

FOUNDER – A LIFE OR DEATH MATTER

When you're raised with horses and have them around you most of your life, you can expect to have to deal with their health issues over the years. We always learn something from these issues and what's equally important is to share how you managed them so others can learn from the experience. I never thought I would have to deal with not one but two foundered horses in the last few years, but I did and what I learned by the second founder has saved that horse's life and what I didn't learn with the first founder condemned that horse to an early grave. I wanted to share this story in hopes of maybe saving a horse you know.



Cherokee was a horse I owned for years, then sold at age 13 to a local person. He foundered while owned by that person and when I saw him lame, unhealthy and in great pain, I bought him back to try and bring him back to health. For two years I worked to save him with my farrier and also with medications and herbal treatments. The farrier put pads & shoes on him and instead of him getting better he kept getting worse. After several months of trying this, I said no more shoes, he was in too much pain. Despite all efforts, it was with the greatest sadness that I had to have Cherokee put down at a too early age of 16 to end his pain and suffering. If you care to read it, I have written a full story on this experience with Cherokee on my website www.seasonsranh.com/articles.html.

What I didn't learn from this experience was just how a horse can become laminitic or I would have prevented Spirit my 10 year old Tennessee Walking Horse from foundering in 2006.



As a result of "normal" hoof trimming methods over the years, Spirit had contracted heels by 2005. He was "set up" perfectly for hoof problems. As a result of poor hoof health and his diet he foundered in spring of 2006. I was heartsick. I knew in my despair that one thing was certain. I would do everything in my power to not have him join Cherokee up on the hill in my back 40 pasture. I took over his farrier work after that time and consumed every book and article regarding hoof care and laminitis that I could find. I consulted my local vets, had xrays and blood work done. The only suggestion one vet had regarding his feet was to recommend special shoeing. You can imagine I wasn't going there again! For a year I worked on his feet and diet as best I could to help him recover. He did recover somewhat and although his feet were still having major problems, he improved to the point where he was comfortable & could be ridden for very short distances. Then in early spring 2007, even with all the precautions and knowledge I had to offer him, he had another bout of laminitis. This was so discouraging and I knew I had to get professional help to my doorstep.

As I came to learn during this whole process, both horses were predisposed to the health issues that can lead to founder. "Easy keepers" they both were living in lush pastures and in winters had rich alfalfa hay and grain. They didn't have enough need for movement and not enough regular exercise from winter to early spring. This is a recipe for founder. In the recipe add farriers that are simply not aware of, nor are correctly taught how to obtain optimum hoof form and mechanism to prevent or treat founder, nor are obliged or mandated to keep abreast of the latest science and technology on healthy hoof care. In all fairness to them, even in veterinarian schools it is apparent that little time is spent on teaching hoof mechanism to obtain optimum health and form.

During my search for knowledge I heard about "barefoot farriers". They are a group that have continued their studies in horse and hoof mechanisms and physiology to improve the feet and performance of horses without shoeing. They, as individuals or groups of farriers, scientists and veterinarians have studied the mustang or feral horses worldwide as one of their models for natural hoof health. There is now a growing interest and respect for these studies and practices.

I knew I had to find one of these professionals to come and teach me and others here in Manitoba the basics of good hoof health and natural farrier practices. I found James & Yvonne Welz of Litchfield Park, AZ through their website TheHorsesHoof.com. I had ordered some educational books and videos from their online store. After reading about James on the site, I decided to host a clinic here in Manitoba, Canada to bring James & Yvonne here to present a Healthy Hoof clinic. They provided classroom education and James trimmed several horses in order to demonstrate the principles of barefoot trimming horses. It was a life changing event...for the participants and the horses, especially Spirit!

This is the progression of Spirit's feet from the time James trimmed him during the 2007 June clinic. I trimmed him thereafter using James's guidelines and consulting. He was trimmed every 2 weeks to a month. At first it was every 2 weeks because of the importance to keep the hooves very consistent to initiate healing from the founder. Then after a couple of months I went to every 3 weeks & now we occasionally can go as long as every 4 weeks for a trim. He has gone from lame on both fronts to sound in this process. By late August, I was riding him 15 miles with his Easy boots on with no recurring lameness.

The first picture is Spirit before his trim by James. At the time of the clinic Spirit was just coming out of the bout of founder and his front feet were very sore.



As you can see his toes are quite long. My problem was that I didn't know how much toe I could safely remove considering his coffin bones in both front feet were rotated (proven by x-rays). James showed us just how short they could be taken back to provide the situation where he would be more comfortable and healing would start to take place. Below are the pictures of his front feet (the laminitis affected feet) after James's trim.

There was extreme seedy toe, poor frog growth, he was slipper footed and old abscesses showed up on both feet at the toes and coming out from the soles.



Right front



Left Front

Here are Spirit's feet now, 9 months after James's initial corrective trim in June, 2007



Right front

Left front



Spirit is still in transition, even after 9 months. What is very evident is that his frogs have grown and spread out, his heel bulbs have widened as well as his quarters. His quarters are all $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wider now! His soles are looking great, good concavity and very little seedy toe left on his fronts. He really hated his front feet trimmed after foundering for obvious reasons...he was really sore! Now, you can hold them up relaxed for any length of time, he is very comfortable. He is sound again! This picture is Spirit and I, taken Easter Sunday this year after a ride up our grid roads with his Easy Boots on to protect his feet from the hard surface and gravel.

I am so happy to have met James & Yvonne and I credit James for literally helping me save Spirit's life. We all need to be concerned with Hoof Health, not just for those with hoof problems but to ultimately prevent any problems in young and older horses and offer them a life with sound, strong and natural feet. As a result of all I have learned, all of my horses now have better feet, move better and in the "rough going" I simply put on my hoof boots to protect their feet over extreme rough terrain, no metal shoes nailed into their feet are ever needed!



Of course, in Spirit's case there are some other factors that have helped in his recovery, i.e. diet, using Paddock Paradise (a paddock & pasture management system) for his turnout and certainly herbal supplements and a probiotic to generally help his overall digestion and health. He is his old "spirited" and wonderful self again. It's been a long haul to learn and get the help I needed to bring him back to health, but without learning about the healthy hoof and barefoot trimming techniques it would have been a very short road for Spirit. Thanks James and Yvonne...from Spirit!

We are scheduled to have James and Yvonne return to Manitoba for another clinic, near Winnipeg, July 12/13, 2008. I know there are many more horse people, farriers and horse professionals and most of all the horses in their care that will benefit from their expertise and information. For information on the clinic contact Yvonne at www.TheHorsesHoof.com or myself at bfenwick@xplornet.com. We are looking forward to their return! **Barb Fenwick**