

# Horse Breather

Equine Breathing ezine      issue 75



## Breathing and healing Saffy, Eloa and myself Kate Saunders



Horses came into my life when I began riding when I was about eight or nine, I continued off and on until I was about twenty-one. But something never quite felt right, so I quietly decided horses were not for me. However, the horses had other ideas, they kept calling me back to them appearing repeatedly in my dreams. I decided maybe it wasn't horses themselves that were not for me, but riding. So, I decided to choose a different path and began exploring the relationship on the ground with them, something which was never really taught when I was learning as a child. I volunteered at different places, often poo picking or the occasional grooming, just to have the chance to be around them. Then around the age of thirty-three, I experienced a powerful meditation in which a clear message came through 'I want to heal horses with my hands'. I was surprised, but it felt right and I enrolled on a cranio-sacral course for people, with the view to move to horses once qualified, looking back that was a significant turning point where my own healing journey really began.

After several life changes and a big move across the country, I decided at thirty-six I it was now the right time to get my first horse. Sarafina came into my life in January 2020; I was very lucky to have found her just weeks before the world changed in March.

Sarafina was labelled a 'difficult' and 'dangerous' horse. As a young horse, she had reared over backwards while being saddled, breaking her withers, it was clear to me she carried both physical and emotional scars. Also - and I'm ashamed to say it took me a long time to realise this! - her passport name is Miracle, potentially meaning she had a problematic entry into this world which likely also added to her difficulties. She had been at the rescue for around two years, beautiful, but often passed over as people were warned she may be 'non-ridden' and had a typical 'chestnut mare attitude'. Lucky for me though...

I was volunteering at her rescue, and when I first met her she placed her nose on my chest and gently nuzzled me. I was then told that 'that horse doesn't like people' which I found odd, because of the tender way she greeted me. I learned through an animal communicator that she wanted to be called Sarafina, very specifically not Seraphina, but Sarafina. Curious I looked up the name and the first thing that appeared was the south african musical Sarafina! with the words "She was their teacher; they were her hope". It brought tears to my eyes. Sarafina therefore has her own theme tune! and something I also found coincidental was that I had lived in South Africa for two years. Another coincidence happened which was impossible to ignore, a family member brought me some paintings I had done as a child, not knowing that I was about to rehome a horse. One was the spitting image of Saffy; I had painted it when I was 13.



Our first year together was a journey of ups and downs. At times, I found myself wondering why I had chosen such a “difficult” horse as my first—but for some reason I’ve never been one to take the easy path. However, we persevered and we were creating something special—through energy healing, time spent together and sharing quiet walks around the beautiful farm she called home

She had her own large field with plenty of horses around her, however one day during windy weather, she could not see her friends who had moved to a more sheltered spot. This had made her very distraught, and she had started ploughing into the wooden 5-bar gate to get to them, almost breaking it in half. Thankfully someone had found her before this happened and I quickly rushed to make sure she was ok. I decided then that she needed a companion. I had been working with a behaviourist who mentioned a horse in need of a home, she felt she would be a good match, a ‘steady eddy’. Her name was Sassy; this made me chuckle because I had made an Instagram profile for Sarafina called SassySaffy. It felt like more than a coincidence, it felt meant to be.

So, a year after Saffy’s arrival, Sassy came into our lives. As a young horse, Sassy had been a severe rescue case, found at just three years old, left in a barn on Bodmin Moor with several others, waiting to die. I hate to think of what she may have endured before that, but there are some physical signs as she sadly has a twitch scar on her nose, and marks on her hind quarters from a cattle prod. She had spent around eight years with her owner, but when Covid came, her owner made the decision to move abroad. Sassy went into a loan home, where she began bucking off her rider. When I met her, she looked like she had simply given up on life, no spark, just existing. It didn’t take me long to decide that yes, she’s coming with me.

Sassy had zero ‘sass’ in her whatsoever, that name did not suit her; I renamed her Eloa after an angel. She has the most elegant trot, and the name felt right for her. I often call them both my angels. [side note - due to Equine Breathing her sass is coming back!]. It turned out she wasn’t the ‘steady eddy’ everyone described, sadly another horse covering up her trauma and trying to hold it together by shutting down.



My wish and goal for my horses has always for them to be happy and healthy. I’m an energy healer and am passionate about helping horses and their humans. What I found, though, was that although my work was helping both my horses and me to some extent, there always seemed to be a kind of “reset” button—returning us to a default state, especially if a stressor was involved. We made changes by moving but were unable to escape chaos. We have encountered places with winter shoots - fortnightly panic ensued for the horses due to beaters, dogs and shooters in the surrounding fields of their home. Then the bird-scarer in spring! After a move across country to what seemed the most tranquil place, a horse there was one of the spookiest I had ever encountered, constantly unsettling the herd. There was also a young colt who repeatedly tried to mount Saffy, and the environment itself felt full of chaos and disruption, I noticed particularly when other owners had been to visit, the whole herd was totally unsettled.

In the midst of it all, I was knocked over four times and seriously injured—something I had never experienced before in all my years with horses. Luckily, I found a sole use place for us to escape to hoping for some peace at last.

However, that was to be short lived...as ‘firework’ season in the UK came upon us, a little earlier than expected, I was shocked to find places nearby setting off fireworks so close to their field. I spent around two weeks camping out at night to make sure they were ok, some nights were extremely loud and they were so frantic, it was

upsetting to watch whilst attempting to maintain calm. That period had me so distraught, it left me at an all-time low as a horse owner.

So, in January 2025 I revisited Equine Breathing prompted by the state the winter had left us in. I had first come across it around two years before; I can't quite remember how—perhaps it was a suggestion in a Facebook post. I likely skimmed the website, then got distracted and moved on. Looking back, it probably was not the right time for me, I had some more lessons to learn! But now I wished I had paused and explored it further. What I've come to understand since is that people who need to restore their breathing the most, are often the ones who find it hardest to access.

This time, I went back and really began reading Clare's website. As I explored the issues and symptoms linked to dysfunctional breathing, I was drawn deeper into the work of Dr Buteyko, whose principles Clare had adapted for horses. One day, while listening to a book about his work on my drive to the horses, something suddenly hit me: my goodness... I have most of these issues too!

Therefore, my journey began more with myself than with my horses...and of course if I'm not calm and breathing well, how could my horses be? I followed some of Clare's guidance for people; and quickly realised just how poor my breathing was. Some of the reactions felt quite intense—not all of them comfortable—but underneath it, I could sense something was shifting for the better. After an already extremely long healing journey of my own, spanning around 15 years, a myriad of techniques and a substantial amount of money, I had been feeling that my health and my life were getting considerably worse. I see now that many of those modalities were peeling back the layers, the compensations and adaptations that both my horses and I had built to survive what we had experienced in the past. What was left was something raw and exposed, not yet able to cope with the world around us. This was where the real healing was beginning. The missing piece we had not worked on yet, one extremely important piece, the foundations on which we live, was our breathing, which had been contributing to us not feeling safe.

I was so enamoured with the work I signed up for Buteyko Instructor Training and found myself flying to Ireland to train within two months of re-discovering it, even though my functional breathing story had barely begun, intuitively it felt so right.

The journey with my horses breathing was a slow one, I guess initially that was frustrating, but I felt they needed to go at their own pace, and I also needed to improve my breathing by a long way before I could really help them. Initially Saffy really loved 1N and would even come over and press her nose against me; but I think perhaps we reached a plateau where she struggled to go further. I know from my own experience that this can happen, and for us it was either because there were some emotions and trauma under the surface that needed to be faced and processed, which can be difficult to do, or the physical body needing to adjust to a new way of being, having been out of balance for so long.

Saffy was never a big fan of being touched but is much happier about that now. I wouldn't usually have classified my horses as 'spooky' as I've seen much worse in horses, perhaps on edge at times, but she is far less reactive, and I also see her self-regulating, able to calm herself when something has unsettled her. She has always had such a brave demeanour, but what began to surface was a very anxious horse that had been covering it up very well, and of course this was something I recognised in myself too. I'm also seeing depression and perhaps grief too, surface for her suppressed from her past, no surprise that it's also something I've been experiencing as well!

#### All Weather Breather



EI was a lot more difficult, having been twitched she's not really that happy about her nose being 'messed' with. She finds it so difficult to relax and switch off, the feeling being so unfamiliar for her, that she would just stop herself as she began relaxing into 1N, convinced there were some monsters or mountain lions somewhere nearby. I decided to move to the All Weather Breather for a gentler approach for her, and she quite enjoys it now. It has taken several months but she is becoming more relaxed with her face softening and her abdomen opening up. Her eyes are still runny occasionally, but now I notice the small stressors that change her breathing such as her oestrus cycle or a hot day.

At times, I have seen what I believe to be PTSD-like flashbacks in her. I have seen her on several occasions become so fixated and distressed by the gate that I can't help but wonder if it echoed how she once felt when her abusers arrived. She has also visited me in my dreams and shared with me some of the terrible things that have happened to her in her life. She is far less reactive now, and I see glimpses of her enjoying life again and running around with her field mate bucking and bunny hopping in a way that feels light and free. Some days, there's a softness in her expression that's hard to put into words—a look that suggests she is simply at peace. It has even been reflected to me through an animal communicator, who described her as feeling a kind of bliss, as though life couldn't get any better. It's so lovely to see, but part of me dreams of giving her even more—a larger place to roam, another companion, and a life free from the disruption of fireworks!

We've reached a point now where we simply sit and meditate together. I might practice gentle cadence breathing, with soft humming, and they will often drift into a deeply relaxed state, releasing what they need to afterwards. In the beginning, EI didn't want to be part of it. She would stay at a distance, but over time, something has changed. Now she comes over, almost as if she's saying, "Okay... I'm ready. Let's do this together."

We've reached a point now where we simply sit and meditate together. I might practice gentle cadence breathing, with soft humming, and they will often drift into a deeply relaxed state, releasing what they need to afterwards. In the beginning, EI didn't want to be part of it. She would stay at a distance, but over time, something has changed. Now she comes over, almost as if she's saying, "Okay... I'm ready. Let's do this together."

Saffy and I have always had a close connection and can sometimes be found running round the field having fun together at liberty, but with EI it has taken a lot longer to gain her trust over the years, I used to catch her looking at me slyly as if she was thinking "why are you so nice to me, I'm sure you must want something from me..". Essentially, I've let her do it in her own time, rather than impressing myself upon her. One day I was putting out some hay and EI was following me, I decided to run backwards with it calling her as I went, she started to trot towards me as I put it down, but then something happened where she completely spooked herself and ran off bucking, it felt like she is almost scared of having that connection, in case something bad happens if she lets it in. Now she does watch Saffy and I as we run around (she was totally disinterested before), and I feel that she very much wants to join in but is not quite ready just yet.

The next fireworks season came around after around 8 months of us all improving our breathing. It was still quite chaotic, but I think a mixture of my knowing what to expect this time, along with my ability to remain calmer, meant we were all much more resilient than the previous year. I've realised that's it more about making peace from within, rather than have external circumstances affect us, because we have no control over those. Stress can be good and help us grow, so having resilience to stressful situations is a huge bonus. Having said that, I really don't want to go through it again!



gentle 1N with EI using a glove

What I love about Equine Breathing and the Buteyko Method is the science behind it, aside from the obvious that breathing is extremely important for us all, it's great to read scientific papers where these things have been studied in human. Whenever I learn something about humans, I see if it could possibly apply to horses too, so the more I learn the more I can see very subtle things within the horses related to their breathing. For example, I noticed El's eyes would be runny during her season, when progesterone levels are increased; in women it is well documented that increased progesterone fuels hyperventilation, so why not in horses? As my breathing has improved so has my relationship with my menstrual cycle (which was the initial catalyst for my entire healing journey!) so I have no doubt as my horses breathing improves, they will not be as affected by their cycles, with more efficient breathing month long.

Whilst I love science, I am also very spiritual and intuitive, and I can see how restoring functional breathing can help heighten your intuition, awareness and help you reconnect to your true authentic self. However, a difficult part of the journey can be the clearing and detox events that occur, even as a holistic practitioner who already understands these concepts! When you see or feel something returning that you thought you had already dealt with it can be difficult to believe you and your horse are on the healing path and not sliding backwards. Sadly, so many things are being repressed in this world by drugs and supplements, and personally I believe that suppressing our breathing has also become a coping mechanism, a way to shield ourselves from difficult emotions or to navigate the world more comfortably. Returning to functional breathing brings so many rewards, but it isn't always easy; it often asks us to move through cycles of feeling better, then gently face the next wave of sensations as they arise to be processed and healed.

My healing journey has been a long one, I've learnt so much, and met some amazing people. As I write this article, I'm full of such joy, happiness and hope for the future that I never knew possible, all because I found the power of restoring functional breathing, and I am so looking forward to helping others too. I have so much more energy every day that I am able to do so many more things, that may or may not involve horses! – it's a new lease of life. With thanks first and foremost to my horses who led me to it, and Clare for bravely pioneering it for horses, and Patrick McKeown and Bryan Mirabella who have generously taught me so much. I hope whoever is reading this can find peace, joy and health with their horse through the power of their own breath.

Kate Saunders  
<http://www.beatonehealing.com/>