

# Spiritual Lessons I Have Learned from Animals

BY COLLEEN BENELLI

PHOTOS COURTESY OF COLLEEN BENELLI

**W**HEN I WAS in kindergarten, I had an experience that influenced the direction of my life. I was on the playground and heard hoofbeats coming down the road. I ran to the fence, and a girl on a white horse rode past me. My face was pressed against the fence in awe. At that moment, as the sound of hoofbeats was forever imprinted in my heart, I knew what I wanted—I had to have horses in my life. Horses became a driving force in deciding the kind of life I wanted to live. The rhythm of hoofbeats became a source of comfort, guiding me to my goals. In retrospect, I can see divine guidance coming to me through the horses I have known leading me on my spiritual path with Reiki. Many of us can look back to events in our lives that guided us to Reiki. I was

43 when my horse, Dakota, directed me to receive Reiki as I explain below. Over the years, my awareness of animal Reiki expanded through special animal partnerships. These experiences gave me a deeper perspective that have allowed me to contribute to the advancement of animal Reiki. Collaborating with Sioux Strong, Robyn Benelli, and Pamela Allen-LeBlanc, the ICRT Animal Reiki Training courses were developed. Here, I share experiences with horses Nicole, Dakota, Jabar, and Gator, and dogs Stella, and Daisy, which boosted my perception of Reiki's guiding



Colleen, age 13, with Nicole.

power when working with animals. Throughout my life, messages from the animals influenced my choices, bringing me to Reiki and ultimately my spiritual path of inner truth and guidance.

## **My First Horse, Nicole**

I grew up in San Diego, California, in the 60s and 70s. When I was 12, my family moved to Encinitas, a small country town, only half a mile from the beach. My parents bought a dog boarding kennel, and we had up to 70

dogs a day. I was in heaven! I worked for my parents, mainly scooping poop and cleaning, but it was worth it because they paid me, and I could finally buy my horse, Nicole! It was my dream come true. While riding Nicole, I had many spiritual experiences. I remember feeling God could see the earth through my 14-year-old eyes and perspective. I was already aware of enlightened spiritual beings and nature beings; I talked to the animals. I also thought everyone talked to animals, and that other people saw the divine on earth too. Still, I didn't have a context or belief system to explain it. My experiences were an early sign of my spiritual perspectives and gifts that later led me to Reiki. I left the Catholic church during this time and was compelled to find a new spiritual path. I didn't know what it was or how to find it, but I experienced inner spirituality riding Nicole.

I was always looking for a path that would teach me how to find my inner truth and authority rather than an outside authority telling me what to believe. My younger years were fun but also difficult. It was hard to find a path in the 1970s. Our generation had to seek it, and I actively prayed for help. Back then, Reiki guided me, helping me find my unique spirituality and perspectives. During my childhood, messages were delivered through my connection to my animals.

I was 13 when I met Brenda, and I finally had a best friend who liked to ride as much as I did. She loved our wild rides; we were certainly kindred spirits. We rode bareback, raced trains, galloped as fast as we could, road up and down cliffs, fell off, got back on again, and raced some more. And 50 years later, we're still friends having both moved to Oregon as adults. Brenda influenced my Reiki journey tremendously. She

encouraged me to offer ceremonies, write, be professional and public with my Reiki practices, and pushed me past my comfort zone to take them to the next level. I know that in its infinite wisdom, Reiki brought us together.



Colleen and Nicole.

### Dakota Guided Me to Reiki

In 1989, when I was in my twenties, my husband and two kids moved to a small town in Oregon and bought a 30-acre farm. By the time I was 40, I was making my living as a fiber artist and still looking for my spiritual path. It was during this time I found Dakota. Although I had horses for years, and loved them all, the moment I saw Dakota, I knew he was my lifetime dream horse. I talked to him, loved him, and spent hours with him. He told me to learn Reiki, guiding me to my current path.

When Dakota turned five years old, he sustained a leg injury that left him permanently lame and no longer rideable. After many veterinary visits, pasture rest, medicines, he was still lame a year later and became a pasture horse. However, I still spent hours with him, as he would always come near me when I meditated outside. He was part of my spiritual training; I just didn't know it.

One day I asked Dakota to explain why he went lame. He responded, "I was born for you. I went lame to deliver you to your power to heal." He showed me images of my hands on him, and I knew it was Reiki. However, I procrastinated, putting Reiki training on the back burner. Then, about eight months later, a psychic randomly came into my business saying that she had a message from my horse. "Your horse said that he has



Dakota said, "I was born for you."

been telling you to do something and you haven't done it. He said you need to do what he is telling you because life is coming, and you are going to need it." Then she left.

I immediately acted, receiving Reiki attunements within two weeks. I had an instant cellular memory as if I had always known Reiki, and I knew I had finally found the spiritual path I was seeking. Dakota's message that "life is coming," and I would need Reiki, turned out to be true. I found myself in a three-year life cycle of death and dying, experiencing a significant amount of loss. It seemed as if family, friends and animals died continuously. I was so grateful to have Reiki helping me clarify beliefs about life and death and my inner truth and authority. At another challenging time in life, my animals were messengers.

In time, I discovered Dakota wanted to be a Reiki horse. So, I gave him Reiki attunements, and he taught me how to work with him. He did truly deliver me to my power to heal. Because Dakota led me to Reiki, I always thought I would work primarily on animals. But he immediately told me to work on people, which started my Reiki path and passion for this work. Now, 22 years later, most of my Reiki career has been working with people.



Dakota and Jabar, on the farm.

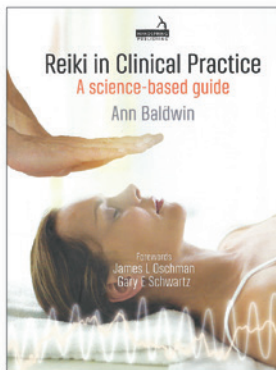
Whenever I was asked to give Reiki to an animal, I used the Reiki to which I was attuned, with no specific animal Reiki methods. Like so many other Reiki practitioners, I just connected Reiki to animals. So, when in 2015, William Rand asked me to write an animal Reiki course, I thought it would comprise the Reiki techniques I was already using for animals. But Reiki and the animals I knew and worked with had a unique vision of what needed to be included in the animal Reiki classes and manuals. What I thought would take six months to develop and write took six years. By 2020, we had developed the ICRT Animal Reiki Training I & II and Master classes and manuals. I realized I had come full circle as I spent hours giving Reiki to horses and animals. Once again, the animals were messengers, guiding me along the Reiki path.

### Jabar Taught Partnership

Bucky, my daughter Robyn's horse, taught me that animals care about their name and feel partnership, not ownership. I was giving Reiki to a client outside by the pasture. My client wanted to change her name and asked me to help release her old name and integrate her chosen name. I looked over at the horses during the session and saw Bucky appear irritated. Using the Mental/Emotional symbol and the Karuna Reiki® symbol Iava to communicate and understand him, I asked what was upsetting him. He told me how much he hated the name "Bucky," said that I did not own him, and he wanted us to call him by his real name. He conveyed how it was an indignity to be called Bucky. Afterward, I looked at his papers and discovered that his real name was Jabar. Through his message, I

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Jabar



Brenda and Colleen.

learned animals have preferences about their names and realized that while I was in a relationship with Jabar; I was not his owner. This point is an essential concept in animal Reiki, where it is important to acknowledge that we do not own our companion animals. We are in partnership, not ownership—a mutual giving and receiving relationship. After receiving his message, we all called him Jabar, and he was a happier horse.

### Stella, Our Reiki Dog

My dog, Stella, taught me the importance of gaining consent before giving Reiki to animals. She did not like hands-on Reiki. One day when we couldn't find her, our search uncovered her severely injured in the forest, having been caught in a cougar trap for days. When home, I immediately tried to soothe her by placing my hands to give her Reiki. She reacted with an obvious message, "Please, don't touch me." I withdrew and activated the Distant symbol with all the Reiki symbols. I beamed Reiki around the house, creating a field of Reiki energy she could walk in and out of, in charge of her session. Through her message, she taught me that animals always need to choose how and when they receive Reiki, and sometimes we need to create a "Reiki zone" for their healing. We discuss these concepts in our animal Reiki classes.



Stella

Stella became a Reiki dog. She always wanted to be in or near my Reiki sessions and classes as long as the client

or teacher was comfortable with her. People loved her, and she loved Reiki and being able to work with me. Her message was always love and devotion. Stella also taught about compassionate euthanasia and the end of life. She waited until I was prepared for her to transition, even though she was ready to go before I was ready. I used self-Reiki to strengthen my ability to choose what was best for her. The veterinarian who came to the house was a Reiki Master, and we used Reiki together for Stella's peaceful transition.

### Gator, Brenda's Horse

Gator was my friend Brenda's miniature horse, and is mentioned in our *ICRT Animal Reiki I & II Manual*. We gained valuable information from him at the end of his life when we wrote the euthanasia section.

He had been in the family for a long time, had raised all of our grandkids, and was good to them. My grandkids learned how to give Reiki to animals with Gator. He liked hands-on and distance Reiki. So, we would go to the barn, and they would give him Reiki. He was patient and a teacher for all.

When Gator was old, the veterinarian diagnosed his condition as terminal, and told us euthanasia was viable. With only days or weeks to live, Brenda had to decide about euthanasia to avoid the serious crisis of unexpected passing. She didn't want Gator to go through pain. I worked with Reiki on both Gator and Brenda. Like Stella, Gator waited for Brenda to be ready for his transition. His message was love and devotion, too.

I gave her support but not advice on choosing. Gator showed he agreed with her once she had decided on euthanasia. He told her to pick a day good for her before he was in crisis

and pain. So, she made the appointment for the vet to come out when those of us who loved Gator could be there. It was a sunny day, and he felt good. He ate apples and ran around a bit with one dog he liked to play with, and he had all of us giving him love. We gave Gator Reiki on his last day, and he knew how greatly he was loved. The end was so peaceful; there was even rainbow light over him when we took his photo.

### Daisy, Our Family Dog

Daisy is my son's family Labrador Retriever with whom I have loving grandmother status. She is a great family dog and is all-in with Reiki, loving to receive it, and give it. Daisy wanted to receive Reiki attunements; however, she only wants Reiki with her family; not interested in being a Reiki or therapy dog for others. She takes care of her kids in powerful ways, devoted to their well-being, and giving Reiki is one way she assists them. When anyone in her family is sick or injured, she lays right by them, placing her head or paws on them in a way that is noticeably different than usual until they are healthy again.

Stella liked to work with my clients and in my Reiki classes. However, Daisy is most interested in taking care of her family. Daisy's message is about consent; animals need to choose how and when they want to provide Reiki as a service. Reiki's energy helps her, so she does not get depleted by her caregiving.



Gator and Luna.



Gator with Cal, Luna, Eva.



Daisy and Cal.



Daisy and Eva.

## Final Thoughts

Once I learned Reiki, I used the Distant symbol to send Reiki back to my childhood moments, healing childhood challenges. I sent Reiki to my past self to empower my inner and outer guidance. Following the thread of my childhood choices with animals, I see how Reiki energy empowered my spiritual guidance. My animals were the messengers who influenced my understanding of Reiki's guiding power. I am grateful for the special animals on my Reiki path. They influenced my choices, bringing me to Reiki and ultimately my spiritual path of inner truth and guidance, all through my profound love for animals and the earth. ■

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