

# HOORAY FOR POO-PICKING!

Much to her surprise, Ko-Li had a thing or two to teach  
Emily Wrench



**A**t my wedding my dad lovingly made reference to my 'cyclical' career. Yes, I am back to horses or at least they found me again after I'd sown my wild oats around London.

I'm helping the Horse Boy Foundation, which uses horses to help people with autism, to get on its feet in the UK, and along with that I am doing the one thing that my father feared a job with horses would lead to; picking up poo!

The day I was offered the position as land manager at the International Foundation of Equine Assisted Learning and Qualifications (IFEAL) was the day the door to a whole world of possibility and promise opened up to me again. At the time I was struggling with the tough economic climate, unable to find a job to pay the bills, and stuck in a very human, but very hopeless pit of emotional self-flagellation that is all too easy to fall into.

I chose poo-picking, or poo-picking picked me, and suddenly I found myself in my environment of choice: natural, outdoors, elemental and

therapeutic, surrounded by a herd of four-legged friends who were just there; silent, honest and powerful, eating, resting, moving around me, playing and accepting me into their space. As I worked my way rhythmically and satisfyingly around them, my senses soaking them up and calming down, I felt happy in the knowledge that I was keeping them healthy and able to do their important work by maintaining the quality of their food source. On top of that, I am connecting with like-minded people, who are all on fascinating journeys with horses and humans.

Most significantly, I had the opportunity to absorb and experience the powerful work that goes on at IFEAL when I volunteered to be a practice client for a trainee facilitator. After a simple body mapping exercise in which I tuned into myself to identify the 'stuck' places, all the ugly stuff that has been going around on a loop inside my head for an awfully long time bubbled up to the surface and completely overwhelmed me. I presented myself

to the horse, Ko-Li, tears, tissues, warts and all. Having ridden since I was ten, I have walked up to horses in fields countless times, but that day my feet turned to lead, my throat went dry and my stomach sank. I realised that at that moment I really wanted him to accept me into his space and he simply moved away. Of course he did! He is a highly sensitive, prey animal. He wants to eat grass and this strange human was edging her way towards him, over-thinking stuff and giving off all sorts of weird, predatory vibes. I had to step back, breathe and realign. Rather than feeling failure and giving up, I realised I had to try harder, but not too hard, with this relationship, to engage a balance of head, heart and gut and be present. I needed to dig deep for that inner confidence and positive energy to make him feel that I was a leader worth being around. After that, each time I approached him he looked up, invited me in, stayed around a little bit longer, let me touch him and lay my head and heart on him. In the end I was even able to get him to move his feet when I asked him to.

Just the honest feedback I needed at a very low point, insight that I am starting to bring to the relationship I am developing with my horse, Patch, and to my life in general. Over the next few weeks with support from the IFEAL team, I was gradually able to see that this was just one aspect of the deep depression I have been suffering from since my nephew died eight years ago, which has clouded and clogged every sinew of my judgement and being. Who would have thought that a horse can show you a thing or two about yourself, your relationships and enable you to take a few brave steps forward to embrace life and love again? The cloud has finally lifted and who knows where this journey could take me. I hope that in the end I will be able to help other people who are battling grief and depression. With the help of my four-legged therapy team of course.

Hooray for poo I say!

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