

MEREDITH HODGES & MULE APPRECIATION DAY

MEREDITH HODGES - LUCKY THREE RANCH

- Story of Rock & Roll
- Use Support Teams
- Function & Good Posture
- Create Good Behavior
- Remote Longears Coach
- Longears Bring out the Best in People
- Yes, there is No Mule Appreciation Day by Deb Kidwell
- Breaking Down Training Steps

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Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

The mules are in the corral. Welcome to Mule Talk! And I'm Cindy K. Roberts, your host. And our author, TV personality, and world-renowned mule trainer, Meredith Hodges of the Lucky Three Ranch.

Okay, Meredith, you are the mule whisperer. I can't think of a better person to interview on National Mule Day, but, but you.

Meredith Hodges:

Actually we should also say **Happy Donkey Day** today too, because all Longears should be appreciated. I think they ought to be appreciated 365 days out of the year.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, I agree with you. I had a chance to watch that DVD on **Rock and Roll**. I've truly enjoyed watching that. It was a little sad at times, and I did cry, but, but it really was a, a good film.

Meredith Hodges:

Thank you very much. I wanted to make sure that it would elicit the same kind of feelings that I felt when I was going through all of that. Most documentaries are so clinical that I really don't enjoy documentaries very much.

I wanted to make a documentary that would tug at your *heartstrings* and help you to feel what I was feeling during that time. I only had one year with Rock, but I got almost 10 years with Roll.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

One of the statements that you made in that film that I truly appreciated is that you said no single person can have all of the information or the know-how on their equine. So that's why it's important to keep a **Professional Support Team** with you.

Meredith Hodges:

That's absolutely correct because we are always are learning. It's a continual thing. Even people that are just starting out with these animals think about questions and things that maybe we don't think about, even after being with them for a long time. **One can learn something from everyone, as far as I'm concerned. The best thing to do is to keep your mind open and learn to listen.** Learn to discuss things about your relationship with your *Longears*. You will be amazed at what you will learn! **Horses can be forced into submission, but when you get resistance from Longears, there is always have a legitimate reason for it.** They have a very strong **Sense of Self-Preservation** and if you *listen* to them, they can actually keep you out of trouble. **We aren't always pleased when we get into altercations with them.** (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs). Right, right. Yup.

Meredith Hodges:

People would like to think we can control everything, but that's not a very good way to approach things. If I had that attitude when I was dealing with *Rock* and *Roll*, I never could have been as successful with them as I was. They were both headed to the slaughterhouse. My friends had them for about eight months. They eventually told me, if you don't help them they will go to the slaughterhouse. I said, "*In that case, I'll take a crack at it.*"

I wanted to get X-rays done on *Rock* to see where he stood. My said it would be a case where they would have to anesthetize him and turn him upside down to take the X-rays. They told me that they thought he had a *hairline fracture* on his pelvis. "*If there isn't considerable damage already, it's going to be even worse if they try to do that.*" **I couldn't imagine putting 2,500 pounds upside down on that injured pelvis.**

So I thought, "**My Balanced Postural Core Strength Training Program** would not do him any harm at all. Teaching him to move in **Good Posture** will only make it better, if that's even possible." He did improve remarkably in the following year and I got him sound at the walk. When he finally collapsed a year later, I went into shock after we put him down, did a **Necropsy** and discovered that his right hind hip joint was completely shattered around the *socket joint*. The *Femur* was suspended in the joint socket by only one *Ligament* and no other muscle or tissue. The *Ligament* that held the *Femur* in the *Socket Joint* and the musculature that I built around the joint was all that held his leg together. There was nothing else to hold it together. Every *Tendon*, every *Ligament* was torn in his leg except the one. I actually got him *sound* for a whole year at the *walk*. You could see his unsoundness only when he trotted. I never could get rid of that. **He was going over poles at the walk and he lasted for about a year before that Ligament just let loose.**

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

I thought it would be a really good teaching tool if I could preserve his skeleton. So I partnered with **Colorado State University**. It took us a whole year, but they processed and boiled his bones. We partnered with the foundry that we used with **Robin Laws** who did bronze statues for me. Her partner, **Tim Joseph suggested that we build the skeleton without props to make it free standing**. We thought we could just run rebar through all those bones to make it *free standing*. So that's what we did.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

Rock's skeleton is quite remarkable. You can see all of the things that were wrong with *Rock*, including the *Side Bones*, *Ring Bone*, *Locked Stifle*, *Kissing Spine*, *Abscess holes where teeth were removed* and the *shattered Hip Joint*. There was a **HUGE** chunk of bone missing from his *Femur*. The **Veterinarians** at the college agreed that he had to have been hit with something as large as a *dump truck* to do that much damage.

In the exhibit, we have brass arrows pointing to the things that were wrong with him. He had *dental problems* and *abscess holes* where his teeth were pulled. ***We have a full Legend that explains all the anomalies the base of the statue. We have the whole story explained in text and photographs on the wall. It is posted month by month and you can actually see how the training process affected his body and how much good it had done.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

I used the same ***Balance & Core Strength Training Program*** approach with all my equines. You can see what it did for ***Chasity*** my *Large Standard Donkey* under ***TRAINING/Chasity's Challenges*** on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com.

My ***Postural Aid*** called the ***Elbow Pull*** really makes a huge difference in their overall ***Posture*** and ***Performance***. ***Be advised that you can't use the Elbow Pull the same way with horses as you can with the Longears.*** Longears will respect a *hard tie*, but a horse, will pull against it and flip themselves over backwards. You can still use it for the ***Postural Effects*** that it has, but you just need to tie it off a little differently so it will slip and allow horses some slack. Many people don't start riding horses until they are three or four years old without any ***Postural Restraint***. While they are running up and down hills does not mean that they are developing their bodies in ***Good Posture***. That's something we're not born with. ***It is something that needs to be taught. How they move on their own is never an Ideal Equine Posture. We generally spend two to three years of the animal being put into Good Posture artificially using the Elbow Pull to stabilize his joints, balance his body and to develop his muscles with symmetrical development according to the Laws of Physics.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

From the very beginning, I start them in the **Hourglass Pattern** by *Leading* them in **Good Posture**. I don't hold the rope underneath their chin. If I did, it would offset their balance with every step I take.

To develop their **Self-Carriage**, I hold the *Lead Rope* in my left hand and keep it loose across my belly to their halter. I pay attention to walking *Straight Lines* and *Gradual Arcs* in sync with their *Front Legs* and *Square* them up at every *Halt*. I do it in an **Hourglass Pattern**. If you do it on the rail and only on *Straight Lines*, it won't balance the body correctly. They will tend to lean one way or the other. They are compromised by what they see peripherally. If they have a rail on one side and not on the other, they will lean away from the rail. ***How they are taught to move the muscles that surround the skeleton affects the symmetrical development and strength of their core, those elements closest to the bones.***

It is really important, especially with animals that were as bad off as **Rock and Roll**, that we start the colts with my **Self-Correcting Postural Restraint**, the **Elbow Pull**. If I'm starting an animal that's over two years old and has had two years of moving incorrectly, he will need to be held in **Good Posture** throughout the duration of his lessons. You cannot do that without this **Self-Correcting Restraint**. ***It's not in a rider's hands.*** Many people think the **Elbow Pull** is the same as **Draw Reins**. ***No, it's not.*** They think it's in the rider's hands, but no it is not. ***It is controlled by the equine himself and not the rider.*** It allows the animal free **Range of Motion** except to allow him to raise his head so high that he can invert his neck and back in very bad posture, but with the strength to be able to **BOLT and RUN!**

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

They can put their head all the way down and all the way to both sides. They can raise their head above the withers. A lot of people have accused me of tying their heads down and making **Peanut Rollers** out of them. I don't like **Peanut Rollers** either. That's a really bad way to train. It puts an animal totally on the forehand and that's not good either.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

That's really good to know because I'm really interested in that. I want to get my mule into, a better posture, a better frame, and so I'm going to move into that direction.

Meredith Hodges:

When you do that, Cindy, then they feel good. If somebody started teaching you how to walk in **Good Posture**, all of a sudden you don't get all those aches and pains as you age. **The aches and pains that normal people get is from being asymmetrical in their development.** When you get really old, you end up being all bent over and develop more pains than you can even imagine.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Oh, yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

If you get into **Good Posture** and maintain it, you will start feeling good because your joints will work properly, the way they were designed to do and there are *no compromises and pressure* against your *Internal Organs* so they will also function correctly. When your *Longears* and horses start feeling better, they do recognize that *YOU* are the one that makes them feel *GOOD*. Even if they're in a herd with their equine friends, they look forward to being with you. **They don't become Herd Bound. They actually WANT to be with you. If you treat everyone the same way and don't show favoritism, when everyone gets the same lessons and are promptly rewarded, they don't feel like they have to fight for attention.** If you call the one you want to you, take them through the gate and reward them for coming, it is important to also reward the equines that stay back and do not *bum-rush* you. **It develops Good Manners.** They won't run the fence while you're gone because hey know that you will come back and they will get their turn. That's why mine are always so good. At my age, I am really glad that they are. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) On a lighter note, how are you celebrating **National Mule Day**?

Meredith Hodges:

I am doing the same thing I always do. I'm the consummate, obsessed remote *Mule Trainer* and *People Trainer*. **I like to help people so that they will derive the same amount of pleasure out of their animals as I do from mine. I celebrate Mule Appreciation Day every day.**

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Good.

Meredith Hodges:

I thought about what we were going to talk about today and I thought it was really important since we call it **National Mule Appreciation Day** that we let people know why. **Longears** bring out the best in people and I think the people that own mules and donkeys are some of the nicest people I have ever met. I do believe that their **Longears** keep them in line and keep them *humble* just like mine do with me. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) Yes.

Meredith Hodges:

I was particularly impressed with *Deb Kidwell* who has a **Jackstock Ranch** in **Martin, Tennessee**. And in 2014, she wrote an article for *Ben and Neta Tennison's Western Mule Magazine* titled, **Yes, We Have No Mule Appreciation Day**. She is a person that is very meticulous about researching information. She was working on her book that is an introduction about **George Washington's** jackass, **Royal Gift** who landed in **Gloucester, Massachusetts** on *September 26th of 1785*. She says misinformation began to be published about him.

She checked with **Congressman Jim Cooper**, a **Democrat** in **Tennessee**. He was, proposing a **House Resolution for National Mule Appreciation Day**. It should have been a simple thing to find a copy of his entire resolution through the records of the **Library of Congress**, but it wasn't. It was a **Joint Resolution of Resolution 76** on the **House Side** and **Resolution 39** from **Al Gore** on the **Senate Side**. It was presented on *January 22nd, 1985*. The records at the **Library of Congress** showed it had been sent to the **Committee of the Judiciary** in *July of 1985*.

She checked, she made phone calls to the **Library of Congress** and the **National Archives** and checked with a professor at the **University of Houston**, a professor at the **University of California** and **the Reagan Library**, trying to get information about **Mule Appreciation Day**. *Deb Kidwell* said she'd been told that a resolution was passed in **Congress** claiming *October 26th, 1985 Mule Appreciation Day* and

that **President Reagan** made a **Presidential Proclamation**, but when she tried to get that source, it wasn't coming up.

She contacted **Congressman Cooper's Press Secretary in Washington D.C., Chris Carroll** and told him she wanted to validate all this information. **Mr. Carroll** told her that he would send her a copy of the resolution. **William Davis**, an archivist for the **Center of Legislative Archives** at the **National Archives and Records Administration** informed her that the **House Records** are sealed for 30 years and he couldn't send her a copy. The **Senate Records** are only sealed for 20 years and he could send her a copy of the **Resolution** presented by **Mr. Gore**. She assumed that the **Resolution** would be the same since a **Joint Resolution** was a **Joint Resolution**. **Deb** did manage to get a copy of the **H.J. Resolution 76**. Neither of the **Professors in Texas** or the **California Reagan Historians** had a record of a **Presidential Proclamation** for **Mule Appreciation Day**. There was no **Presidential Proclamation** making **October 26th, 1985** or any other day **Mule Appreciation Day**. When the **Resolutions** were sent to the **Judiciary Committee** in July of '85, they *died in committee* meaning that the **Resolutions** were never passed.

*This illustrious group of mule men, the **Lynchburg Mule Traders Association** who had apparently started this whole darn thing were lying. It was not true. It turns out that there's not much of an association either. **Deb** called the **Moore County, Tennessee Chamber of Commerce** and a nice guy answered the phone and then pushed her off to his wife. He said he'd never heard anything back from the **Mrs. Deb** called the **Moore County Library**, those helpful ladies knew nothing about nothing. They told **Deb** if she wanted to know more about mules that she should call **Columbia**. They might know more about mules and what's going on in **Lynchburg**, but they could find no information about the **Lynchburg Mule Traders Association**. And **Mr. George Stone** wrote, "I don't know anything about this, but I would not put it past the **Jack Daniel's** advertising and **Roger Brashears** doing this for publicity."*

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay. (laughs)

Meredith Hodges:

Jim Cooper as a **House Representative** says he's *bullish* about mules. That's why he is sponsoring a measure and thinks it's **the mule is the most underappreciated animal in the United States**.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yep.

Meredith Hodges:

Mule lovers in the **United States** are an untapped vein. **People who love mules really love them. That's true. (laughs) We know that's true. Jim Cooper** assured his colleagues in **Washington** that October 26, 1785 was the date **King Charles III** of **Spain** sent **George Washington** two donkeys. One of the donkeys fell in love with a mare, and the first **American Mule** was born. I'm sure it wasn't quite that simple.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yes.

Meredith Hodges:

The idea for **Mule Appreciation Day** was proposed by the **Jack Daniel Distillery** in **Lynchburg, Tennessee**. **Lynchburg** was once a **Mule Trading** hub center. So it makes sense that the gossip would come from there. **Cooper** said many of the people first thought his proposal was a joke, especially because they were advised to call a staff member named **Chip Monk** if they were interested in the idea. (Laughs) Another guy called up and said he would support it because his secretary **Bunny Rabbit** asked him. **Senators Jim Sasser and Al Gore, Jr.**, both of **Tennessee**, were handling the bill in the **Senate**. **The Press** had a *field day* one of the scores of newspaper articles that **Deb** found about **Mule Appreciation Day**. They claimed that **Jack Daniel's**, not the elusive **Lynchburg Mule Traders Association** was really behind it all.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Interesting. Yeah.

Meredith Hodges:

They said that the resolution that started the whole thing was worded to designate **October 26, 1985 as Mule Appreciation Day**. **"Whereas on October 26th, 1785, the father of our country, George Washington, received the first jacks from King Charles III of Spain to breed the first American mules. Whereas mules bred from these jacks became a tradition of service to our nation in agriculture, mining, transportation, territorial explorations, war, and countless other**

endeavors. Whereas mules have been such an important part in the building of this country and whereas this in the bicentennial anniversary of the arrival of the first mules in America. Therefore, be it resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled that October 26th, 1985 is hereby designated as Mule Appreciation Day.

The President of the United States is authorized and requested to issue a Proclamation calling upon the people of the United States to recognize October 26, 1985 as Mule Appreciation Day."

Granted ***October 26, 1785*** does not have much of anything to do with arrival of the jackass, with the exception that ***Washington*** made a, a short note in his diary on that date that he had received a letter from ***Thomas Cushing*** that the jack had arrived in ***Boston*** after having come on foot from ***Boston***. But even if the jacks had arrived in ***Boston on October 26***, it would've taken days for a letter to get to ***Mount Vernon***. Mules arriving in ***America*** did not happen on that day. The jacks did.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

We wonder why this history is convoluted like this, but think about how people *retell* stories in their own ways. ***The common thread may be true, but each person will add their own twist to the tales. Deb*** says, "***Well, I'm sure the news of there being no official Mule Appreciation Day may upset some. You know and I know that every day is not only Mule Appreciation Day, but Donkey Appreciation Day as well. If you are lucky enough to own a Longear,. Happy Mule & Donkey Appreciation Day, y'all.***"

I thought that ***Deb*** wrote an amazing article, but knowing the details of politics the way I do, I can't help but wonder if there is a whole lot more to this story than what ***Deb*** was told. Would the ***Democrats*** actually allow a ***Republican President*** to declare freely, uninterrupted to take credit for a ***National Holiday*** about ***THEIR*** logo? I thought it was important for people to know because not everybody gets ***Western Mule Magazine*** and is privy to all this information on mules and donkeys. Many people ask me if ***Longears*** are mentioned in the Bible. The answer is ***YES!***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yes.

Meredith Hodges:

Yes, they were. My favorite, uh, passage in the *Bible* about mules is in **2 Samuel 18, 9th verse**. It really portrays the humor of these animals right from the very beginning (laughs) and how they humiliate us.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) Absolutely.

Meredith Hodges:

It says that “Absalom met the servants of David, and Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak and he was taken up between the Heavens and the Earth and the mule that was under him went away.” (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

(laughs) I love that.

Meredith Hodges:

I love it. I just love it. We deal with that all the time and get humiliated as we try to find a new way with these guys. When you get into an altercation with a mule, you'll seldom get hurt, but you'll surely be set straight in a *most humiliating* way. (laughs)

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Yes.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Chastity is your latest project, right?

Meredith Hodges:

Yes. **Chasity** is my latest project.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

And are you doing, are you doing a diary on her as well?

Meredith Hodges:

Yes. Her diary has been published under **TRAINING/CHASITY'S CHALLENGES** on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com from the beginning when I first got her at the end of **March 2020**.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

When she first got here, she was *obese* and had a *huge crest* on her neck. She also had a really *bad infection* in her *udder* and on her *teats*. Her *udder* was the *size of a grapefruit* and the *teats* were *leaking fluid*. At first look, I thought maybe that a foal had just been weaned because there was milky white fluid coming out of her *teats*. After about two weeks, I called my vet and said, "***You had better come back here because this really doesn't look like milk. It's not slowing down and it's not stopping.***" So he came out, checked her and she had a *major infection* in there.

We put her on **Antibiotics** and hot packed her every day, twice a day. We got it cleared up, but it took a long time to do that. In the meantime, I started out working her in the **Hourglass Pattern with the Elbow Pull Postural Aid** twice a week. After a few weeks, I realized from my experience with **Rock and Roll**, that I didn't need to be that aggressive with her training. With **Core Strength Training**, you don't want them to get stressed. They need to stay calm and work at the *walk* in **Good Posture** so they do not get **Asymmetrical Development**. So I backed off and just put her through the **Leading Exercises** in the **Elbow Pull** through the **Hourglass Pattern once a week**, the way I normally would.

It has four places where we Halt, Square Up and where I change leading sides. Keeping me to the inside of the arcs develops everything symmetrically. I put four **Ground Rails** between the **Center Cones** to walk over. This encourages suspension to her walking gait. What you're doing is basically tracking an **Hourglass** in the sand. It positively affects the **Internal Pendulum** in their body such that it swings outwardly on one arc, when you stop it settles in the middle and then swings outwardly on the new arc. It is an **Internal Balance Swing** that stabilizes their body in **Good Posture** while they are moving.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

This is why you want them to *Halt, Square-up* and make them stand in ***Perfect Posture*** so that that ***Internal Pendulum*** comes to rest in the correct position. When you *Halt*, reward them after you set them up and wait until they finish chewing. This allows the whole body to settle in the ***Correct Posture***. When they have finished chewing, say their name to get their attention and give the command to *Walk On*. Stand with their head at your shoulder and grasp the ***Lead Rope*** on the opposite side (usually with the left hand). Leave a loose loop across your belly to their halter. ***Point in the Direction of Travel*** with your opposite hand. If you are tracking left, you hold the Lead Rope in the left hand and ***Point in the Direction of Travel*** with your right hand. This allows you to control their head and keep them from crossing in front of you. It shows them which direction to go.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Okay.

Meredith Hodges:

Match their front footsteps with your steps and always stop with your feet together. Then turn to their shoulder, set them up *Four-Square*, give them their oats and stand there absolutely still. Wait for them to finish chewing before you change sides and give the command to proceed forward. I use an arena that is 60' by 180'. I only go around the pattern once, doing the *halts* and *leading changes* in four places between the cones. Then I cross the *Diagonal* and do the same thing in the other direction. Then you're done. ***If you're doing this correctly, the whole exercise should only take about 15 minutes, but it is intentionally precise.***

Drilling an equine will not improve performance. It will only make them tired and resistant. You only need to do it once a week to start affecting their posture. You begin to see that their ***Play Patterns*** and their ***Rest Patterns*** change when they're in turnout. They learn to *rest Four Square. They rest with the two front feet together and the two back feet together directly underneath their bodies with equal weight over all four feet.* There is no more dropping the hind foot or resting with their feet straddled. ***When you are consistent with your Leading Training, it develops their HABITUAL WAY OF MOVING and they are able to PRACTICE their Good Posture in Turnout when you are not there.***

Over time, if you're willing to be *patient* about not getting on and riding and consistent about doing all this **Groundwork**, it takes three to six months of this work on the flat ground doing the **Hourglass Pattern**, then another three to six months doing the **Hourglass Pattern** with **Obstacles** added afterwards to start developing **Coordination**.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

This is where the **Type of Halter** you use makes all the difference in the world. The halter makes a lot of difference in the way they relate to you. I have noticed that **Rope Halters** with the knots in them are more of a distraction than any leverage it might provide. The pressure becomes really obnoxious to the equine after a while. If you would like to see what the equine experiences with a **Rope Halter**, put your index finger underneath your ear and see how long you could stand having it there. After a while, it's just obnoxious. It's not that it applies too much pressure, it's just distracting. You want your animal's full attention (100%) on you. It's better to use flat **Nylon Halters** that are comfortable on their face. **We don't need leverage to force these animals to do our bidding. What we need is their cooperation and we need their trust to get their cooperation.**

I use nothing but **Nylon Halters**. Now try putting the palm of your hand underneath your ear. You'll find that that the **Pressure Point** is dispersed. A **Nylon Halter** spreads out the pressure on their face, so it is no longer a *distraction*. The equine can give you that 100% attention. **The fit of the halter is critical for clear communication.** Generally **Rope Halters** are either too tight around the throat latch or too loose around the nose band. You want a **Nylon Halter** that fits lightly over their whole face that has contact with their face everywhere. When we get to the end of the bridge and they are grossly unbalanced, a **Nylon Halter** will afford us the ability to step out in front of them and hold the halter on both sides with your hands to help stabilize their balance.

Meredith Hodges:

I've done this with **Chasity**. You can see this under TRAINING/ CHASITY'S CHALLENGES with a donkey on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com.

I'll ask them to *stretch sideways* and even *down* in that position and ask them to take the oats from different positions. This will help them to become more stable in their balance. All of this **Groundwork** prepares them to be lunged correctly in **Good Posture** in the **Round Pen**. **Most people lunge to get the kinks out, but it is more important to lunge in Good Posture for exceptional overall performance.** I also noticed when I became more aware of **Good Posture** and **Correct Ways of Moving** that most equines were *leaning like a motorcycle* instead of staying erect. When they were being lunged they were moving away from the *optical illusion* of the fence. **They did not stay erect, bend through their rib cage on the arc of the circle while keeping equal weight over all four feet. This is what you will need for optimum performance later.**

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

If you don't want them to end up being sore in their body, they need to learn to move with equal weight over all four feet, keep their body erect through all the movements, even when they have to tuck their butt underneath themselves for a slide and stretch their spine and arch their neck to go into that slide. They need to walk forward with the front feet while sliding on the back feet. **They must be balanced through every single thing they do. You will know when to move on to each stage of training when you can put the lead rope over their neck and do everything with Hand Signals, Body Language and Verbal Commands alone without touching them.**

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Wow.

Meredith Hodges:

I have found that every disobedience is due to a lack of balance. Whatever it is that we are doing is throwing them off balance and they trying to compensate. Even when you're doing something as simple as **Mounting**, you put your foot in the stirrup, grab the saddle and you pull it sideways in one direction. They will step over in the opposite direction to compensate for what you're doing. **Then WE think they are being disobedient when it is actually OUR FAULT!**

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Sure.

Meredith Hodges:

When you are lunging your equine tie the **Lunge Line** to the **Bit Ring** on the inside of the circle. He should be in his **Snaffle Bridle, Surcingle or lightweight saddle** and the **Elbow Pull**. Leave about four inches, run it under the chin and snap it to the ring on the other side. If you need to tug on the **Lunge Line**, you won't pull the bit through his mouth. ***You have direct contact with the bit for clear communication.***

A Halter rides higher on their face than a bridle. It has a completely different effect on the way they bend their neck and is not preferable to use for postural training. They can't arch and extend their neck to turn towards you. If you pull from the **Side Ring** on a **Halter**, it causes them to brace against you because there is not an *elongated line* that matches the length of the neck from the *Poll* to their *Mouth*. The shorter distance causes an abrupt bend in the neck that will not allow for the *extended and elongated frame*.

I have a TRAINING TIP titled HALTER TYPES under TRAINING/TRAINING TIP #23 on my website at www.luckythreeranch.com that explains this concept. ***This is why I don't like using Bitless Bridles or riding with Halters. The fulcrum point is juts too high and perpetuates Bad Posture and Over-reactions.*** Teach your mule to *give* with light pressure from the corners of his mouth. I did a demonstration with my draft mule *Roll*. I put on his halter tried to pull his head toward me while I stood at his side. He braced against me and pulled his head away. Then I put my index finger in the corner of his mouth and gave him squeeze/release pressure on the corner of his lips, He extended and arched his neck, yielded to my pull and brought his head completely around to my chest. ***Roll told me in his own way just how to get his full attention.*** It is simply a matter of really *listening* to what the animal is trying to tell you. They can't speak *English*, but they have other ways of communicating. ***If we are smart enough to pause and try different things to get our answers, we WILL get them. This is the beauty of living with and really listening to your Longears.***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right.

Meredith Hodges:

“And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam and Balaam’s anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, ‘What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?’ And Balaam said unto the ass, ‘Because thou hast mocked me, I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.’ And the ass said unto Balaam, ‘Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?’ And he said, ‘Nay.” (Numbers 22:23) Mules and donkeys will always be compelled to let us know when our actions are careless and thoughtless—it is in their nature. Whether or not we choose to listen and alter our approach is entirely up to us.

The highest intelligence residing in animals is that of the mule. He inherits athletic ability and “horse sense” from his mother, the horse, and incredible wisdom and strength from his father, the jack. Perhaps the kings of yore finally tired of being publicly humiliated by their superior mules, or perhaps they just couldn’t muster the patience or humor to deal with them anymore, but mules were eventually replaced by horses as the mount of choice, and were subsequently used primarily for ***Packing*** and ***Draft*** work.

The closest ancestral link to the mule is the ***Somali Wild Ass***, found in ***Northeast Africa***. Only a few were still living in the ***Danakil Desert of Ethiopia*** when a number of them were captured and brought to ***HAI-BAR***, where they began to once again propagate. The ***Somali Wild Ass*** has incredible strength for its size and subsists on desert shrubs as its only food. This explains why our modern-day mules and donkeys can stay healthy and strong on much less feed than today’s horse requires.

The unique personality traits of the mule come from the ass. Unlike horses, mules are naturally curious, but are also suspicious and require time to size up a situation before acting. For this reason, it usually takes time for people to warm up to mules and time for mules to warm up to people.

Because their judgment of people is unmatched, it is wise when buying a mule to allow him to pick you! ***A lot of the mule's so-called "stubbornness" is really a sense of self-preservation.*** If he has a negative experience, he is not likely to repeat it. His memory serves him well and he never makes the same mistake twice. For this reason, it is important that the personality of the mule and his handler are compatible and that they actually like each other.

The old myths, "Stubborn as a mule" and, "A mule will wait for the opportunity for revenge" are just those...myths. I would suppose these opinions arose from those who were probably impatient when dealing with mules. When left to their own devices, mules will learn from their experienced peers and from those who truly care about them. And people who are confrontational with mules will meet with undeniable stubbornness and resistance.

It makes sense that mules and donkeys have become so economically important to Third World countries. They are generally sedate, humble and hard working animals with an intelligence that enables them to learn their job quickly. They can go anywhere man can go, and do the work of many at far less expense—which is more than can be said of any motorized vehicle. Mules and donkeys are still an important part of ***Third World Economies***.

There are educators from ***The Donkey Sanctuary*** in ***Great Britain*** and other sanctuaries who visit these emerging countries, with the expressed purpose of teaching people how to work more efficiently with their *Longeared* counterparts. The very existence of many ***Third World Nations*** depends upon this partnership.

George Washington was a fairly well educated man and, "*the copybook which he transcribed at fourteen years of age a set of moral precepts or **Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation** was preserved.*" ***Practical Experience*** was the foundation for his best training in outdoor occupations and *not* books. He was a successful tobacco and livestock farmer early in his teens and mastered the art of surveying to plot the fields he inherited. It is no accident that ***George Washington*** became not only the ***Father of our Country***, but also, the ***First Organized Mule Breeder in America***.

Respect for donkeys and mules are the only way to motivate them to action. Their *rugged individualism* will tolerate no less. ***The mule exemplifies the “All-American,” as set forth by the colonists. The colonists were thought to be stubborn in their quest for individual freedom by the British Crown that super-imposed itself upon their individual liberties.*** Like the colonists, mules will challenge anyone who challenges their individual liberties! It is only fitting that the mule would be fully revered and appreciated by a man of such distinction as ***George Washington.***

In 1803 ***Thomas Jefferson*** completed the ***Louisiana Purchase***. “Over the next 75 years, more than two million square miles revealed their secrets to an army of hunters, soldiers, naturalists and other adventurers.” ***Longears were an exemplary part of our American History!***

Mules and donkeys have been a great friend of man. There is no more useful or willing animal on earth to aid man in his endeavors. “He has had to plod and work through life against the prejudices of the ignorant. Still, he has been a great friend of man, in war and in peace serving him well and faithfully.” For centuries the mule loyally traversed the course of history with man, though he was never given credit for his valuable contributions. In fact, men perpetrated stories to the opposite and the mule’s legacy became one of laziness, stubbornness and disobedience. Only those humans who were of a character to willingly explore the spirit of the mule were there for its redemption. We are thankful that their stories have withstood the test of time. Throughout history, man believed that he was making progress with each new age, but the blind farmer will tell you, ***“There’s no such thing as a seeing-eye tractor, and while I am farming with my mule, I can hear the birds sing. I never could with a tractor!” Perhaps we should take note and stop to smell the roses and give credit where credit is due. .***

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Right. (laughs) Okay, Meredith. So how can people get a hold of the DVD on ***Rock and Roll*** and all your other books and DVDs?

Meredith Hodges:

You can go to my website at www.luckythreeranch.com and look at the Drop-Down menus along the Task Bar. You can view all the Books, Videos, Documentaries and RFD-TV Shows that I have produced in the past 50 years including our children’s Jasper the Mule Series FOR FREE.

If you want to buy any of them, they are available in our STORE at www.Luckythreeranchstore.com. Jasper has his won website for kids at www.JasperTheMule.com . if you'd like to call me, you can reach me or leave a message at 1-800-816-7566.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Meredith, thank you for coming on to Mule Talk! and, and Happy National Mule Day to you.

Meredith Hodges:

Happy Mule and Donkey Appreciation Day to you too, Cindy.

Cindy Roberts (Interviewer):

Gotta go. My mule is looking for me.

Speaker 4:

Mule Talk! is an Every Cowgirl's Dream production.

RESOURCES:

WEBSITE at www.LuckyThreeRanch.com /**TRAINING:**

- 1) Another Augie & Spuds Adventure
- 2) Chasity's Challenges
- 3) Longears Music Videos
- 4) Mule Crossing Articles
- 5) Mule Facts
- 6) Podcast Appearances
- 7) Training Tips
- 8) Rock & Roll: Diary of a Rescue
- 9) What's New With Roll?
- 10) Video On Demand
- 11) Wrangler's Donkey Diary

BOOKS/VIDEOS IN THE STORE:

- 1) Training Mules & Donkeys: A Logical Approach to Training
- 2) A Guide to Raising & Training Mules
- 3) Donkey Training
- 4) Training Without Resistance
- 5) Equine Management & Donkey Training
- 6) Equus Revisited Manual
- 7) Equus Revisited Video
- 8) Rock & Roll Documentary
- 9) Building the Jasper Carousel
- 10) LTR Hay Production
- 11) The Road to Bishop
- 12) The Bishop Experience
- 13) The Bishop All Stars
- 14) Walk On: Exploring Therapeutic Riding
- 15) Building of a Nation
- 16) Give Your Equine the Athletic Edge
- 17) For Children: www.JasperTheMule.com for books & videos