

Kindness pays when handling livestock

One nice October day, I looked up from my 5-year-old play activity in the back yard to see my father and Daisy.

Daisy, a bay filly recently weaned, wore a new double-stitched leather halter with a brass ring to which my father had snapped a strong, 6-foot-long rope.

I studied the activity in the barnyard for a little while before deciding he deliberately wanted to hurt her.

He jerked her from side to side, first one way and then another. A strong man, he used his strength to pull hard and fast enough to yank her off her feet.

Each time, she struggled to regain footing. She grunted and squealed; sounds which tore at my heart frightening me. Why did he want to punish her?

From time to time, he stopped tugging to catch his breath. While he rested, Daisy stood spraddle-legged with her head down panting, a picture of bewilderment and dejection.

Then the process started all over again. Maybe Mom could do something. I ran through the front porch and into the house yelling, "Mom, he's hurting Daisy. Make him stop."

My grandmother heard me coming and blocked the door to the living room, where Mom busied herself at the table giving my little brother a bath in her red-rimmed white enamel dishpan.

Grandma commanded, "Now you jist hush. He knows what he's doing. He has to make the colt's head sore so she'll learn to lead."

I knew from experience when Grandma said, "Now you jist hush,"

hushing better happen. More than once my backside bore her finger marks from not obeying soon enough for her liking.

I went back outside and watched through silent tears as the torture in the barnyard continued. After what seemed an eternity, things began to change.

Daisy's think tank started working and she began watching my father. When he moved to the side to administer another rough jerk on the rope, she turned to face him.

He could no longer pull her off her feet. When he leaned back and pulled hard on the rope, she stepped toward him and reduced or eliminated the force he could muster.

She didn't trust him. Her eyes showed white-rimmed fear as she began to protect herself. She learned to step into the pull on the halter rope.

She still kept her distance from him, never getting any closer to him than the length of the rope.

His tactics changed. Instead of leaning back on the rope, he stood in place and hand over hand pulled her toward him. Finally, she got close enough for him to touch her.

As he reached to touch her, she braced herself, forefeet extended, regarding him warily with low snorts. She held her ground as his fingers touched the softness of her nose. She bobbed her head up and



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down slightly.

He kept some pressure on the rope. She let him rub between her eyes. He worked his hand up to the knowledge bump between her ears.

Her fear subsided, and she relaxed as he

continued to rub her face and neck. He rubbed her around the ears and foretop and let the rope slacken to massage where the leather halter bit into her.

Fast-forward 10 years ...

I had a weanling filly of my own to halter-break, a palomino named Skippy. We became well acquainted during the summer when she still ran with her mother.

She learned to enjoy the brush and curry comb and had no fear of me. She came to meet me when I visited her in the pasture. I put a leather halter on her and let her wear it for a couple of weeks before weaning.

I met her in the weaning corral and snapped a lead rope into the brass ring on the halter. Then I took a short lariat rope and tied a loop in one end large enough to fit over her rump. I threaded the other end of the lariat through the same brass halter ring.

I put steady, firm pressure on the lead rope. She resisted, as expected, by planting her feet and letting her neck stretch forward as I pulled.

I kept pulling on the lead rope with one hand, with the other taking up the slack in the lariat. The lariat became taut; she felt the pull from behind and hopped forward toward me. I let slack in the lariat so she wouldn't run into me.

I talked to her, rubbed her knowledge bump, and again pulled on the lead rope. The process repeated with her jumping forward and me letting slack in the lariat.

Within a surprisingly short time, she learned that a pull on the halter rope meant a pull on the lariat would follow. She anticipated it and stepped toward me when she felt the lead rope tighten.

In less than 15 minutes she was halter-broke. I led her out of the corral, across irrigation ditches, through trees and brush, and into the barn.

To prove she truly was broke, I led her across the porch, into the house, turned her around in the kitchen, and took her back outside. I ran and she trotted beside me, never letting the lead rope get tight.

Throughout my lifetime, I used this method to halter-break colts. Kindness has generally paid off for me in handling livestock.

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Center Stage is written by friends of the Senior Center for the Sheridan community. It is a collection of insights and stories related to living well at every age.