

# A Wild Mustang Taught Me Vibrational Energy Medicine

by Ellen Kaye Gehrke Ph.D. MBA

## Adopting a Wild Horse:

A wild horse guided me to energy medicine and healing. My experience involved an 8-year old wild mustang I adopted, whom I called Tonopah, since he had been gathered from wild herds in Tonopah, Nevada. I thought that a wild horse would fulfill the dream I had of a connection to the raw foundation of nature, spirit and humans. However, the adoption of Tonopah was frightening - especially to see how he was handled by the Bureau of Land Management wranglers. To see the fear he had and the instinct to be free tore my heart - I felt guilty for wanting to "have" him as my horse. He did not want to have much to do with me for several months -- always running away to the other side of the arena.

## Learning About Energy and Connection with Others:

It was not until I started working with Tonopah under the guidance of a gifted horseman, that I came to understand energy. With regard to horses and humans, this man knew a connection when he saw it and knew that it took energy awareness to find that connection. It was a lesson I needed to learn.

One day, at a horsemanship clinic, I was walking into the round corral to be with Tonopah when he bolted and ran to the other side. I felt dejected and rejected and took the whole thing personally. Then my trainer said, "Ellen, you need less energy to connect to Tonopah. You come into the arena way too big for him and it scares him. Horses are different. It is not about the task so much as it is about the relationship. You can not help a horse feel safe and have him/her think of you in a leadership role unless you know how to moderate your energy back and forth with him."

It took a long time for me to understand what it meant to come into the corral "big" and "small." A wild horse is very sensitive to the slightest amount of energy and intention in a human. I had to find "small" or actually "quiet" and to be "present" with Tonopah. As I did, I could see that his response to me changed.



I could see he felt safer and I felt my heart open more. I did not understand vibrational energy at that time. As I look back, I realize I was learning to adjust my vibrational energy so that I could develop a relationship with Tonopah. Horses are truly living biofeedback sentient beings - honest, reliable and consistent.

## An Agenda Versus a Plan or Being Present and Aware in the Moment

There is a lot of discussion in the healing arts of the importance of being present with self and clients. I thought I knew what that meant. One day I received a big dose of reality while working with Tonopah during a horsemanship clinic in Arizona. I had already spent several years working to help heal a tragic situation with Tonopah that happened with another trainer. I was making progress - or so I thought. I had gotten a saddle blanket on him several times and he seemed pretty relaxed about it. Before I arrived for my week at the clinic I made a pact with myself that I would saddle Tonopah this week. I began the week with what I thought was a good idea, an agenda for what I would do with Tonopah for the week.

We arrived in Arizona and Tonopah was turned loose in a huge arena. When it came time to gather him in - he was not interested in coming over to me. It took almost half an hour for me to catch him. This wasn't good -- it showed me that our connection was not going well. He would rather look out over the desert at cows then come over and be with me. I put him in his corral for the night with his other horse pal - still thinking about my preplanned agenda of how I would put the saddle on him the next day -- not being mindful that we had an energy connection problem.

The next morning, when it came time for my session in the round corral, I walked in with Tonopah in tow after spending a few minutes trying to catch him in his smaller pen. I wrote all this off to the fact that he was still basically wild. I went through the process of moving Tonopah around the round corral in both directions, controlling his speed. He had no ropes or attachments. I thought Harry, my trainer, would be proud of how Tonopah and I were working so well together, but his silence said otherwise. I then proceeded to throw the saddle blanket on Tonopah and pat it showing that Tonopah was fine with the blanket. I went over to the rail and picked up my 32 pound saddle and walked back to Tonopah. I was reminded by Harry, "Ellen, you are not to set that saddle on Tonopah unless his head is soft and low and his body is relaxed. Any sign of tension and stress and the saddle stays away."

I stood on Tonopah's left side, held his lead line in my left hand and hovered over his back with my (heavier and getting heavier by the second) saddle. I was just about to set the saddle down on his back when Tonopah threw his head and flew away to his right - galloping as fast as he could to the rail of the round corral. I dropped the saddle and felt the tears well up in my eyes. I was sure everyone would feel bad for me at how hard I was trying.

Then I heard Harry ask, "Ellen, are you going to have a pity party for yourself when you just left your horse?" The shock of his statement was so dramatic that I looked up and immediately pointed out that I was still standing in the middle of the arena and Tonopah had left me. What did he mean? "Well, Ellen, the truth is that you left him first. Since you were not present and aware of him in his state he had to leave - it was instinct and survival on his part."

"What!? I am standing in the middle of this pen and he is over there - I just don't get it."

"Ellen, you had an agenda to saddle Tonopah. It was not his agenda. You may saddle him eventually but it will not be a partnership until you let go of your agenda and pay attention to the state of your horse. He was scared. You wanted to put a saddle on him. He left. You felt bad for yourself. Now think about it. You can't work on an agenda with a horse. Yes, you can have a plan, but not an agenda. Your agenda did not account for Tonopah in his state or need."

I walked up to Tonopah and put on his halter. I led him out of



the round corral - ashamed and embarrassed - but still not fully comprehending what it meant to have an agenda versus a plan. I put Tonopah in his corral and stacked my saddle and blanket in the trailer.

That night I called my husband and wailed at what a terrible day I had working with Tonopah. I told him of the incident and the feedback from Harry about me mentally and emotionally leaving first so Tonopah had to leave for his own protection. "Do I do this to you?" I asked Carsten. There was dead silence. I was stunned. Apparently I do and my husband is too kind to call me on it in the same way that Harry had. I cried a few tears that evening - my personal "pity party."

The next morning I awoke early and pulled on my walking shoes. After giving hay to Tonopah and my other horse, Shiloh, I set out for a short walk that turned into about six or seven miles. I thought long and deep about what it meant to stay present and aware. I had never thought of my relationship to Tonopah as a partner. I would have to learn how to stay aware, present and compassionate while being his guide and leader. I felt a little stronger, but sick in my stomach by the time I got back from my desert walk.

When it was my turn to be coached by Harry, I went over to Tonopah's corral and walked in quietly - focusing on the intense love I had for this horse. I fully expected him to stay on the other side of the 60' X 25' corral - but he quietly walked over to me and held his head in such a way that I could easily slip on the halter. I felt my heart soar and a tear well up in my eyes. This had never happened before.

We headed to the round corral. I did not stop at the trailer for the blanket or the saddle - the heck with all that - I wanted to partner with this magnificent and wonderful horse and if I never saddled or rode him then, so be it. We walked into the round corral when it was our turn. Harry and the other participants all let out a deep breath and said, "What happened to you two? Things are different!" I did not realize it was that obvious. Harry commented, "Ellen showed up for her horse. Good for her - now they can work together."

Tonopah continues to teach me energetic connections. Sometimes I come home with a lot on my mind and walk out to the horses in this state - holding a halter and ready to catch a horse to go for a ride. If I neglect to shift my heart to be in the present moment - the horses move away from me in the two acre turnout and do not usually want to be caught. So in the process of walking to them, I make a shift in energy and spirit setting an intention to connect. If I come into the turnout quiet minded, intentional, heart focused, doing no harm and moderating my vibrational energy - the horses come over and compete for who will go for a ride with me that afternoon. Tonopah is the most sensitive partner. There is no faking it with him to this day and we have been working with each now for over 10 years.

A wild horse taught me the true meaning of energy and relationship. He helped me transfer this learning to my teaching and energy practice.

About the author:

Ellen Kaye Gehrke, PhD, MBA is a Professor of Community Health and the lead faculty for the Master's Program in Integrative Health Management at National University in San Diego. She has been conducting Heart Rate Variability (HRV) related research with horses and humans for the past five years. She has developed energy medicine leadership programs for health care leaders and provides personal development and coaching for humans with her ten horses. Ellen has completed Healing Touch Program's Levels 1, 2 and 3, as well as, Healing Touch for Animals (HTA) Level 1 and has been trained in animal communications. She has adopted and gentled five wild mustangs and is a practitioner of energy medicine healing for animals. She is currently writing a book, with the help of her horses, about human energy impact on horses.