

The Horse's Hoof™

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Barefoot Hoofcare Magazine

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Discover the Barefoot Magic with Cynthia & Tony Royal

by Yvonne Welz

Imagine a training system that quickly achieves a seemingly magical connection between horse and human—without force, restraint, or even any tack at all. **Imagine** an equestrian performance group where humans and horses, in liberty and bridleless riding exhibitions, perform as examples of an ideal horse-human relationship—demonstrating a mystical bond that re-awakens all of our childhood fantasies. **Imagine** that all of these horses are **barefoot** and cared for in a way that nourishes their nature and respects their physiological needs.

These dreams did come true when I discovered Cynthia and Tony Royal, and their company, “IMAGINE - Discover The Magic.” Cynthia Royal, founder of IMAGINE, specializes in liberty and bridleless riding, and, with the help of her husband Tony (also an experienced horseman), is now sharing her unique approach with horse lovers.

Was it sheer coincidence or fate? I signed up for a clinic with the Royal's, at my very own boarding



Cynthia Royal and her horse Blanco, a 15'2 hand Australian Andalusian gelding who starred in “Lord of the Rings” movies as “Shadowfax.”

stables, having no prior knowledge of them or their philosophies. It was simply convenient to attend! I never suspected that shining examples of successful barefoot exhibition horses would soon be parading in front of my eyes...

Initially, I was simply impressed with their training techniques. I am a big fan of both classical horsemanship and natural horsemanship, and I find much to appreciate in a wide variety of methods. What Cynthia Royal offered was an elegant system, unique in its simplicity and streamlined approach, and completed entirely with the horse at liberty—without any tack at all.

Their techniques could easily be incorporated into the training of any horse, no matter what age, experience, or discipline, as the entire focus is on developing the glue-like

bond—**The Magic**—between you and your horse. Who doesn't want that? As clearly shown by the 5 demonstration horses (including my own horse, Belle), this willing bond could be achieved much more quickly than I had ever seen, without any force, and without chasing the horse around in endless circles. Since liberty work has been a slightly difficult area for my horse Belle, this approach was exactly the inspiration I needed to tackle this problem!

Discovering all their horses were barefoot was icing on the cake. Well, very important icing, of course. Cynthia Royal has been barefooting her horses for about 2 years now. They work primarily with horses of Iberian descent (Andalusian, Lusitano & Spanish Norman), mostly stallions. As soon as a new horse arrives at their ranch near San Diego, California, its shoes are immediately removed. Cynthia,

who is experienced with the farrier arts through a step-father, said that she started taking them barefoot because it simply made sense to her, in her “natural is usually best” philosophy. Best of all, she has discovered that all of their horses' hooves have improved significantly since going barefoot, and many of them started out with hoof problems.

(cont. on page 2)



Cynthia works with each horse for only about 20 minutes a day, using exercises that cause the horse to view the human as a nurturing leader, a mother/father figure. The horses always have the option to leave!



This system of training is all about the connection between horse and human, as clearly evident between Cynthia and her horses.

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Discover the Barefoot Magic, Cont.

(cont. from cover)

Cynthia and Tony did make an attempt to learn to do their own trimming, but soon discovered that it was a lot of work. They decided to use farriers, instead. With their hectic travel schedule, constantly on the road, they are often at the mercy of whatever local farrier is available at that place and time. They have had great luck so far, simply by letting the farrier know exactly how they want their horses trimmed. They have also found that the hooves need to be trimmed at least every 4 weeks, for best results. If necessary, they can do a little touch-up work on their horses, in between trims.

Cynthia's personal natural care philosophies were evident throughout the clinic, as she provided feeding advice, including free-choice grass hay, low-carb/low-sugar grain mixes, and loose salt minerals. Food plays a major role in their training program, so Cynthia uses top quality senior feeds from Triple Crown Nutrition and horse treats from Purina. She also recommended better living conditions, with horses living out as much as possible, always in groups. She stressed that a horse's number one need is the **HERD**, so all of her stallions are kept together. Again and again, she emphasized understanding and respecting the horse's nature.

Cynthia Royal has an inspiring story about what led her down this interesting path. She has trained horses using harmonious techniques and worked with liberty horses all her life, but professionally, pursued the corporate world. Everything came crashing down when she nearly died from salmonella poisoning, which required two heart surgeries. In a carpe diem moment, she decided to follow her dreams, give up the corporate world, and return to her true passion—liberty horses. Her specific direction came in the form of a richly detailed nighttime dream that provided her with every detail to create a world-class, permanently-based, fantasy themed theatrical show—with 30 of the world's most beautiful and talented horses, unlike anything in existence today. She focused on the development of this visionary theatrical show that would exemplify the intimate relationship between horse and human.

This show, under development, will be called **IMAGO**, with locations planned for around the world, including Las Vegas, Dubai and Sydney (Australia). The concept is to create a fantasy experience to bring out all the emotions from our first memories of horses and other magical creatures, but with a profound message of connection and collaboration to all mankind underneath all the visual spectacle.

While the theatrical show is being developed, the Royal's are touring the country for their



Spanish Walk: Blanco offers some lovely steps of Spanish Walk for Cynthia during their Arizona clinic. Their other performance horses in attendance included Bronsé, a 15 hand white Aralusian gelding from Puerto Rico and Tony's horse, Rameous, a 17 hand black Spanish Norman gelding from Canada.

"2008 Follow Your Dreams Tour," participating in expos, events and horse fairs, as well as offering private clinics along the way. These clinics allow Cynthia to share her relationship training techniques, the same ones that are used to train all the equine stars of the theatrical show. Once the show is underway, Cynthia and Tony will no longer be available for these clinics, so they have laid out Cynthia's full training system on a series of DVDs. Currently available are the first two volumes: **Horse Talk Relationship** (the step-by-step basic training method), and **Horse Talk Bridleless** (advanced techniques, including how to start a horse in bridleless riding without needing to initially use a bridle).

Also under development is a television show called **Horse Talk**, which is both an educational series, as well as a reality TV show. The show will feature a behind-the-scenes peak at their training meth-



Tony and Cynthia Royal.

ods, tours, performances, and work with private owners and their horses across the country. Viewers will also get a chance to watch the development of their Las Vegas theatrical show.

Look for a full interview with Cynthia Royal in our next issue, where we'll talk with her about barefoot, natural care, and all the other hoof topics you just can't find anywhere else!

For more info and to purchase DVDs, visit: www.IMAGINE-DiscoverTheMagic.com

Biology of Natural Horsemanship Symposium

"By the end of the day, you will know why Eight Belles' ankles snapped after the Kentucky Derby, and why the recommendations to improve track safety, like replacing dirt with Polytrack, are not sufficient or even particularly relevant." This is how **Ann Corso** opened the most recent **Biology of Natural Horsemanship Symposium** in Sharon Center, Ohio on May 10, 2008. The symposium, the brainchild of **Dr. Bruce Nock, PhD**, is designed to benefit horse owners, care providers, veterinarians, trainers, hoof care professionals and others concerned about the welfare of domesticated horses.

Advanced topics in horsemanship were presented to participants, who were encouraged to critically evaluate their practices, to arrive at a meaningful holistic model for humane horse keeping and use, based on fact and science-based information. Along the way, hoof health was presented as a window into the overall health of a horse, as the interdependence of horse and hoof health was repeatedly emphasized. Participants raised important questions and left with insights about the synergy created when horse care and use practices are aligned with the natural behaviors and biology of the horse.

The one-day educational event was jam-packed with information on topics that included

- Promoting hoof health.
- The impact of an unnatural environment on horse health and how to help horses cope with it.
- Choosing gentle and tactful training methods.
- How to keep horses safe from colic, insulin resistance, laminitis and founder.
- Enriching a horse's life through natural boarding, training and exercise.
- Physical development—When is it safe to start a horse under saddle?
- Riding to promote horse health, well-being and longevity.

Afterwards, experienced horseman Ruess Griffiths said of the symposium, "I thought your presentation on the science behind holistic horse care was excellent. I really enjoyed it! Quite literally, there is no one else doing anything like this for the horse public, that I am aware of."

For more information on the **Biology of Natural Horsemanship Symposium**, including the summer schedule, please visit: www.brucenock.com

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