

All the WILD HORSES



Here at Horseyse, we regularly meet Australian horse lovers who are passionate about the horses and animals in their lives and who are achieving extraordinary things. Billie Dean is an author (of both children's and non-fiction books), horse lover and animal psychic, who has dedicated her life to teaching people how to better understand the animals in their lives. Billie, along with her husband Andrew and their 16 year-year-old daughter, Tamsin, care for over 40 rescued horses at her NSW farm, 'A Place of Peace'. And as the founder of 'The Billie Dean International Deep Peace Organisation', Billie's love of Australia's wild brumbies in particular, is now attracting international attention.

HW: How did you discover your love of horses and brumbies?

Billie: I fell in love with horses before my first riding lesson when I was six. They have always been a part of my life, and I had my first horse 'Sollie' for 22 years. When he passed, I had already started rescuing other horses in trouble, and I was deeply into natural horsemanship. We moved to our current property because we had too many rescued horses and not enough land!

Because my husband and I write and make independent films, we had enough land for us and for our 'herd' of a dozen rescued horses. And then, suddenly, our 'herd' became twice the size! There are so many horses in need and I don't believe in killing them or sending them to the slaughterhouse, which is what happens to far too many of them. So we decided to make a stand against that mindset, and to try to create social change through our creative work.

I first came into contact with brumbies when I was asked to film them in the wild, being caught, naturally trained, and then sold. I'm a natural animal telepath, meaning I understand their silent language, and so I was surprised to meet a tiny stallion who feared for his life.

He told me, "I don't want to be dog meat." Being small and fear aggressive, this is probably what his future would have been. So I put my hand up for him. In the end, all the horses in that particular herd that were caught, ended up at our place for safe refuge. By then, I knew the brumbies of Kosciusko National Park were being culled every year and I was determined to see if I could help.

HW: Tell us a little bit about your farm and what you are currently doing with brumbies on your place.

Billie: We currently have over 40 rescued horses and more wild babies on the way. We are at full capacity on this particular property. Right now we are still in the process of building the trust of the new herd. The older brumby herd runs free in a very large paddock. They come when they are called for cuddles and feed. The new brumbies are in a large paddock around the house, being fed and gently handled. They are in a routine and every day is exciting, as we become closer and closer.

Billie Dean getting to know two of the rescued brumbies from Kosciusko at A Place of Peace... Photos by Billie Dean and Andrew Einspruch

HW: What does 'forever care' mean and how much time and resources does it take to look after the brumbies you already have?

Billie: 'Forever care' means that I have made a promise that they will stay on this property, with us, forever. They will never be sold. They will never be slaughtered. They will never know fear. In the event that something happens to us, I have created a not-for-profit organization and have people that will take over their care.

This particular lot of brumbies has been expensive, as we have stallions and colts and foaling mares and needed to keep them in eyesight. So they have chewed through a lot of hay. It means we go without comforts, like desperately needed renovations to our ancient, leaky farmhouse! But to us, it is worth it to know that you have saved precious lives and particularly saved them from the slaughterhouse. That is just too horrible to contemplate.

Time is also relative. Unlike normal horse thinking, we don't go in and start training them. We are simply feeding them and cleaning up manure. They now consider us two-legged horses and it is truly an honour to be accepted as part of their herd.

HW: What is it about the Australian brumbies that makes them so worth saving?

Billie: I have all kinds of horses, from a Shetland pony to ex-racehorses here, but the brumbies are something else. If people can see past 'needing' to use a horse for their own pleasure, and if they can understand that a brumby carries something



of the wild within them that we all need to touch for the health of our souls, then I think we would see a healthier human race and a better world. I love all the horses in my care, and share very deep relationships with all of them. The brumbies connect me to something deeper in the natural world. They are freedom, and they unleash my heart and soul.

HW: We often hear about how 'wild' the brumbies are and that the inbreeding has also caused problems with their confirmation and temperament. What is your experience?

Billie: The brumbies that I have in my care are all amazing. They are gorgeous! They have no problems with temperament or confirmation. Not that I am interested in either of those things - I would love them regardless! The foals are friendly and healthy and strong. So I haven't seen any signs of inbreeding at all. They are all perfectly normal horses with intelligence and personality. And they are responding to hay, grass and minerals, with glossy coats and friendly natures.

The only thing that makes an animal "wild" is fear. Remove fear and you have a relationship. These horses are very sensitive and very gentle. You learn to be a part of their world instead of making them conform to your ideas of what is "right". And they help you to be more gentle too.

HW: Does the concept of a Brumby or Wild horse sanctuary really work - or is this idea simply unrealistic in the real world?

Billie: I turned our home into a sanctuary for horses, so it does work. It just takes care and a set of different values. If more people did what we did, there would be a lot less suffering in the animal world. It helps to have land and a network of people who can help support the venture through fund-raising. Our goal through our not-for-profit organization is to buy more land, hopefully before the next culling season, so we can prove that it is a viable option and change people's mindset so that culling never happens. There is really nothing quite like seeing horses in the wild - or even running free as a herd in very large paddocks.

HW: In countries like the US, they have wild horse adoption programs. Do you think we should be promoting the brumby breed more to Australian horse lovers?

Billie: Yes, but to be honest, I think the entire horse industry needs an overhaul. There are hundreds of thousands of beautiful horses who face horrifying ends because humanity seems to have forgotten compassion, kindness and care. The brumby can make a wonderful companion, but I think people need to understand that like any horse, they form deep bonds with their offspring, they are a sensitive, herd animal and they are incredibly intelligent and feel grief. I've been appalled at what some wild horses have suffered because humans want to "use" them, and let their ego get in the way of horse essential needs - like other horse companionship.

HW: Tell us some of the experiences that you've had with the brumbies that make all the effort and hard work worthwhile...

Billie: Ha ha! Every day makes this experience worthwhile! The first time a wild horse eats out of your hand, the slow build up of trust, the intelligence, the way they listen when I explain things...everything I learn from them. And the many moments of interaction and exchange. There is nothing quite like jogging alongside a wild horse who has accepted you as herd, or having them come up to you just because they love you.

Right now we have three foals in the garden around the house with their wild mums. Every moment is a delight.

We made a short video of our work, which I was able to share with a USA group trying to protect their wild mustangs and burros. It gave them ideas and hope. We are in a time of intense social change and it's time people banded together and created more sanctuary for brumbies and all animals. When we work together, we can achieve anything.

To support or sponsor the brumbies and find out more please go to www.billiedean.com or watch the brumby video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmPx21CwmQ

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