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## Horse listener lends kind ear to those in pain



"Carlos is my lifesaver," says horse owner Kylie Dalton, whose animals were attacked with stakes at South Morang. Carlos Tabernaberry, above with Jester, has rehabilitated the traumatised horses.

Photo: *John Woudstra*

Steve Waldon  
April 20, 2007

KYLIE Dalton was stressed and angry last week when she arrived at a South Morang property to find her five horses had been attacked.

It wasn't just any attack. Her horses had been speared with metal pickets and wooden stakes, and they had the wounds and fear in their eyes to prove it.

It must take a particular absence of thought and compassion to act so hideously towards animals, and the outcome for Ms Dalton was that her relationship with horses she loved was fractured.

A couple of days after the attack, the horses' trust had so evaporated that she could not approach them; she had to leave feed on the ground and move well clear before they would come to eat.

She thought it would take anywhere up to 12 months to rehabilitate her horses, and even then their trauma might never be fully overcome.

How can such a story have a happy ending? It can if the forces variously known as karma, serendipity and fate intervene.

They have, introducing to the story Carlos Tabernaberry, the trainer whose natural affinity with horses was featured in *The Age* on April 2.

Mr Tabernaberry was dubbed "the horse listener" — he rejects the more clichéd "horse whisperer", because he thinks that confers on the human more skill than the horse in what

should be a relationship of mutual trust and respect.

An *Age* reader, recalling Mr Tabernaberri's burgeoning reputation for rehabilitating abused and reluctant horses, suggested Ms Dalton seek his advice. Mr Tabernaberri agreed, and this week visited the South Morang property.

It is difficult to describe Mr Tabernaberri's technique, but this was his starting point: "These horses have lost faith, they've had their spirits broken," he said.

Yet, within a few minutes, three horses that since being attacked had been extremely wary, even of their owner, were nuzzling Mr Tabernaberri and accepting his pats and soothing.

As he does in his book *Through the Eyes of the Horse*, Mr Tabernaberri explained his reverse psychology. Rather than chasing the horse and forcing a response, he wants the horse to conclude that it is good to be with Mr Tabernaberri. He points to Curley, a beautiful gelding, who is looking indifferent, but who hasn't run away.

"See, his attitude is 'OK, I figure you're not going to hurt me, but I'm not interested in coming to you'," he said.

So Mr Tabernaberri continued to work with Jester, who had been virtually unapproachable, but was now seeking human attention.

Within half-an-hour, he had three relaxed horses, Curley included, following him in a kind of equine convoy, heads up and attentive.

Ms Dalton was amazed.

"Carlos is my lifesaver," she said.

A few minutes later, Mr Tabernaberri had won the confidence of filly Cowgirl, the most traumatised of the five horses.

He called Ms Dalton in to the enclosure, and soon enough, under his tuition, she was able to handle Cowgirl's hind legs — something she doubted would happen.

Police have not found the attackers, but Ms Dalton and her partner are visiting the property frequently, including late at night. There is a discernible undercurrent that a repeat attack would not go unchallenged, and might not be a good idea.

Anyway, Carlos Tabernaberri said, the horses would recognise the attackers and respond accordingly.

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