

# "Beyond Trail Slaves" for Horses in the Caribbean

**Beyond Trail Slaves: Horses will teach connection, bonding and natural horse management.**

by Stina Herberg with Carolyn Resnick

In 2007, I took up a new job challenge of managing training of international volunteers at Richmond Vale Academy on the island of St. Vincent. St. Vincent is a small island in the eastern Caribbean; the population is around 120,000, and it is one of the last untouched and unspoiled islands in the Eastern Caribbean.

I have had horses as my hobby for many years, and in recent years I had learned the new "old" lessons on the benefits of keeping horses in a natural setting.

When I arrived in St. Vincent, I ran into an abandoned and abused herd of horses. The horses had been brought over to the island some 8-10 years ago to take tourists on trail rides. The owners had, for unknown reasons, left the island—and the horses. The original herd had 16 members, but 9 had since died, so we brought the 7 surviving horses to our Academy, Nature and Hiking Center.



Stina ran into the herd of wild, abandoned and abused horses, which challenged her to find new ways of training and understanding horses.

The horses were wild; most of them were thin, and they were full of worms. Step-by-step, the horses got healthier and happier—they were dewormed, we got the ticks off, and slowly, they gained weight.

We had no idea what we had gotten into. Two or three of the older horses had possibly been handled before. The first idea was to train them to be trail horses, and carry tourists to the beautiful waterfalls in the area, down the untouched beaches, and even up to the volcano. But after several tries, the horses clearly told us they were not at all ready, and they were certainly not up for the idea of becoming obedient trail slaves, carrying people around that don't even know them.



The herd has 7 members right now: Darling, Magic, Moonlight, Elena, Jack, Spirit and Laska, the donkey.

I thought I had quite a bit of experience with horses, having worked with some "difficult" horses, some "shut down" horses, and horses regaining their health and strength with natural methods—especially barefoot trimming. But these horses showed me new behaviors nearly every day. They kept being "distant," frightened, and a bit aggressive, and it seemed impossible to really connect with them. There are no natural horsemanship trainers or liberty trainers in the country, so it was hard to look for help to get some feedback on how I could make progress.

## Finding the Right Help

I could not and would not force or make the horses do anything. I wanted to find a way to communicate with them and agree about what to do, and also really make the horses enjoy my company and the reasonable challenges I would like to present for them. I searched the Internet for hours, contacted many people, and finally found Carolyn Resnick, a horsewoman based in San Diego, California. She agreed to guide me online, as she was the only person I could find who had a heart for the horses, even though she did not know them. She has had extensive experience with wild horses.

It has now been one and a half years, and we are having such great progress! I think most "horsegirls" dream of having that special connection with the horse, where the horse follows you, calls you, and wants to be with you. Finally, after many years of horsing around, I can see what I needed to learn and change to achieve this magic connection.

## How We All Connected

I was guided by Carolyn to spend lots of time with the herd—for example, hang out with

them, not making the horses do anything, and have them choose when they want to interact with me. In between, I made them move a bit forward, showed them the way to the fruit trees, and picked fruits for them.

I spent hours in my chair, sitting in the middle of the herd reading a book, and then I started to work with what Carolyn calls, "the waterhole rituals," for example, teaching the horses when to eat and when not to eat.

We established a good relationship through these games, especially building mutual trust. Sometimes I would just sit in the moonlight with the horses, listening to the deep sounds of the rainforest. Sometimes we would dance and play, to make it more fun.

All was not easy, however. I once took one of the mares to a place she was not happy to be trained in, and she showed me that in this setting we could not receive any results or make a connection. Other times, I wondered if we will ever get there, and I learned a lot about taking the time needed to achieve the results we wanted.

We are now working on some exercises at liberty, and also walking with a halter, and we take long walks in the rainforest. The horses and Carolyn have really challenged me to acquire a lot of new knowledge on how to work with and understand horses.



Through online coaching from Carolyn Resnick, Stina was able to connect with the wild herd of horses.

There are no farriers or trimmers in St. Vincent. I have earlier studied the hoof theoretically, but have no practice trimming hooves. The horses needed a trim after a while, and we had to set up their paddocks so they would keep their hooves worn down by self-trimming. We made a long walkway in a hilly area, and since September last year, the hooves have been getting a nice shape and are kept in self trim. We are lucky to have the space to make this possible.

## Beyond Trail Slaves, Cont.



Walking the horses around the island enables the horses to maintain their own hooves.



There are no farriers or trimmers on St. Vincent, so Stina set up the paddocks to help the horses self-trim their hooves. Examples of their hooves.



I think that is also why I would like to share these experiences, as I know many people who are looking for that intense contact and bonding with their horses, and also ideas to keep their horses more naturally.

We are now able to offer a very different kind of horse program at our nature and hiking center. It will not be a mainstream matter where lots of people come, but it does not matter, because we (the people and the horses) agree about the program.

Instead of people coming to "rent" a horse they don't know, for a trail ride, they can instead come for "magic." Ride with the herd without tack, walk 5 horses together, spend time and study the herd, walk with the horses in the rainforest, study natural horse management, get ideas for an "active" paddock that encourages movement, study the hooves, and together enjoy the very unique nature here in the one of the last unspoiled spots in the Caribbean.

## Comment and Insight from Carolyn Resnick

When Stina got in touch with me, she was truly motivated to get her horses down the road in training, as she had decided to raise money to help feed the poor people in Africa and Latin America. This, I thought, was a good cause, so I offered to help. Stina was willing to give my program the time needed and had a great background in training horses, so I thought we would work well together. What I liked about working with Stina is that she was not much on asking "why" when I would tell her to do something. She would just do it and then report back.

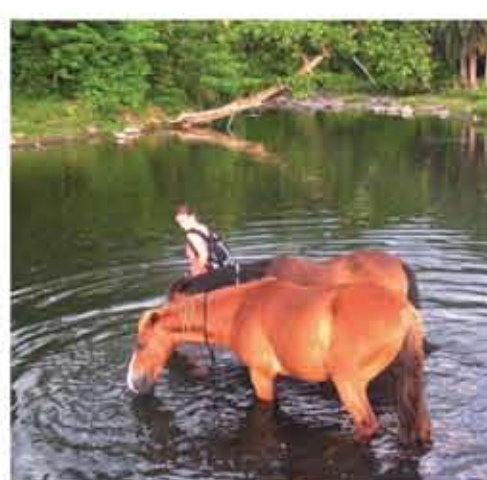
I had her start with my first Waterhole Ritual, which was to sit in a chair and wait for the horses to interact with her.

This did not happen at first, and most people would have abandoned the project. But Stina had read my book, and she was convinced that some magic would occur by following my suggestion. I kept telling her to sit, and she kept sending me pictures of her sitting. She started out during the daytime, and stayed all day and into the night. This went on for many days. I was feeling good about how Stina was really going to get it, and also aware that Stina herself was a wonderful person to take the time that I asked her to take with her horses. Well sure enough, the horses started coming around, as horses will do, just because it is their nature to connect with us if we take the time for the connection to occur.

I then guided her not to interact with the horses and to only allow them to interact with her.

Again, Stina complied. I explained to her that if a horse can interact with us without our interference, the connection can study us. And when this happens, and the horse is not pressured from our need to connect, the bond grows.

When horses form a friendship with us and



Swimming with the herd is just one of the enjoyable activities to share.



The first Waterhole Ritual is to sit in a chair and WAIT for the horses to interact.

begin to interface with us, they will test us. They become so secure that we need to create a working bond with them over personal space issues, because they will get "pushy," as most animals and people do.

Stina was always focused at first on the slave rides, and getting a saddle onto their back. I remember saying to her she reminded me of a teen-age boy on a date, wanting only one thing. I also said that she was not presenting the rituals in a fun way for the horses, and this was slowing the process down.

I then started talking about the magic in the relationship that is happening in the moment with the horses. How wonderful it would be for people to come to her and be a part of the process of the horses getting so comfortable with people that riding them would be natural. People could ride the horses bridleless, never using tack, when Stina had developed the connection further.

In the beginning, Stina could offer guided trips on foot with a wild herd of horses in the jungle and beaches. She could take people on picnics with the horses, and the people then could pick the fruit that the horses could not reach which would continue to develop the bond. I pictured her adventure for the tours to be like the adventure that the boy in the movie "The Black Stallion" had with his horse. Then there was a shift in Stina, and the magic grabbed her heart and she has been in a dancing meditation with her horses ever since.

This is what I call a happy ending, because the journey continues and stays in the magic, as the connection and working bond keep escalating to a higher consciousness and deeper magic.

Stina is living the dream and the horses are calling people to come. She offers people a chance to feel the magic by traveling with wild horses. To feel the herd connection and be a part of their culture, and be accepted at the same time, is something not to miss out on.

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## Beyond Trail Slaves, Cont.



Today, Stina and the horses teach about horse behavior, herd dynamics, horse language, natural horse keeping, trust, respect and riding with a herd in the small island.

(cont. from page 13)

Her wild horses would be bonded to people more than any domesticated horse could be. The connection they offer returns us to our instincts to move as one, a feeling that leads to pure joy. Every one can fall into the meditation dance of companionship and trust at Stina's ranch, as you are traveling in beauty guided by Stina who can bring your awareness to a connection with the horses that we have all read about in books. She took the time and found the truth. ●

About the author: Stina Herberg is the director of Richmond Vale Academy and its Nature & Hiking Center. Stina was born in Rjukan, Norway, and has worked in several countries in the world, including Angola, Mozambique, Denmark and USA. She speaks Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, German, Portuguese, English, and she understands and read Spanish. Right now she is working on a series of 20 rounds to improve the connection with the herd; you can follow the progress at Stina's YouTube Channel—more info here: <http://stinaherberg.wordpress.com/>

Richmond Vale Nature & Hiking Center  
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About Carolyn Resnick: Carolyn Resnick is an expert on horse behavior, herd dynamics, wild horses, horse communication and training. She is based in Southern California and has, for many years, coached people on how to get a real connection with their horses. Carolyn is famous for her book *Naked Liberty*, videos, her insight and experience on training horses and riders. She specializes in working with horses using no tack, just body language and communication.

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## Colukum Pass Wagon Train Ride by Dave Stewert

This is a story of how hard it is to get people to accept the natural hoof system and change their ways from steel shoes. I sell weed-free hay, and had a lady (Jenny) call and want 130 bales of hay for a wagon train trip to Colukum Pass in Washington State. This sounded like a great trip, and I asked if I could join the wagon train as an out rider. Jenny, the wagon train organizer, said that would be fine, as they were looking for more to help share in the catering expense. Dutch oven cooking for 5 days and riding seemed to be right up my stomach's and heart's desire. I asked my horse, Babes, if she wanted to go and she said sure, but I only want hay, thank you very much, I am not into cooked food as I am a vegetarian only. So we left on June 24th to drive up to the base camp. The road was steep and rough, and my truck and transmission over heated.

They said shoes were needed on this trip, and I am driving over boulders and thinking this could be a trip to prove that my boots could do the job. I put Cavallos on the front the first afternoon for a short ride out of base camp, and found that the roads and trails were big and little rocks with a little dirt. Babe's rear feet were okay, but I felt she needed all four covered, and added pads inside to help make my buddy very happy. When I returned to base camp, a group of wagon train people asked if my galoshes were to keep my feet dry. Keep in mind, that this is high eastern cascades area, and it is very dry. So I thought this was a remark to be cute, which it was. I responded by saying that I am a barefoot natural horseman. I am sure they are thinking that this guy is a joke and will never make it!

The next morning we headed out for the first camp site on this part of about a 50 mile loop. I rode with a few out riders on a side trail and we came upon 80 elk running and squealing through the woods. Babes did well on this scene, but then we came out to the pass road and saw our first wagon. It was pink, had hanging buckets, black mules with silver rigging, and a white cover with two big windows which looked like a monster. I didn't know then that my horse would freak out over the wagons, as she is very level headed. She said elk are okay, but this is just too much for me, and wanted to turn around and go home NOW! I got off and worked her though it by doing all kinds of controlling exercises, and walked the last 1.5 miles where lunch and



also that night's camp was to be. I was setting up for the night, and in came a wagon from the 1800's, with steel wheels. It was as loud as a dump truck, with two big black and unhitched. They set up camp next to me, and drafted Dick and Don, who ended up in a portable camping pen next to us. Babes thought they were something to die for, as we became best buddies. Now she knew they and the wagon wouldn't eat her.

Later in the same day, we were to go for a wagon train ride out and then back to our first camp. This was my chance to get Babes to accept the wagons, as she could see Dick and Don being hitched to the wagon. So I walked her for the first mile beside the wagon and her new buddies (see photos). All went well, and she became the horse that loved to be with everyone and the loud wagons. We became the point lead horse for the wagon train, and also the messenger between them. Most riders went on side areas where it wasn't as rough, away from the wagons. They had seen me trotting over the boulders, and not being the least bit lame or sore.

After doing this for two days, people began to come over to my campsite and ask about boots and trimming. Questions such as, is this better for the feet than steel shoes, and how long do the boots last? We have been trimming our ten horses ourselves for about 5 years, and in the last couple of years, using a power grinder to do the trimming. Power grinding has been the biggest labor-saving method ever, and the horses love it, as we aren't wrenching on the feet. Even our new mustang likes it. I also explained that the Cavallos and Old Mac's G2 last about six to twelve months, riding every 2-3 days over rocky roads for 5-8 miles, which is much less expensive than shoeing horses. They could see my horse's wide heels, good concavity, and healthy feet. I am sure that many opinions were changed by example.

We have been working with horses for about 14 years, and used to breed horses until times changed, years ago. Now we trim and teach horsemanship, as well as ride as much as possible for fun. If you have any questions fell free to email us at: [siewedj@rainierconnect.com](mailto:siewedj@rainierconnect.com) ●