

Spring: A Time of Renewal

By Cheryl Nygaard



Foaling... Vision Hope Renewal Excitement Anticipation Fruit

During thoughts of Spring, I'm sure all of us start thinking about green grass, flowers, renewal, birth. As breeders of Gypsy Cobs, or Gypsy Vanners as they are also known, our thoughts may turn to new life more than some!

Becoming breeders was not part of the original dream, I have to say. We started with the idea of a family project involving the calming influence of horses. Life seemed to be getting faster and faster, with city life, daily stresses and family changes all contributing to a sense of high stress and not being able to keep up. But as one member of the family, then another, started to take horse-back riding lessons, the realization that time spent with these wonderful creatures seemed to take one into a different world, one where the pace was slower, the communication full and yet quiet, and the people more willing to stop and take the time to listen both to themselves and others, and the idea of sharing this new found peacefulness with others was born.

Of course, with every vision, the dream is the beginning, and then the work begins. How are we going to do this? What type of research do we need to do? What are our standards? What is the end goal?

Whether it is a breeding program you are developing, or a life direction, many of the steps are the same.

1. What do you want to accomplish?

During this phase there are no boundaries, no "buts", and no roadblocks. It is your time to write down your dream as you see it.

For us, our dream was to share the peace of horses with others, and the possible healing of some of life's stresses along with it. Part of this included making ourselves available to people, whatever that looked like.

2. What needs to happen before or on the way to making this vision reality?

This is an important time to brainstorm with those you trust. Both those who often say "but what about???" and those who will back you up no matter how crazy the idea sounds, are important sources of feedback.

We spent our time discussing whether to focus on a particular breed of horse, find a farm to buy, and talking more about what sharing our love of horses and helping others looked like. We also talked about what was going to pay for this (or at least contribute to paying for it!). Hence the "birth" of the breeding program, along with a boarding business.

3. What are the limits or boundaries?

This is where putting your vision into action starts to meet up with "curbs" at the side of the road on your journey. Things to consider here are budget, timing (remember this is not set in stone), personal/



family responsibilities and time needs, and level of ability or knowledge among other things. Making time for family and friends can be challenging - if you don't plan for it, it won't happen!

Other businesses enabled us to provide the start-up capital, and get the horses we needed from England to begin a quality-breeding program. As we didn't know much about breeding, we also did a lot of research, including anything we could find out about the Gypsy Cob/Vanner breed itself. Speaking to those who had been in the business for years and networking with well-established breeders laid the foundation for much of what we do today.

4. Who will do what part of each task or section of the plan?

Everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, things that they can contribute (or not). Also, each part of the plan should have a person assigned to it to ensure it actually does happen. If there isn't enough knowledge or experience for something key in the process, this may mean either hiring someone who can do it, taking courses, or getting help from more experienced people, at least to start.

Our vet, other breeders of Gypsy Horses, trainers, coaches, family and friends all had a role in making North Fork a quality breeding and boarding facility, as well as helping us take the first steps into the world of breeding. Decisions had to be made about method of breeding - "in hand", pasture, collection and insemination. What level of quality would we be breeding? Who should be bred with whom? What about desired colors, conformation, bloodlines? (As the Gypsy breed has very little written down by the Romany people for bloodlines, this part was especially challenging. We decided to trust the judgment and recommendations of the breeder we had purchased our first six horses from for the first season of breeding decisions - after all, they were from a long line of respected Travelers who had been in the business for eight generations!)

Learning from professionals such as our vet (who lived in a suite at our ranch for our first two years) and with the assistance of our trainer and barn manager, my husband and I were able to learn for us what the best way was to handle each aspect of our vision. This included quality, as we decided that we really wanted to represent the best of what was available in the breed.

5. What is the best that could happen? What is the worst that could happen? And can you live with the answers to these questions?

Picturing your vision can take you on a high tide of excitement that propels you along into previously uncharted territory! And fear can keep you from even trying. It is important to consider the possible roadblocks as part of your plan. It is also important to envision a way around them.

I had always been a person that thought of something I wanted to do, then came up with a long list of reasons that it couldn't happen! My husband taught me to look at ways around the barriers, and develop a "what if" list. (Both aspects are equally important to have, and help you to develop



asolid vision.) Yes, we were starting on a very unknown trip, with large learning curves (that never really end) and significant amounts of potential for failure. (This can mean something different for each person involved.)

But in the end, our goal is to help others, develop a reputation for being quality breeders, enjoy our animals, and create the lives we've always wanted.

What that looks like changes as we travel this road, but all the different parts of our dream are exciting, challenging, and fulfilling. The breeding program at our farm is part vision, part planning, part hair rising, and part Christmas gift each and every day. It's not for everyone, and we learn new things all the time. Will we ever be experts? I hesitate to use that term. But we strive always to learn from experience, other breeders, and ourselves. In the process, we hope to continue to share with others the wonderful, magical world of the Gypsy Cob.

About the Author

Cheryl Nygaard and her husband Dale manage their ranch North Fork Gypsy Cobs just outside of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Canada. They breed Gypsy Cobs and also run a boarding facility along side, which is open for visiting and boarding year round by appointment. They presently have 32 Gypsy Cobs, and are expecting 10 more babies by the end of June. Dale & Cheryl are originally city folks who fell in love with horses and enjoy sharing their calming presence with others.

For more information on their horses and their ranch, go to: www.northforkhorses.ca

