottom fell out of the market, the crop had to be sold at a loss and the farm was put up for auction. John had just seen his farm being sold, but then his lovely horse "Monte", the love of his life, was auctioned off! That was the last straw, John cried like a baby!

John Riley had been born near Burden, Kansas Sept. 24, 1905. His father had tuberculosis which was gradually getting worse. The doctors told him that his only hope was to move to the Colorado Springs area, since that climate would help him. The next year his father, mother, grandmother, and uncle moved by covered wagon finally settling on an abandoned, undeveloped homestead near Simla, Colorado, about fifty miles east Colorado Springs. Many homesteaders had found the work too hard, the isolation unbearable, the weather unpredictable, and had left and had moved back from where they had left. John was just one year old when they moved! The men put up a tent and built a stable from rough pieces of lumber. Then they were hit by an early snowstorm. It was a struggle to keep the tent from blowing away. The two men slept in the stable with the horses. They had to keep shoveling snow away from the horses to keep them from being smothered. They also had to keep the fire going in a small cast iron stove in the tent! Fortunately they had collected a large pile of "cow chips" to burn in the stove! The winter of 1906-1907 was very severe and the family barely survived. A house was finally built and the land was plowed and the fields were fenced. Pinto beans were planted to restore nitrogen to the "worn out" soil. The surrounding ranchers were outraged. They had been grazing their cattle illegally on the land! At night they would cut the fence and drive their cattle into the bean field. An entire field would be cleaned out overnight! Bean plants were a delicacy for the cattle! Then the next crop was destroyed by hail. Fortunately Henry had bought hail insurance. The next crop was destroyed by swarms of locusts, then for several years there were severe droughts, floods, and more hail! The only times when the Rileys made any money was when they collected on their hail insurance. But Henry's tuberculosis was apparently cured by the move to Eastern Colorado! After living on the Homestead for five years, Henry was given title to the land in 1911.

To survive G. Henry learned to dig wells, work on threshing crews and on some of the nearby ranches. His son, John, was able to help more and more as he grew up.

John fed and cared for the horses, then when he was ten years old he started working with thrashing crews. Sometimes he helped with the cooking and serving of meals to the crew. Later he was taught to hitch up and drive a team of horses pulling some of the equipment. The thrashing crew had a steam tractor which was used as a stationary engine to run the thrashing machine. A very long metal drive shaft connected the tractor to the machine. Teams of horses pulled the McCormick reapers that brought the sheaves of wheat to the thrashing machine. Then two years later John's job was to take the wagon containing a two hundred gallon tank to a nearby stream, pump the tank full with a hand pump, bring the wagon back to the tractor, then pump the water into a high tank supplying the steam tractor. Then he would race back to the stream. At first the tractor used up the water faster than John could supply it. John would be at the stream pumping as fast as he could only to hear the tractor whistling for more water! Then he had to face the ribbing by the thrashing crew! Finally John was able to pump fast enough to keep the tractor supplied. John loved working with the horses pulling the wagon. When one of the other horses wasn't behaving, young John would be called. He was usually able to calm the horse and get it working smoothly with the others without hurting or threatening the horse.

At a nearby ranch John would be asked to help out when there was a big cattle roundup. He had to ride different horses. John was paid very little but gained experience with handling horses. John was appalled with the way the ranch horses were being trained. The young horses were beaten and starved into submission. The ones that were ruled not trainable were auctioned off. John had bought a book on how to train a horse the gentle way, just with praise, rewards and great patience. Bill Baley, who worked on the ranch trained almost all the horses in the area. He was considered the expert! His method was to beat, intimidate and starve horses until they were "broken".

John couldn't keep his eyes off a young colt. Bill was getting very frustrated with it. The horse had been beaten and starved, but the horse was stubborn. It refused to eat, was not growing, its skin was covered with scabs, and it was losing its hair! Bill said it was time to get rid of the animal. John, though still young, saw hidden talent in the colt! He felt he had to rescue the horse. He paid for the horse by working on the ranch.

John had to be very patient with the horse; finally it began to respond to love and kindness. At first it refused to eat if anyone was near but finally it was eating from John's hand, and letting him stroke its neck. John would not carry a whip or wear spurs. Finally John was able to saddle and ride his horse. He named the horse "Monte" after the horse in the cowboy book, "The Virginian". He taught the horse to "count" and do "arithmetic" and other tricks! They became a team. Monte was anxious to please his master. He grew back a beautiful coat of hair and grew up to adult size. Monte became the talk of the town. John was offered large sums of money for Monte but the horse was not for sale. At roundup time, John was in demand because the horse could think just like John. By instinct the horse knew the routine. Obstinate steers were no match for Monte! The only time Monte would act up was when he saw Bill Baley. Monte would want to attack him! Bill was advised by the rancher to stay away from Monte.

At the auction John had been told by the bank manager that the farm would probably bring enough so that John could keep Monte. To their surprise the farm was sold for a smaller amount so Monte was put up for auction. Most of the buyers wanted Monte; he was sold for a premium price. John knew that Monte would not cooperate with anyone who tried to intimidate or threaten him. He never found out what happened to

Monte! He just prayed that his new master would be kind and patient.

John's family was now homeless! They had to separate and move in with several friends and relatives. John had to support his mother, Fannie May [West] Riley, younger brothers James and Opie, plus younger sisters Sarah, Ethel, Viola and Mamie. He went to work for the rancher who had sold him Monte. He was given Goldie, a Palamino, "trained" by Bill Baley. The horse would only behave when it was threatened with curses and a whip, but John was determined to treat Goldie with respect and kindness. Within a week the horse had bonded with John and was behaving well. The only problem was Bill Baley. Goldie would show anger whenever it saw or smelled Bill! John tried to keep Goldie away from Bill! John chose to ride the ranch by himself. He would check on several hundred cattle, find lost steers, round up strays and repair the boundary fences that had been cut or broken. He would stay overnight in line shacks built at the corners of the ranch. He would use his saddle as his pillow. Goldie would be released to graze. John didn't have to hobble the horse. It would come running as soon as John whistled. Sometime he was invited to stay with a hermit who lived in a log cabin near a far corner of the ranch. They would practice shooting, with John's revolver, at knots in the wall of the log cabin. John's host told others he met in town that John never missed the target!

At roundup time John and several other cowboys had to drive the herd of cattle across a fence line. John dismounted and held the reins, then he and another man laid two fence posts flat and stood on the posts while the cattle were driven across, then John started to lead his horse across. Suddenly Goldie reared up jerking John off the fence post, the fence popped upright and the horse's front foot was caught in the barbed wire. The horse panicked and ran sideways down the long fence line. The barbed wire completely sawed through the ankle joint. The barbed wire was cut to release the horse, but it was too late. The horse was bleeding badly; was having severe pain, and was unable to walk. The horse had to be put out of its misery. The unwritten cowboy code was that no one else but you could shoot your horse. With tears in his eyes and a lump in his throat John was finally able to pull the trigger! Bill Baley then rode up, Goldie had acted up because it had seen Bill approaching in the distance!

Still the roundup had to continue. After the roundup was over, a wagon was sent to fetch the carcass. By that time the body was very stiff when it was loaded onto the wagon. One hind leg stuck straight out. With great force the leg was wedged inside the wagon bed. When the wagon arrived outside the ranch buildings, the horse had to be unloaded onto the truck from the rendering company. It took several men pulling on a rope. Bill rushed in to help, at that moment the horse's hoof came flying out from the wagon bed striking Bill Baley in the head. He fell to the ground unconscious. He died on the way to the hospital. Years later, tourist "dudes", drinking with cowboys in the local saloons, wouldn't believe the story that a dead horse had kicked and killed its abusive trainer, yet they believed most of the other tall tales the cowboys told them!

The only horse left for John to ride was Diablo, a wild mustang that Bill Baley had "broken". John soon learned that the horse lived up to its name! The horse would behave if other people were around but John could feel the suppressed rage and see the defiant look in Diablo's eyes! John found out that the rage could surface any time his guard was down! He had to watch Diablo's ears. As soon as the ears would start to lay down flat on the back of the horse's neck John knew that there was big trouble ahead! The horse would suddenly start bucking when John was far away from anybody else. John

knew he had to stay on the horse, if he fell off the horse would stomp and paw him to death or leave him injured and stranded far from help. At other times the horse would try to toss him into the barbed wire fence. Then the horse would buck until it was tired, then get down and roll on the ground. John would quickly get off holding onto the reins then swing back into the saddle with the reins without touching the stirrups!

John attended a revival service at Eagle Bluff Free Methodist Church, where he went to the altar and surrendered to God's will for his life. The other cowboys could not believe how he was changed! His nickname had been "Poker Face" because his facial expressions led the other card players astray. John had won the majority of the card games, but after his conversion, he was more interested in reading his Bible and learning more about God! He was given a Bible and found a well worn song book. He read the Bible out loud while riding Diablo. He also sang all the songs in the song book. (Many years later John learned that he was tone deaf; he had sung all the songs to the same tune!) He continued to read and sing since he could feel Diablo relaxing while he was doing so! Its ears stayed straight up! John also started to practice his preaching. His horse seemed to listen intently! John felt called to preach but he was responsible for his mother and six other children, so his plans had to be delayed.

In 1924 John's mother married John Turner, who then took over responsibility for the family. Alice Turner was born in 1925. John was very proud of his baby sister. John Riley's rancher boss then lost the ranch because he gambled and lost when he bet a whole train load of cattle on the upcoming presidential election. With the help of his church friends John was able to attend God's Bible School from 1925 to 1928. He then spent two years in missionary work among the Mexican farm workers in Southern Texas. He was fascinated with the "baqueros", Mexican farm workers who were cowboys working on a large local cattle ranch where John held meetings. These were the "Buckaroos", the original cowboys. They had started herding cattle long before the West was settled. When John had time off, he would ride with the baqueros so he could learn more Spanish and show them how he handled horses without a whip or spurs. The Mexican cowboys were surprised that a gringo cowboy knew as much as they did about horses. They were amazed how God had changed John. Several of the baqueros were converted and were mentored by John. John showed them the gentle way to train horses as well as his quick way to mount and dismount. In turn the Mexicans taught him how they handled horses and herded cattle.

In 1932 John married Edna Butler, a Christian girl from the nearby Koontz Ranch. She also had found the Lord at Eagle Bluff Church. They became missionaries in the Kentucky Mountains. There they had to travel by horseback and wagons. The local moonshiners tried to get rid of the Rileys, they would shoot under John's horse to try to get him bucked off, but after Diablo it was easy to stay on his horse! Drunken men would ride by the house at night shouting threats and shooting in the air! These "brew masters" thought John was a spy for the "Revenueers", federal agents who were looking for illegal stills. A bomb then exploded under the front of the church during altar call! For a moment the front of the church was lifted off its pillars! The local people began to accept these "feeriners", as they called the Rileys, when the Rileys were given some milk goats. The people's curiosity got the best of them as they wished to know more about the goats. The tide also turned when John started teaching the mountaineers the gentle way of training horses and how to properly care for their horses and mules. He impressed the

men with his riding ability and his accuracy with a revolver. Gradually the hostilities toward the missionaries abated.

Then the Rileys then went to Smyrna, Tennessee, where he pastored the church while training to be a Motor Mechanic. Then he went to South Africa where he taught Motor Mechanics at Edwaleni Mission Technical College. Every lecture about cars included sermon illustrations equating car repair and maintenance with a person's spiritual life. The local people marveled at how John could control cattle and horses with kindness. In all these places he taught people how to train horses with great patience, encouragements and rewards rather than intimidation and cruelty.

Using the same techniques he used in training horses, John treated everyone with dignity and respect, in turn he was usually able to bring out the best in people and gain their respect and cooperation. John noticed that children he saw treated with ridicule and cruel corporal punishment turned out to be very shy and withdrawn or aggressive, self-centered, and non-caring people. Those treated with love, respect, patience, understanding, and rewards usually became lovely caring people that could handle life's daily problems in a more mature manner.

John and Edna raised four children. All of them are serving the Lord. Three have been foreign missionaries. John and Edna ended their missionary career in 1956. They then finished college and pastored churches in Nebraska. John was glad to see that the ranchers were all training their horses just like John had learned to do. He did not see a single aggressive horse. Even most of the bucking horses in Rodeos were not mean; they had been programmed and encouraged to show that behavior and were rewarded afterwards! John kept the following excerpt with his sermon notes.

If a child lives with criticism-----he learns to condemn!  
 If a child lives with hostility-----he learns to fight!  
 If a child lives with ridicule-----he learns to be shy!  
 If a child lives with shame-----he learns to feel guilty!  
 If a child lives with tolerance-----he learns to be patient!  
 If a child lives with encouragement --- -----he learns confidence!  
 If a child lives with praise --- -----he learns to appreciate!  
 If a child lives with security --- -----he learns to have faith!  
 If a child lives with fairness -----he learns justice!  
 If a child lives with approval --- ----- he learns to like himself!  
 If a child lives with acceptance and friendship --- he learns to find love in the world.

John had found that his "Horse Sense" also worked for people.

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