

## The Way of the New Horse

A meeting with a 'Horse Whisperer' at a very special stables near Motcombe has helped Sue Carpenter re-evaluate her fear of horses.

I am not a horsey person. I don't mind stroking their noses or even offering them a carrot on my flattened palm – as long as there's a fence between us. I love the idea of cantering along a beach with the wind in my hair, but it's only one of many fantasies involving potential personal injury that I never intend to fulfil. I just don't feel safe around horses. My 11-year-old daughter Simi, however, worships the ground they trot on. And so I wondered if there was a way that I could overcome my fear.

That's when I discovered The New Horse - a stable at Bittles Brook Farm in Motcombe, near Shaftesbury. Opened last year, its philosophy is one of encouraging understanding and respect between human and horse. I went to see the founder Carolyn Bourchier, whom I knew slightly through a mutual friend. She welcomed me with a big hug and a smile, and, emanating positive energy with every step, took me for a walk in the new Paddock Paradise - a fenced trail rather than a field, where her own horses roam free and unshod. They immediately came trotting over.

Heart thudding, I hid behind Carolyn as she stroked and kissed a skittish three-year-old named Frodo, who in turn nuzzled her face in greeting. As we walked on, Frodo followed, a few paces behind. I was on my guard, reading such behaviour as threatening. Carolyn laughed. "What

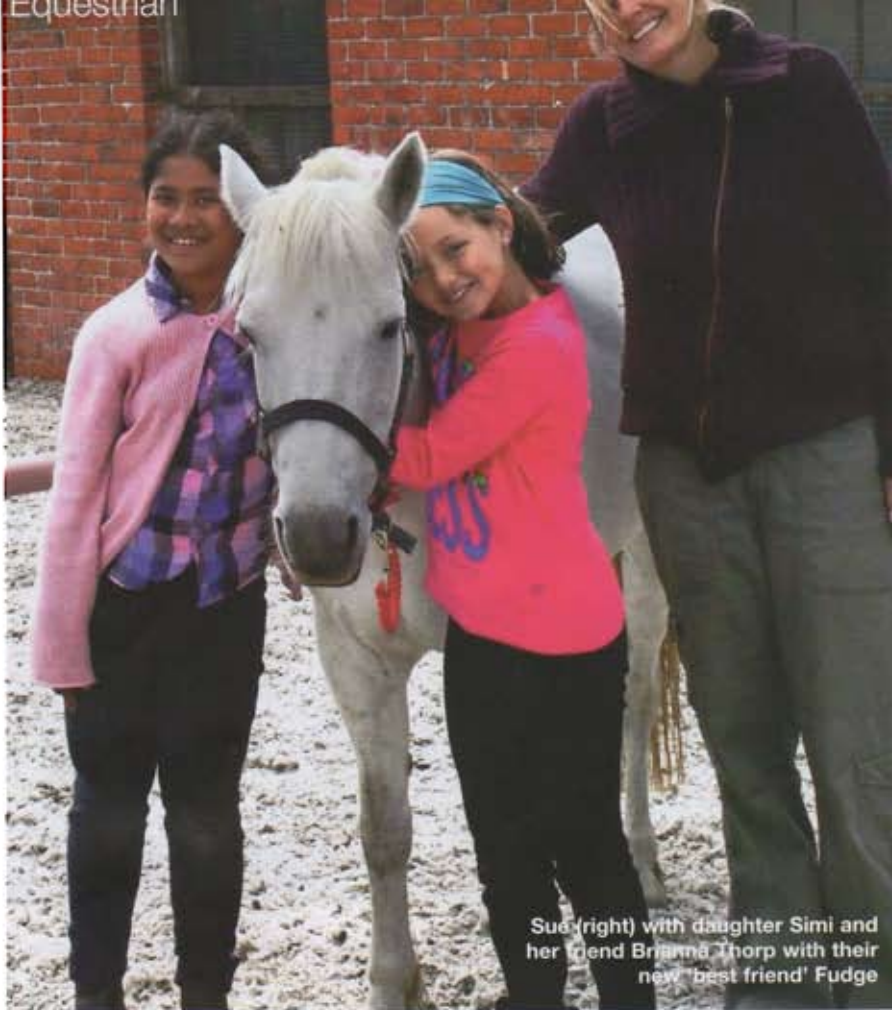
the horse wants is strong leadership, and I am the herd leader. They're just following me as they would do if I were the lead horse in the wild."

Carolyn went on to explain that a horse is a prey animal and thus needs to feel safe with a human. Any skittish (aka scary)



Simi walks off round the pen and Frodo follows like an obedient dog.





Sue (right) with daughter Simi and her friend Brianna Thorp with their new 'best friend' Fudge

her giggle and me squirm. Introductions over and a thread of connection is created. Simi walks off round the pen and Frodo follows like an obedient dog. Simi then takes over the 'flag' (an orange plastic bag tied to a stick) and using clear commands becomes an instant circus ringmaster, getting Frodo to walk, trot and canter around the ring, kicking up dust as he turns on a sixpence and thunders off in the opposite direction. She emerges elated.

"Sue!" Franklin strides towards me and fixes me with his steady eye through the mesh. "I hear you're a little fearful around horses, am I right?" I nod. "Would you come into the round pen? Would you trust me?" I clearly look stricken as he adds, "Frodo's a bit young and needy. We'll work with an older horse who is more experienced and very gentle."

Minutes later, I'm in the round pen, stroking Fudge, a 23-year-old grey who stands calmly at my side. "Breathe," says Franklin. "If you're feeling fear, you communicate that to the horse. Breathe and focus on making the horse feel safe and secure." I breathe.

I walk across and around the pen, with Fudge in quiet pursuit. Now it's my turn to be ringmaster. Standing in the centre,

facing the horse's rump, I wave the flag tentatively behind her and she trots off round the ring. As long as I keep the flag out behind her, explains Franklin, she'll keep moving. If I wave it in front of her head, she'll change direction. If I drop it vertically by my legs and say, "Woah," she'll stop. Simple. We go through various manoeuvres, all of which work like magic. "Let's try something," he says. "Kneel down beside the horse." I kneel. My head is now inches away from Fudge's. She turns slightly to look at me, sniffs without making contact, then turns back. I remain calm. I don't feel she's going to take a chunk out of me. I actually trust her.

"How do you feel?" asks Franklin.

"Fine," I say, smiling and dusting down my knees as I rise to leave the pen.

"That's great, isn't it?"

"Yes," I agree. "Except it feels a bit of a cheat, because this is the sweetest, calmest horse in the world."

"Yes," says Franklin, "but you still did it. You were the leader and she followed. She wouldn't have done that if you didn't show strong leadership."

I nod, still a little doubtful. "But if it had been Frodo..."

"That's how you build confidence," he

says. "You start with the basics so that you go away thinking, 'That's easy, I can do this.' Then you can move on."

When I think about it, many of my fears exist because I've gone in at a level that puts the fear of God into me, such as the 'fun dive' I did in deep sea, without any preparation in a swimming pool first, or the ski trip with half-an-hour's tuition and then straight onto a blue run (resulting in the ignominy of the instructor having to go down backwards, facing me, holding the front of my skis).

At The New Horse, Carolyn advocates coming in for a few sessions just to be with the horses and get to know them before attempting to ride them. It's a completely different approach and I can see how it would work for the most nervous of wannabe rider. Now I'm eager to take the next step. With a suitably reliable, calm horse, of course. □

## NEW HORSE WORKSHOPS

Carolyn runs immersion weeks in Dorset, with workshops from various visiting experts. Franklin will be running a series of workshops at The New Horse from 17-21 May, 2012. With a second course planned for August (date to be confirmed). More details can be found at [thenewhorse.co.uk](http://thenewhorse.co.uk) or call 01747 854772

To find out more about Franklin Levinson at his website [wayofthehorse.org](http://wayofthehorse.org)

## Meeting of Minds Open Days

These are held once a month starting on 9 January from 10am-3pm. This is an opportunity to participate with your horse, or observe, and gain insights and instruction from two different horsemanship trainers:

Debbie Reilly - former Monty Roberts' instructor, international clinician and founder of the 'Understanding Equus' approach.

Carolyn Bouchier - owner of The New Horse, student of the Carolyn Resnick Method as well as Equine Facilitated Learning with Franklin Levinson and Rupert Issacson.

For more details visit [thenewhorse.co.uk](http://thenewhorse.co.uk) or call 01747 854772





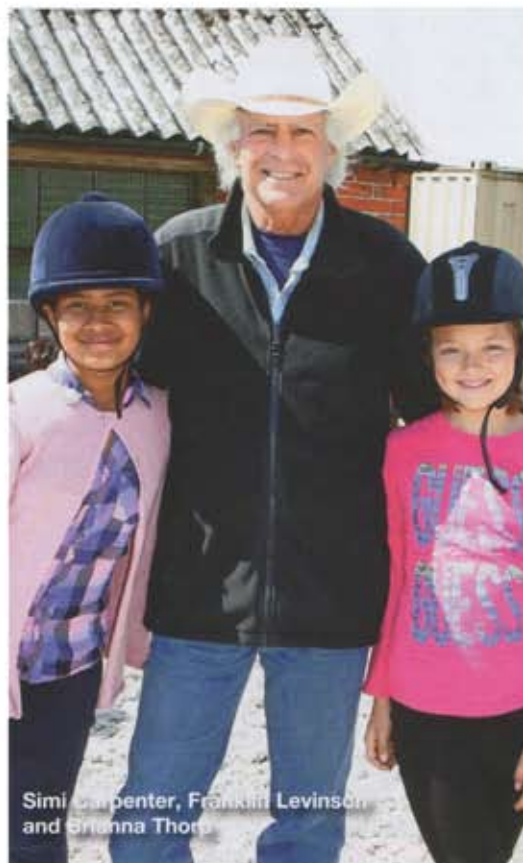
behaviour is likely to be caused by fear, not malicious intent. Having spent her life with horses and studied with several of the great leaders of natural horsemanship, Carolyn now wants to promote the new, gentle way in Britain, where the old style of tight-reined domination still prevails in many riding schools.

"The overriding thing I want people to feel here is the calmness of being around horses. Being at one with nature," she says. "Horses live in the moment and are connected to nature, and through them we remember the instincts that we've lost. Human and horse relationships have to be based on trust, respect and friendship."

Carolyn invited me and Simi to come and spend the day with one of her mentors, the American 'Horse Whisperer' Franklin Levinson, who has been training horses and their owners using his own gentle methods for over 40 years.

Franklin maintains that to be good with horses at a high level requires us humans to come forward with our best qualities and attributes, similar to being a great parent. He calls his method 'Beyond Natural Horsemanship', because, he says, "there's nothing natural about a human riding a horse. I

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Simi Carpenter, Franklin Levinson and Brianna Thorp

teach successful horse training through compassion, acquired wisdom of horses, learned and practised skills, and trust."

Both Carolyn and Franklin teach how to communicate with horses using – and reading – body language. They believe that by interacting with horses in the right way, we can learn about ourselves and become more functional in all our relationships. As Carolyn says, "Being with the horses teaches us about the sort of person we are and the sort of person we could be."

I am intrigued and so Simi and I head off to The New Horse for the Family Day with Franklin. We arrive to find him, complete with cowboy hat, demonstrating his training technique with a lively young horse in the round pen. It's Frodo. No sooner have we sat down than Franklin is asking for volunteers and Simi is fearlessly entering the lion's den. I watch with bated breath as she greets Frodo by rubbing his neck; Franklin doesn't advocate patting horses or touching their faces – "How would you like it if I came up and patted your nose?" he asks. "Whereas if I give you a gentle stroke on the shoulder, that feels reassuring, doesn't it?"

Frodo nuzzles Simi's head, making