



NATALIE RAWSON TALKS ABOUT BEING ON THE DATING SHOW, TAKE ME OUT, HOSTED BY PADDY MCGUINNESS
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CAN HORSES REALLY HEAL US?

SALLY CHURCHWARD heads to the stables to meet some unusual four-legged therapists

WHEN Jackie Smith was looking for help with anxiety and confidence issues she found a therapist with a difference.

Forget laying on a psychologist's couch or sitting in a comfy armchair talking to a counsellor: Jackie headed to stables in the Meon Valley to meet her therapist, who has four legs, a flowing mane and a fondness for carrots: he's a horse.

Merlin is one of three horses plus a donkey used by Emma Dimage for Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL). EFL is an alternative therapy, in which the horse plays the therapeutic role.

The person receiving the therapy may try to communicate with the horse, for instance using words and movement to encourage it to move, or may just be silent.

"EFL helps the person to address and overcome obstacles and emotional blocks and move forward in their lives with increased self-awareness and confidence," says Emma.

"It often brings up people's emotions very quickly, quicker than interaction with another human being would, because the person with the horse isn't worried about what the horse thinks of them, so there's no fear of judgement."
Jackie had already worked with Emma with her



Emma with horses Guardian and Merlin

own horse - Emma is a hands on equine and pet healer - and was delighted with the results but she was sceptical about EFL.

"I thought with your own horse you have a bond but I couldn't see how that could transfer to horses I didn't know," says the former nurse from Stibbington.

"But it's changed everything! I'm more relaxed, confident and more in the moment."

Although there is another human involved in the therapy, Jackie felt that it was definitely the horse that was helping her.

"For me it's the horse doing the work and Emma is a guide," she says.

"I just wish everyone could do it. As an ex-nurse, I wish it was on the National Health Service. It would save a lot of money on pills!" Jackie and Emma agree that lots of people don't 'get' EFL. "I think it's the same as other complementary therapies," says Emma.

"If people don't believe in it I don't waste my time trying to convince them."
Emma herself came to EFL as a result of her own experiences as a horse owner. When she found out that her beloved horse, Sky, who she'd had for 18 years, had terminal cancer she made the huge decision to sell her flower shop business in London and move back to the Meon Valley to take care of her.

During the last two years of Sky's life she began looking into alternative therapies for animals. She spent three years training as a spiritual healer for animals and became a professional animal healer.

"I realised that for a lot of the horses I was being asked to heal, their problems were being exacerbated by what was going on for their owner."

"I thought there had to be a way of helping the owner to let go of whatever they were holding onto as a way of helping their horse to heal. That's when I discovered EFL."

When people heard that Emma was doing animal healing they began to bring her their own horses that they couldn't keep.

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COVER STORY

"A number of people asked me to take their own horses that would otherwise have been put to sleep and a couple I bought at meat markets that were clearly going to have a much less dignified fate.

"It's important to me that the horses aren't perceived as victims though. I didn't want to just rescue horses without any kind of vision behind it. Now they have a second career of being healers themselves."

She – or rather her horses – have had around 30 EFL clients. People can have anything from a couple of sessions upwards, with some coming regularly for a month or two, depending on their needs.

"People often say 'why horses?', It's because horses are prey animals (they would be eaten by predators). They're highly sensitive and are aware of any incongruities in their environment. They sense something without seeing it, whether it's a rabbit in the undergrowth or anger swirling in someone's stomach while that person is putting on a smile. The horse feels what isn't seen – it feels the energy. Unfortunately, we've closed our senses so much that we almost only believe what we see with our eyes whereas horses use all their senses all the time. The more you're with them, the more you do it yourself because it's kind of catching."

Four-legged therapists might not be for everyone but Emma and Jackie are convinced.

"Horses react to what they feel," says Emma. "That's how, if we want them to, they can help us get back in touch with ourselves and live a happier and healthier life."

For more information, visit heartoftheherd.com, email emma@heartoftheherd.com or call 07929 406850.



Jackie Smith who has experienced the therapy

SALLY TRIES EFL:

MY session began with a consultation with Emma to discuss what I was hoping to get out of the process and any issues I had.

She explained that the first EFL session usually focuses on boundary issues – horses, she said, are very aware of boundaries in a way that humans aren't always.

After having a practice with Emma trying to tell where our own boundaries were, she left me to observe the horses and donkeys to choose which one I wanted to work with. The donkey wrote itself off straight away by trotting off into its stable to munch some straw.

I was left to choose between two rather large horses and a tiny Shetland pony.

Although I used to ride as a child, I was rather nervous about the prospect of standing next to one of the large horses for a long period so Hamish, the Shetland, it was.

The session involved me trying to sense Hamish's boundaries and then attempting to use my



Sally tries out the therapy with Hamish.

energy to get him to trot round the arena in the direction I wanted.

It was quite frustrating as I couldn't get him to go for ages and I felt very pleased with myself when I finally coaxed him into taking off.

It was hard to gauge the therapeutic value to me of one session but I certainly enjoyed working with him and had a big sense of achievement and relief, when he moved.

FITNESS

BALLET DANCING

Finding fun fitness as
HILARY
PORTER
reports



Marie with her daughter, ballet teacher Vanessa

WHY I LOVE



THE RELEASE of the movie *Black Swan* – the psycho melodrama that explores the mental and physical intensity of the ballet world – has not just caused a rush to the box office. It's also caused a surge of interest in ballet.

You would expect young girls to want to follow in the footsteps of the ballet stars – but now it's mature women who are equally keen. In fact, one class now boasts Marie Searle, 71, and another has an 80-year-old attending.

Vanessa Searle, principal of Rochelle Ballet School at Portchester, added adult ballet classes to her school four years ago. Now 50 per cent of her pupils are adults, ranging in age from 17 to 70, and one is her mum, Marie.

Vanessa also offers a teenage class to youngsters who have never done ballet before – including boys.

Many of her teen beginners are taking grade 5 and 6 exams. Anyone joining aged 16-plus can take vocational graded exams but most prefer to do it for fun with no pressure.

She has about six enquiries a week from adults, mostly in their 40s and 50s, keen to join her classes.

"It's really taken me aback because when I started adult classes every dance teacher I know said don't do them because they will end up like mothers' meetings!

"But to my delight totally the opposite is true. They come focussed and they are all really passionate about it. It's been a really nice surprise!

"People are a little bit bored of repetitive exercises at the gym or some of the aerobic classes. Doing ballet they get a really holistic sense of fun; it's nice and relaxing and gentle listening to classical music while stretching and holding their legs up. It helps your posture, strength and core stability; all the work you put in takes you up to old age.

"With ballet you are thinking all the time so it boosts your concentration level as well as stamina, flexibility and well-being.

"Age is no barrier; there is nothing holding anyone back. The unique thing is you can take it at your own speed.

"You see them losing weight, toning up and generally becoming a lot healthier and more energised and it's wonderful: the benefits are endless.

RACE FOR LIFE...

HAMPSHIRE WOMEN URGED TO 'JOIN THE GIRLS'

HAMPSHIRE women are being urged to "join the girls" to help beat cancer by entering Tesco and Cancer Research UK's Race for Life.

Organisers want local women to recruit their mums, sisters, daughters, aunts, friends and workmates now the Southampton and Winchester events have opened for entries. By registering now, they will have plenty of time

to plan and fundraise together before the big day.

This year, Race for Life in Winchester has changed venue from North Walls Recreation Ground to The Garrison Ground and takes place on Sunday, June 12th. Southampton takes place again at The Common on Sunday, July 10th. Last year 9,575 women took part in the two events and raised an incredible £540,000.

In 2011, organisers are encouraging more than 15,500 women to come together to walk, jog or run in the two 5k events, to hopefully raise more than £1m! Race for Life is the UK's largest women-only fundraising event series where all the money raised goes to fund Cancer Research UK's life-saving work. Women of all ages, shapes, sizes and abilities join together to walk, jog or

"To me ballet is the one thing people should try – especially if they are overweight. People should be brave and go for it.

"The problem is ballet comes with all these preconceived ideas: it's just a case of getting round those problems.

"One lady's husband bought her classes as a surprise Christmas present because he heard her say how much she loved ballet dancing as a little girl!"

Vanessa's mother Marie decided to try a beginner class two years ago and now attends three classes a week!

Incredibly she says ballet dancing has cured her diabetes. Marie said: "I decided to lose weight as my other daughter was getting married. I joined Slimming World and as the weight fell off it gave me the confidence to try ballet dancing."

"I struggled to keep up with the others at first and I felt exhausted but now I feel bad if I miss any classes."

Marie has lost the four stone she piled on through four pregnancies – and is now a toned size 10-12, and after years of having to inject herself twice a day with insulin her type 2 diabetes has completely gone.

"The doctors have been amazed by me.

"I have so much more energy. I feel so much fitter and never even seem to get colds. I feel healthier and happier."

But Marie is not the oldest ballerina in the region. Adult ballet dancers at the New Forest Academy Of Dance who meet at Lyntonton Community Centre on Thursday evenings include an 80-year-old lady who principal Jenny Porter describes as "wonderful and inspirational".

For 52-year-old Jane Bennett a hip replacement operation was the reason she took up ballet. A regular at Rochelle