



The Barefoot Paradigm

Why it is high time for Team Barefoot!

by Yvonne Welz

The common golden thread that binds together the originators of the barefoot movement is the premise that when we undertake the responsibility of removing iron shoes from our horses' lives, we change everything about the way we THINK and CARE for these animals.

But hold on a moment—just what is a “barefoot horse” in the first place? And what defines a “barefoot horseowner?” Believe it or not, these are two questions that deserve a great deal more reflection.

Horses were born barefoot. There is nothing magical about that whatsoever! This is one of the concepts that naysayers of barefoot like to point out—after all, pull the shoes on any horse, and you've got a barefoot one, right? Wrong! Likewise, if you own a horse that isn't wearing shoes at the moment, well, that alone really does not make you a “barefooter.”

When we talk about a “barefoot horse” or a “barefoot owner” in the modern context, we reference a very specific paradigm. A paradigm is “a philosophical or theoretical framework.” Without fully understanding this paradigm, communicating with others about “barefoot” can become a very frustrating ordeal. So exactly what is the barefoot paradigm?

Now I'm stepping up to the plate here, to add my perspective. What qualifies me to define the barefoot paradigm? I believe I have held a distinctly unique point of view over the development of the barefoot movement during the past 12 years. I've been able to communicate extensively with vast numbers of hoofcare professionals, farriers, vets, trimmers, students, and horseowners, representing just about every single barefoot method and organization that exists. I have watched horses rehabbed through barefoot both in person, and long distance through various communications with so many owners and trimmers from different backgrounds all over the world. I have researched and studied all available information about barefooted horses. In the end, what stuns me most is how **similar** all the disparate information is—just how much in common the various and competing “methods” have with each other. In the end, there truly is simply one single Barefoot Paradigm.

This definition of the Barefoot Paradigm comes directly from material authored by Dr. Hiltrud Strasser, Jaime Jackson, Pete Ramey, KC La Pierre, and flows through all the studies presented by Dr. Robert Bowker. Each of these people have inspired unique schools of thought, and yet there is one single continuity. And in the end, we discover that the Barefoot Paradigm is

all about the choices made by the **horseowner**.

The Barefoot Paradigm:

- 1) Because domestication has created so many health problems for the horse, we must recognize and study the **natural equine** and identify its true biological needs.
- 2) Once these genuine, physiological needs for good health have been identified, we must remove those elements of our care which are causing problems for our horses, and **modify their lifestyle** to promote better health.
- 3) With the right combination of improved **living environment, diet, exercise, and trimming** of the hooves to encourage a natural hoof form, horses can live in a domestic situation with extremely healthy bare hooves, and can perform nearly any task that is humane to ask from a horse.
- 4) When we encounter health and/or hoof problems, we do not simply apply “symptom relief.” We go back to step one, and repeat the entire process, **scrutinizing** what combination of factors caused the problem—then **removing the cause**.

The Barefoot Paradigm is about putting the needs of the horse first. There is never a single right or wrong answer to any problem; it is about doing the best we can for our horses within any limitations that we might have at this time. Hoof protection is sometimes a necessity, and can be very helpful when it is used appropriately and chosen with great care. The Barefoot Paradigm is not about being “anti-shoe.” However, because of the great damage and interruption of normal circulation caused by metal horseshoes, it would be rare to ever find that an acceptable solution to any problem. As such, we find that shoes are no longer the “necessary evil” they once were—there are now so many other choices. This is about **CHOOSING WELL**.

One problem we are now having, due to the increased popularity of the barefoot movement, is that so many people are taking their horses barefoot—without even understanding the Barefoot Paradigm first. These people don't realize that they have missed the entire boat. Whether barefoot fails or succeeds is something they will simply observe, rather than understand it is something that YOU DO! Sorry, if your horse's shoes have just fallen off, that does NOT make you a barefooter! Likewise, if your farrier doesn't apply shoes to your horse, and it happens to be working for you—but you'll slap shoes right back on if they ever become “needed”—that does NOT make you a barefooter. **Barefooters make it work, by figuring out what they are doing wrong, and doing it better for their horse!**

What about differences of opinion regarding trimming? Isn't that a controversial area? I say, **vive la différence!** Isn't it wonderful that we don't all

think alike? Isn't it great that there are so many people out there exploring this new frontier? Because while some may theorize that trimming is self-evident—trimming is always a **man-made activity**. Humans trim, therefore we can't ever really call it “natural.” But we can aspire to the natural, and attempt to discover the best ways to help our domestic horses keep their feet shaped as naturally as possible.

Now a special note: this is a hard thing to write, but I feel it is so important, I'm willing to stick my neck out for it. Nothing breaks my heart more than to see members of any barefoot group (association, organization, school, etc.) launch a public attack on any other barefoot group, or even upon barefoot individuals. Usually it is done in the name of “good,” as the attackers often speak of protecting the horse, or trying to educate those they believe are ignorant—but all I see are stones being thrown in a glass house. A whole lot of bad things have been done in the name of “good.”

If you truly love and care about horses, and about the barefoot movement—and not self-promotion—I urge you to think before you condemn another barefooter, because you literally shoot your own self in the foot. You have a right to your own beliefs—stick to them, present your own methods and be proud of them, and treat everyone else with respect. At the same time, be humble, and continue to learn from all sources. You would be surprised what you can learn from unexpected places.

Likewise, individual barefoot owners and trimmers, please think carefully about your words and actions, and consider how you can promote the good of barefoot as a whole. Our best way to success is to lead the way through our own good results. There is no need to condemn horseshoes, or people who live within a different paradigm.

Finally, through the Barefoot Paradigm, I want to introduce a new concept, and that is **unity**. Despite our different trimming theories and systems, and focus on various horse sports, activities or philosophies, we have so much in common! We need team spirit, so I've come up with the idea of “**Team Barefoot**” as a generic catch-phrase.

If you believe in the Barefoot Paradigm, you are already an honorary member of Team Barefoot! Be proud of us all, the entire community, everyone who has made the choice to do better by the horse. We've come a long way in this past decade, but we can go a whole lot further if we do it together! **Go Team Barefoot!** If you like this idea, please share it! 🍎

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