

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

By Pete Dillingham

“Flicker” knew better, the gelding and I had crossed dozens of wood bridges before! The old horse’s refusal that day was nothing more than an argument about who was the “decision-maker”. His interest in returning to the trailhead had been evident from the moment I hit the stirrup. Again, I asked him to travel forward, but when his front feet landed on the plank construction, the rascal hit reverse. Finally my request went to a demand and the veteran horse yielded to my authority....with cautious strides and a trusting heart, my old friend started forward. It was a journey neither of us ever forgot.

The wooden bridge had been a passageway for farm equipment and its rough sawn timbers showed signs of ancient travel. Halfway across the old structure, an unseen decay gave way to our weight and my horse’s right front foot dropped through a hole up to his shoulder. The next few moments are still a blur in my memory. With unimaginable strength, fueled by fear, Flicker brought us through a wreckage of boards and braces. When we reached the opposite bank, we had escaped with minor bruises and scrapes.....it could have been much worse.

There were a couple of good lessons that came from that experience.

- 1. A decision-maker has the responsibility of making good decisions. In the following months, when Flicker and I approached a questionable danger, he would hesitate or try to avoid the area. I had lost his trust in my judgment. When we are asking a horse to do our will, we are also asking that critter to trust us. We are the decision-makers, but our safety and the safety of our horses depend on us making the right decisions.**
- 2. Listen to your horse. Have you ever been driving down the road and the person in the passenger seat says, “Don’t forget your blinker” or “You’re driving too fast”? Oh man, that used to make my ears get red! One day I realized that the passenger and I were going for the same thing....we wanted to get to our destination alive. Flicker and I both wanted to get to the other side of that stream in one piece. Two sets of eyes, ears, and hooves are better than one. Intime, my horse started to trust my judgment again and we went across many more wooden brides.**

Daily life is full of problem solving moments. Learning to listen to others before making our choices helps us to become better decision-makers. Every path we choose can impact the trust and safety of others. It’s a lesson I learned when Flicker and I crossed the bridge.