



By Martine Sudan

# Balancing Whispers

'Where excellence in care meets natural living'

About eight years ago, I decided to take a leap of faith and bought my first horse to enjoy their wonderful nature. My young daughter shares my love for these animals, so soon after buying an eight-year-old Gypsy Cob named Aramis, we found another - a spirited three-year-old Gypsy, Baron, who immediately basked in my daughter's love for him. Thus began our journey through the often-challenging world of horse boarding, with two unique horses who didn't fit the mold of horses typically boarded in our part of the world. After 5 years of moving around, with 2 horses that got increasingly more stressed, we bit the bullet and bought our own farm.

The real estate market was at an all-time high, and choices were limited; we ultimately settled on a 50-acre farm built 10 years prior as a show-jumping facility, about an hour north of Toronto. The property came with ten paddocks, three large pastures, and a large 12-stall New England-style barn with all the amenities, as well as a smaller quarantine barn and fiber footing indoor and outdoor arenas—essentially, all the bells and whistles. Although it was more than we needed, we wanted something move-in ready.

Our family of five moved in, along with our two cherished, hairy, and opinionated cobs,

onto a farm that had previously housed 30 horses. Aramis, my now 13-year-old gelding, had unfortunately suffered a career-ending accident at our last boarding facility and was dealing with chronic pain and anxiety, making him a dangerous bolter. Baron, the younger cob, had also struggled to thrive in the boarding environment, which I attributed to limited turnout and confined stalls. They now had 15 acres of pasture to roam as well as a new young Gypsy friend, Coal.

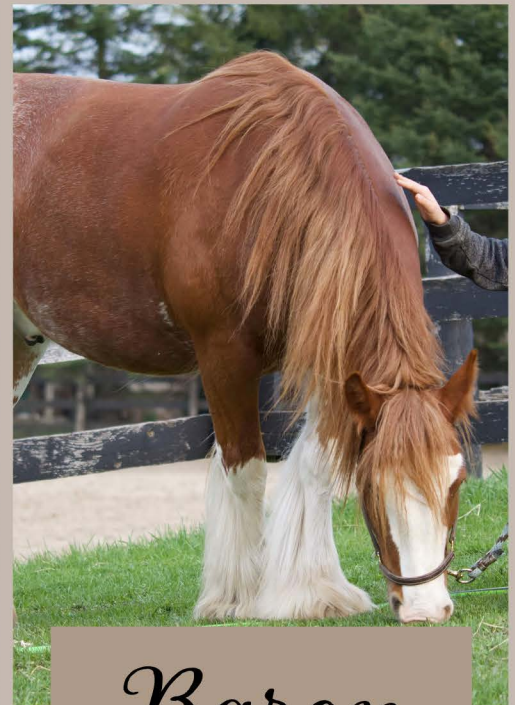
For the past 20 years, I have been studying horses, focusing on bodywork, natural therapies, training, and husbandry systems. I've always wanted ▶



*Coal*



*Aramis*



*Baron*

to establish a track system, but our new farm's infrastructure, complete with fenced paddocks, power and water connections, led me to initially put the idea on hold. Unfortunately, my three geldings struggled to thrive, which kept me preoccupied with their health and adapting to life as a city-girl-turned-farmer. As a result, the track system remained an unfulfilled idea.

Eight months after our move, everything changed. One morning, Baron, my lively, spirited companion, was unable to walk due to severe pain. He had developed laminitis, suffering rotation in three hooves, and his system was in distress from undiagnosed metabolic syndrome.

The following seven months were an intense roller coaster. He suffered a second, much more severe founder, crippling him for weeks. Despite excruciating pain and stress, he kept a sparkle in his eyes, so we fought with him to recover from the founder and the multiple other health issues that arose due to stress and interventions.





While Baron was fighting for his life, we had to reassess how to create a safe, sustainable environment for our horses. Returning to pasture was no longer an option, especially with the unique environment of our farm situated on an escarpment, where grass flourishes year-round due to underground springs. Having Baron live alone in a small sand paddock would have killed him emotionally, and other horses were becoming grass affected as well.

So, we revisited our track design and began transforming the pastures. By utilizing the existing wooden perimeter fencing, sheds, and water troughs, we designed a winding track using the entire 15 acres and incorporating the herd's favorite places to eat, rest and run!



475 wooden posts were pounded in -putting in temporary posts was not going to work since by then we had a bunch of cobs and other horses with great humor and skill who needed solid fencing to stay off grass. Many corners were braced, thousands of insulators were drilled into the wooden posts, so we could finish ▶



off stringing 7500 linear feet of electrobraid as an interior fence line. After hours on tractors scraping grass and many rounds with power harrows, we finally had a 2,5 kms grass free track with multiple sheds, shade spots, water buffets and about 20 hay stations in a variety of feeders. We left the middle grass sections grow long and natural. Over the summer, wild flowers bloomed and it became home to many birds, bunnies and insects.

Observing our growing herd living on the track system 24/7 has been enlightening. Aramis no longer needs strong medication to control anxiety and pain and is enjoying being part of a herd. Baron has defied the odds, recovering fully and returning to his cheeky, playful self, all while barefoot!

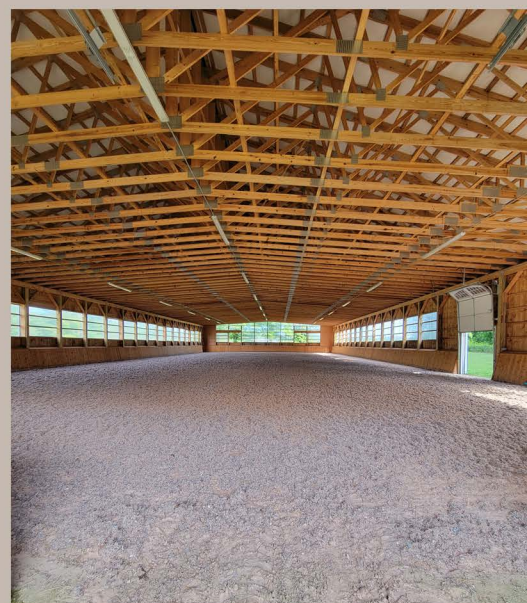
Our approach to integrating a track system with traditional riding facilities has been grounded in carefully observing and responding to our horses' needs. For instance, each morning, our three cobs come in for breakfast to avoid arguments over high-value food. For the first few months of his recovery, we saw Baron often lying down after his breakfast - he could not always keep up with the energy of the herd. We would leave him alone and he would eventually show us when he was ready to go out. Soon, Coal was sometimes refusing to go back out when the herd was too playful and he wanted some quiet alone time. This behavior of choice made us decide to integrate the stalls in our track boarding. Bringing each horse inside for a quiet breakfast, allows us to do a quick check up, pick feet, put fly spray or occasional blanket and make sure everybody is feeling up to being outside.

In another instance, we converted two small paddocks into sand paddocks in Baron's early recovery

days, to allow him to be outside but stay safe. These paddocks have since become an ideal space for introducing new horses, because they are located behind our house, so we can keep a close eye and they are next to the bottom track allowing new horses to see the herd over a fence.

What began as a simple plan to have horses at home has evolved into a unique boarding set up, combining well-maintained training facilities with one of the largest grass-free track systems. We also offer years of experience in equine bodywork, TTouch practice, and behavioral work, and have a large network of like-minded health professionals working with us. They are all huge supporters of the track systems and sometimes even sent us horses that need to recover from grass induced health crises.

The changes we have seen in each and every member of our herd have been phenomenal and we take every opportunity to share our experiences with the many people who want a better life for their equine partner.



Martine Sudan  
Caledon East, Ontario, Canada  
ms@balancingwhispers.ca  
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