

Hi. They call me Peerd. The day I was born, my youngest human saw me shaking on my new legs and said, in Flemish. "Look. A baby horse". Everyone laughed. Peerd, stuck. I was the first Belgian horse born in Southwest Manitoba.

In the early 1900s, our pasture was busy. So many beautiful horses. The elder horses taught me horse history and about working with our farmers. I'm old now. Same creek. Smaller pasture. Not much to do, except whinny when the oat pail rattles. Don't even have a colt or filly to teach. So, YOU get to hear my stories.

My parents came because our farmers wanted reliable horses to pull heavy loads and machinery. But we weren't the first horses in these parts. Smaller riding and work horses came from eastern Canada in the 1880s. And before that, the Nakota, Dakota and Metis had the most dazzling horses, the ones that could cut in and out of bison herds, being steered by the riders' knees. Now that's impressive.

Those agile ponies came from the Blackfoot Nation to the west, around 1700. You see, the Spanish brought horses to Central America more than 600 years ago. But they didn't want First Nations to have horses, for fear of losing their advantage. Eventually the Pueblo Nation rose up against the Spanish and took guns and horses for their own use. Horses were then bred and traded north along the foothills and within 20 years were being used by Plains Peoples for hunting, skills competitions and defending themselves.

We horses have special relationships with our humans. We understand moods and we anticipate what's needed. The Nakota called us the Horse Nation, with our own culture. Our humans understand this about us. Our relationship isn't natural though. Humans are predators. Look at their eyes. Our eyes are at the side of our heads, so we can see predators chasing us. Humans are natural enemies. We need to be soothed, romanced, trained to trust.

And every human needs to learn to approach in a reassuring way. That's how we learn to work together.

When we did farm work, we insisted on respectful treatment. Our farm devoted nearly 1/3 of its land just to feed us. Summer pasture, oats on work days, and hay, with a wee bit of alfalfa please, in winter. We couldn't be overworked if we were expected to work every day. We thrived on attention. Kids on our backs. Brushing after work. Timely clipping of our hooves.

We had it good. A few years ago, though, we smelled them. Heard them chug, chugging. Tractors came from the south. Literally pushed us aside. No respect. So little culture. Certainly tractors get a lot done. They barely need to sleep.

But I'm not sure they'll last. The costs are huge. So be patient, nostalgic ones. Our day may come again.

Horses was inspired by Vantage Points books and podcasts.