

# *Companion Horse*



## **Travels with Destiny**

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## Foundation Work

Watch how Frank Bell uses the first three steps of his 7 Step Safety System to establish the trust and relationship this race horse needed.



### Step 1: Bonding

The goal is to relax the horse and be an asset to them. When they see you coming, they want to be around you because you are enjoyable to them. A great way to start the bonding process is to find places the horse can't touch and scratch them. They'll relax and realize that you're a pretty great person to have around.

**M**agnifico's story is as interesting as any. A complex Arabian who ran for his life at the track and won, but he lost his way with humans. What had taken place will never be known or admitted. I ache for what he must have endured, because when he came to me in the late winter of '96, he had no use for me or anyone for that matter.

After winning several flat track races the summer of '95, he was purchased and sent to Turf Paradise in Arizona. He broke the track record in his first race by a serious margin and placed well in the next. But that was the end of it. In the third and fourth races, by the time he'd entered the gate he'd already run his race, he was so stressed out. He had nothing left.

# Getting Intimate with Magnifico

By Frank Bell

This was a horse who fit his name perfectly. I've not laid eyes on a more well proportioned animal. He was a bay horse of 15-1 with strong bone and the muscle to cover it. He was a no bull horse who was all business. His gaits were to be envied. His speed awesome. But none of that mattered when he arrived via transport one warm spring afternoon. I happened to be returning from a hike off the mountain when I was informed that "the man" had arrived. I'd been expecting him. His owner, Emmett Ross and I had discussed his plight at length. I couldn't wait to get my hands on him. Something inside me needed to help him. I eased into his run dressed in shorts and hiking boots as the sun was setting. He took one look at me and turned his rear in a sign of disgust for humanity. I agitated a little until he turned to face me, then backed off, allowing him to digest my deliberate intrusion. He looked at me with obvious contempt saying, "just feed me and leave me alone. I don't want to have anything to do with you." But I persisted by moving toward him. His ears shot back and he charged me. I held my ground, yelled at him, raised my arms while making a threatening ugly guttural sound. He stopped head high, ears forward clearly surprised. His intimidation had proved successful in the past. This time he hit the brick wall. As his expression softened into curiosity and defeat, I backed off. His head lowered and he licked his lips. I circled to his left slowly, maintaining my distance.

“With a big sigh, all at once he let down and melted into an intimacy he'd never known. With his head in one hand and his tail in the other he delighted in this oneness as he found his way back to being okay with the human.”

He watched with a suspecting attitude, then took a step in my direction into the circle. Then another. I stopped and allowed him to sniff me. I slowly reached back and made contact, scratching his chest lightly. He took a step closer as my hand continued working on him. My hands drifted up to his head all the while continuing my attentions with the sincere desire to make an incredible first impression. My fingers found his mouth and tongue, then inside his nose, then his eyes. He leaned into my palm as I rubbed one eye then the other. With one hand on his nose handle my other found his flanks which I stroked gently. When he was ready I stroked his rump then stroked the underside of his tail which he lifted with pleasure.

With a big sigh, all at once he let down and melted into an intimacy he'd never known. With his head in one hand and his tail in the other he delighted in this oneness as he found his way back to being okay with the human..

Three months later Magnifico returned to the track in Colorado to place a respectable fourth in his first race. He entered the gate confidently and ran a good race against tough competition. Two weeks later I watched him enter the gate for his second out as the new Magnifico. In a seven furlong competition in a field of eight horses he held his own running third into the final bend. Coming to the finish with two seasoned race horses in front of him he came from behind to win the race in the last moments, coming on strong.

As I rushed from the stands into the winner's circle, I flashed back to that spring afternoon months before when we had rekindled his belief and trust in the human. We had worked together for months dealing with his issues. I'd taught him to lay down in the most stressful of situations including next to a rickety starting gate. We had developed a bond and level of trust few horses or humans reach in a lifetime. Without a doubt, attaining that intimacy had been the key to today's success.

**RESOURCES:**  
[www.gentlesolutions.com](http://www.gentlesolutions.com)



## Step 2: Take and Give

The principle of pressure and release. When there's pressure, and they give, then immediately release.

Bell works with the horse on lowering their head, turning their head, back into their shoulders. This is where the horse gets "soft" and any anxiety or tension is released.



## Step 3: Intimacy

Creating the feeling of safety, reassurance and that where you are, is a good place for the horse to be. By covering their eyes, rubbing their nose, mouth and behind the tail, they show their trust and willingness to be with you.

Illustrations by Kim McElroy