

Equine bodyworker

Jim Masterson developed his equine bodywork technique, The Masterson Method, through his work on the US showjumping circuit – although his travels have taken him much further afield than just North America

As the son of a cargo pilot, I moved a lot growing up.

I'm from Southern California originally and when I was 11 we moved to the Philippines. We lived just outside an air base, where there was a riding school. My mom and dad

college set up by key players in the TM movement – was founded in the 1970s.

Meditators from all over the world came to Fairfield – including Conley, a hunter-jumper rider, who would later become my wife.

In 1997, I stepped into the performance horse world.

Conley kept a horse at a smart hunter-jumper barn where the trainer needed a show groom. I was between jobs at the time, so Conley said, "Well, why don't you do that?" So I'd go to

the big shows on the hunter-jumper circuit to groom.

The first time I remember becoming fascinated by treating tension in horses was watching this older guy from New Zealand who the vets would fly in from

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bought me my first pony there, a Welsh called Misty.

Later, when we moved back to California, I was lucky – a buddy's dad owned 360 acres and boarded horses and cattle. I spent most evenings and weekends messing around with horses and having fun.

When I was a teenager we relocated to Africa for two years, living in the northern Congo. The locals knew I loved animals and they would bring them to us – we had a little six-month-old chimpanzee, Chi Chi, who was attached to my mom, and a couple of baboons who lived with us.

Baboons are social and fascinating to watch – I studied their behaviour, which I think fed my interest in animal behaviour and body language later on in life.

I spent a lot of time away from horses until fate intervened. I'd decided to check out Fairfield, Iowa, in the 1980s after spending time in Alaska learning to practise transcendental meditation (TM). Fairfield's a small town where the Maharishi International University – the



California to shows, and later observing two women hired by the trainer I worked for to massage the horses.

They used very different methods. The old chiropractor would use these quite long, forceful techniques, while the women would relax the horses by running their hands very lightly along the topline – in ancient Chinese medicine, this line is called the bladder meridian, which is where one of the techniques I use gets its name.

I noticed the horse would blink or twitch every so often as they worked. I asked them

to show me how it was done.

The Kiwi, once he'd made an adjustment, would step back to see what the horse had to say. If he was licking and chewing,

and chew or begin yawning – just like when the chiropractor had performed a release. I thought, "Ah, so there's a connection there."

steal any of your customers." Suddenly, I had 300 clients overnight and went from working on 10 horses a week to 50 or 60. It was a

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yawning repeatedly, that showed a good adjustment.

So, when I used the women's technique and saw a blink or twitch, I waited to see if anything else would happen. I found that if I waited for long enough, the horse might drop his head, lick

Combining these two approaches was the beginning of The Masterson Method.

I started working for a vet tech, Bill Stanton, who was swamped with clients. A mutual friend told him, "Have Jim work for you, he won't

huge education, you learn a ton about physical soreness patterns and evaluating where a horse might be holding tension.

I worked on showjumpers for nine years before I began teaching The Masterson Method. We now have more than 500 practitioners in 20 countries, but it all started because I wanted to teach people how to read and follow their horses' body language to relieve tension, and they wanted to learn.

I started doing weekend courses in the bladder meridian technique – the light touch down the body – alongside my work, and things got busier and busier. Equine massage therapists wanted to know if there was a certification programme, so I made one. It just grew and grew to the point where I have six professors around the world teaching our courses.

A lot of the things I do seem to be backwards. I worked on US endurance champion Valerie Kanavy's horses and when they made her chef d'equipe for the US team in 2006 she asked me to go with them to the World Equestrian Games in Aachen. So, my first time as part of a national endurance team was at the world championships – I started at the top and worked my way down.

It's the working down, though, that defines my ultimate goal: that every horse on the planet experiences the bladder meridian technique at least once. **H&H**

● *As told to Bethany Stone*



Marion Dreelan,
show centre founder