

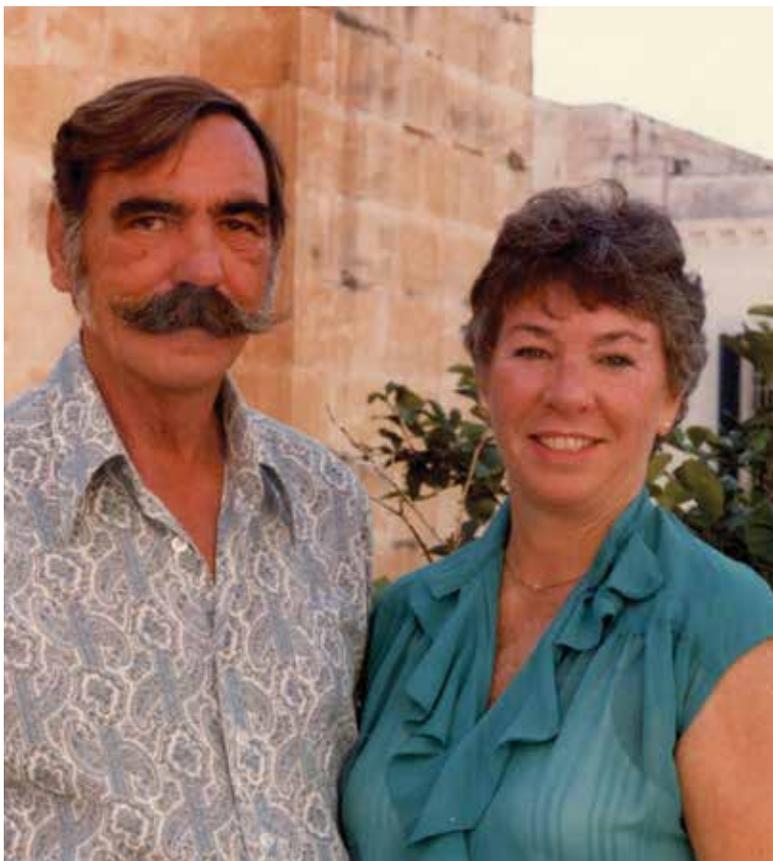


Photo courtesy of The Masterson Method

Jim Masterson demonstrates on young Conego one of his Masterson Method equine massage back techniques that is a type of gentle myofascial release that follows the horse's responses. It is called the "accordion" even though it looks more like playing a piano.

## **JIM MASTERSON:** *His Hands-On Horse Massage Method*

By Jane E. B. Simmons © 2020



Jim Masterson's parents, Air Force Capt. R. A. "Bat" Masterson and Lois Ann Hinton, together in Malta where the family lived while his father was doing contract flying jobs in Libya.

"Working with the horse and not on the horse allows the horse to release tension in essential core muscles, and in the muscles of key junctions of the body that affect movement and performance," equine massage therapist Jim Masterson said.

This relaxation, he said, "improves the horse's performance, and in the process, it develops a trust between the horse and you."

Jim, creator of The Masterson Method, said his innovative form of equine massage allows a horse to release deep, accumulated pain and tension in its muscles and connective tissue.

Jim said that most of a horse's body language is missed by humans, noting that a horse communicates almost entirely through body language.

"When a horse's nervous system lets go of blocking pain and discomfort, then comes into play that part of the nervous system that regenerates and heals," he said.

The block-out part is called the sympathetic - the flight, fight, or freeze part. Once released, the healing that comes forth is called the parasympathetic part.

Through the use of light touch and gentle movement while a horse is in a relaxed state, Jim said, one can observe a range of the horse's responses. This reveals what the horse's body is feeling.

Years of stress and stiffness can often be resolved in a few sessions, Jim said.



Jim Masterson and his wife Conley in 2016 in Majorca, Spain.

"This opens doors to improved health and performance, while also enhancing communication with the horse," he said.

Over 4,000 horse owners over the years have agreed with him about his innovative method of equine massage.

Jim's work with horses was already noticed back in 2006. During that year he was invited to accompany the U.S. Endurance Team to the FEI World Equestrian Games in Aachen, Germany.

2006 Endurance Team member Jennifer Niehaus said afterward: "Of all the things that were done for my horse Cheyenne, the bodywork Jim did was the most beneficial. He has truly never moved as nicely as he did in Germany."

Dr. Meg Sleeper, DVM, worked with Jim in 2008 at the FEI World Endurance Championships in Malaysia.

Dr. Sleeper said of Jim's work: "It is impossible to overestimate Jim's ability to keep performance horses working at their peak level. Simply put, he is like having a secret weapon."

Jim accompanied the WEG team to Lexington, Ky., in 2010, to the World's Championships in England in 2012, and to the WEG in Normandy, France, in 2014.

"Horses are survival animals," Jim said. "They instinctively mask pain and discomfort in order to stay alive and off the predator's menu in the wild."

This is why it can be so challenging to evaluate lameness. This survival mode, he said, is how a horse is able to push



These 2010 Endurance Team horses are being led to veterinary appointments at the Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games in Lexington's Kentucky Horse Park. This 2010 event, held from September 25 - October 10, was the first time the every-four-years Games were held outside of Europe. The BBC broadcasted them live.

so hard, often beyond its normal physical limitations, to do what it is being asked to do.

What happens when a horse tries to communicate that it is uncomfortable or unable to do what is being asked?

"A horse's reactions often are interpreted as a behavioral or training issue," Jim said, "and the horse continues to work through the pain."

Today Jim continues to travel the world teaching his Masterson Method to horse owners, trainers and therapists, holds Seminar-Workshops across America and offers courses in his method for individuals.

Jim was introduced to horses early in life. He was born in Southern California, at Edwards Air Force Base in 1954. Jim was number five of the eight children (seven boys and one girl) of Air Force Capt. R. A. "Bat" Masterson and Lois Ann Hinton. His Air Force pilot father flew in World War II and Korea before becoming a commercial pilot, working mostly on a contract basis.

When he was in kindergarten, Jim's family moved to a rural area where they would live until he was 10.

"We had a family horse, a pinto Quarter Horse named Duque," he said. "He lived in a stable at the bottom of our property."

Jim's first horse memory - at about 5 years old - was sitting in the saddle "in front of one of my older brothers, listening to the creak of the saddle, and looking down at the shoulders moving back and forth, watching the ground go by so far away down below."

In 1965, the family moved to the Philippines, and at the nearby Air Force base was a riding stable.

"I hung out there long enough for my parents to buy me a Welsh pony that was for sale," Jim said. "Her name was Misty. I had her for a year."

Jim gained more time with horses from 1966-1969 in Glendora, Ca., where he spent most of his time at a friend's ranch.

"My friend's cattle ranch was in the hills behind our house," he said. "It had 10 to 15 horses. For three years, I became attached to a small grey Mustang named Grey."

The first half of his freshman high school year was spent



Photo courtesy of the Masterson family

Only Stars Invited is a living teaching model at the September 2016 Masterson Method's Advanced Course held at Larkin Valley Farm in Watsonville, California. Jane Brown's painting of "Star" - owned by Sandy Vreeburg - was to add value to Jim's skeletal movement work relating to how the MM techniques affect the movement of a horse.

in Glendora, Ca. The second half, he spent in Fairbanks, Alaska, where his father had a flying contract.

No horses were in Jim's life in 1969 when his father took a flying job in Africa in the famous Biafran Airlift. During this Nigeria-Biafran civil war, millions died of starvation, notwithstanding the efforts of those, like his father, flying relief into Biafra.

That year, Jim and his mother and siblings lived in Mallorca, Spain.

"My second year of high school study was spent at a small British private school, and then a small American private school there," he said.

There were still no horses in his life from 1970 to 1972 when his father took a flying job in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"We lived in Kisangani, in the northeastern part of the country where my father flew cargo transports for the Congolese military," Jim said.

Jim was home-schooled during that time because there was no school there.

"I think this is where I really started to notice subtle

changes in an animal's behavior and see them as forms of communication," he said. "My two younger brothers and I always loved animals, and while we lived there, we had many pets, mostly primates: a chimp, two baboons and a few monkeys."

In 1973, he and his mother and siblings were back in Mallorca, Spain.

"I finished my third and final years of high school studies at the American School of Mallorca," he said.

Jim was on the move again in 1974. He took a summer job in Fairbanks, Alaska, then that fall, he headed to the California Polytechnic University of California. However, he stayed only for one quarter of classes at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, Ca., as a Mechanized Agriculture major.

"Because it was too much sitting and I couldn't sit still, I moved back to Alaska for four years," he said.

In 1978, Jim rejoined his parents and "a few left-over siblings" in their large house in the Big Horn County seat of Basin, Wy. where his father was flying fire retardant tankers.

Horses were finally back in Jim's life. On the five acres, the family boarded some horses and his sister had a Quarter

Horse colt named Toby.

At first, Jim worked on oil drilling rigs in Wyoming, then worked offshore in Alaska and eventually overseas.

In 1985, his life came to a turning point.

That year, Jim's parents moved back overseas, but he decided to take a job in Iowa, where he met his future wife, Conley Wright.

"I was working on a Polish Arabian horse farm in Fairfield, Iowa, where as it turns out, my future wife was also employed," Jim said. "This was not as exciting as it may sound at first. Her job was riding and preparing horses for the track, while mine was doing menial work on the ground, repairing fences, cleaning stalls and doing projects for the owner. Her equestrian background was hunter-jumper show horses; mine was backyard horses and galloping around the hills."

Jim left Iowa in 1987 to return to work offshore in Alaska, California and Africa, but Conley was still in Iowa when Jim returned to the Hawkeye State in 1992.

In 1995, the pair moved to Hawaii, where they worked for a book distributor for two years.

"I eventually convinced her that it was safe to lower her standards and we were married ... in 1999, which is when my professional life with horses serendipitously started."

Jim came to his current life's work by following a 1998 suggestion from Conley.

"She suggested I take a part-time gig as a horse show groom for a local hunter-jumper barn that was going out on the show circuit," Jim said.

While doing this work, Jim was exposed to performance horses and equine bodywork modalities and started to connect the subtle behavioral changes or 'responses' to physical issues that led him to his current work.

"In 1998, while I was grooming horses on the U.S. hunter-jumper show circuit, I noticed while watching physical therapists work on horses that a horse exhibited certain

said.

Jim created his first instructional video in 2005 when he started teaching his Masterson Method weekend seminars to horse owners. The video is entitled: Masterson Method Equine Massage for Performance Horses.

The following year was the start of his joining the U. S. Equestrian Federation Endurance Team. He did this every two years through 2014.

Next Jim turned his attention to doing seminars in the United Kingdom, Ireland, and in Europe.

He traveled to Australia for Equitana in Melbourne in 2008 and gave his first MM seminar in that country. He also joined the U.S. Endurance Team that year at the WEG in Malaysia.

Soon thereafter, Jim began work creating a certification program, at first for equine massage therapists who wanted certification, and then for horse owners.

In 2011, Jim finished his Beyond Horse Massage book, which also included a DVD. The Beyond Horse Massage book and DVD has sold over 50,000 copies and been translated into six languages, Jim said. At one point, it was Amazon's No. 1 seller in the equine veterinary category.

Within two years, he stopped taking clients.

"In 2013, I devoted full-time to teaching, promoting and managing MM," he said. "I also did fun interviews and podcasts."

Another book came in 2015, Dressage Horse Optimized. This book was done in partnership with Coralie Hughes. He also released his Dressage Movement Revealed DVD with Coralie Hughes and rider Betsy Steiner. Next came the release of his Light to the Core DVD in 2016.

In 2019, Jim traveled to New Zealand where he taught his first New Zealand MM Seminar and attended the Equitana there.

This year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, "my career took off with my 2020 podcast interview with the famous Jane Pike of Confident Rider," he said.



**I think this is where I really started to notice subtle changes in an animal's behavior and see them as forms of communication," he said.**

subtle changes in behavior that correlated to what the therapists were doing," he said.

He learned that if you trust and follow what the horse is telling you as you work on it, the horse's body will participate in the process of releasing tension. The result is not only an improvement in performance, but also in the trust that develops between the horse and human.

"I started to pay attention to what the horse was saying during the therapy treatments that I observed by various therapists," Jim said. "I also began experimenting with what would eventually become The Masterson Method."

In 2001, Jim started - one horse at a time - building an equine bodywork practice.

"I mostly worked at this effort in Wellington and in Ocala, Fla., and when I was at home in Iowa and in between," he

The impact of COVID-19 earlier this year slowed his travel, but he and his team have continued sending and providing products and services online and participating in new social media events such as Facebook Live.

"We are eager to get back out there to our hands-on courses as soon as the starting gate opens," he said. "My personal goal is to have every horse on the planet have experienced The Bladder Meridian technique at least once."

What does he see as the future of the entire horse industry? Jim answered: "Coming is the day - one horse at a time - when there will be a deeper connection between horse and man." [👉](#)