

Ep #53: Time Spent with Wild Horses



Freedom for Wild Horses

WITH **CAROL J WALKER**

Full Episode Transcript

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Carol J. Walker

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Have you wondered what it's like to be in the field, on the land, spending time with wild horses? If so, this episode is for you. I'm your host Carol Walker, and let's get started.

Welcome to the *Freedom For Wild Horses* podcast, the place to find out about wild horses in the American West and what you can do to help them stay wild and free. If you love wildlife, wild horses, and the freedom that they stand for, this show is for you. I'm your host, Carol Walker. Let's get started.

I just returned home from a trip to Salt Wells Creek Herd Management Area in Wyoming. This is one of my favorite wild horse herds. And I spent time while driving, which is what I spend a lot of my time doing when I'm out looking for wild horses, thinking about what it is about being with them that captures my heart. I'm enriched and forever changed by the time I spend with wild horses.

Some I may see once and never again. And I'm left wondering. Some I see, and I haven't seen them in years, and I'm so excited to see that they're still alive, still with their families, and see the changes in their lives. Even those I see many times in a year and over several years, I don't know what they face day to day. I get little glimpses into their lives, but the vast majority of their time on this earth, I do not see them. The time I spend with them is just a snapshot of a moment in their lives.

They live shorter lives than we do. They are blessedly unconcerned with my life. I can tell my story about our encounters and what impact they have on me.

Each of us has our own relationships with the wild horses we encounter. By relationship, I mean connection, if only for a moment. Much of the time I spend with wild horses, I'm sitting on the ground, quiet, watching them as unobtrusively as possible. They always know I am there. They keep an eye on me, even when at rest. I have my camera, and I photograph them. And my photos are a way for me to celebrate them, remember them, worship

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them. My camera does not get in the way of time spent with them, but is an expression of it.

The horses don't know what is going to happen this year. We do not know what is going to happen this year. All that we have done to save these herds in Wyoming from being zeroed out: calling, writing, posting, commenting, suing, talking, rallying, and now we wait. I have no control over what the three judges on our panel in the Tenth Circuit Court decide. I have no control over whether the BLM moves forward with a roundup this year.

There is a kind of peace in the in-between time. Time to go see the horses and enjoy them. Share photos and share stories about them. And make sure I have no regrets.

I just got home from a week with wild horses. There was a morning in Salt Wells Creek that I will never forget. It was windy and cold and partially overcast, and the clouds were blowing in and out. I saw many horses at a distance with no way to get any closer. I finally found a family in a low spot near a creek, and several young horses were lying down, napping. The bay stallion was on alert, and when his two-year-old approached him, clacking submissively, he did not have time for her. I watched several of the horses in his family turn their heads and look toward the hill as if waiting and listening for something. I didn't hear anything. I didn't see anything. But they knew something was coming.

Suddenly, the stallion got everyone up and started running away. Then I saw them. Horses streaming down the hill at a run. So many horses, running because of the wind, because they could, for the sheer joy of it. Not because a helicopter was chasing them and they were running for their lives. But this was an expression of their freedom. The colors of the horses spread into a beautiful wave of sorrels, palominos, browns, roans, buckskins, and blacks, dotted with a few pintos.

I watched band after band run down the hill. And as I turned around, several other bands ran down the hill and up another. Once they were out

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of sight, I drove up a two-track on a hill where I thought I might be able to catch a glimpse of them on the opposite hill. The road twisted and turned, and finally I could see them all on the side of a hill. And they were still moving, dancing through the grasses and the sage. They walked, then trotted, then ran down the hill, but this time more to the west.

I turned my vehicle around and drove back down to the main road. I drove, wondering where they were going. Suddenly, I stopped. They were going to cross the road in front of me. There was no way to fully describe the beauty and sheer impressive sight of all those horses running. It was as if some of them decided that the wind was occasion enough to run. Then the others joined in, and it was a parade.

I had a feeling I knew where they were headed. So I drove to where a two-track I was familiar with went down to a creek. I stopped and got out of my car with my camera, and I waited. In the distance, there was so much dust. Imagine over 150 horses running together. And the noise. Stallions sparred and squealed, and I was concerned about the foals, but even the littlest, who was born three days ago, had no trouble keeping up. And the mares kept their foals close.

Now, as they approached, everyone was slowing down, first to a trot and then to a walk. As they passed, some looked curiously at me, others just faced forward. There were a couple of mares heavy with foal, but they did not look distressed, and they kept up with their families. The last family I watched come by was Teton's. He's a gorgeous red and white pinto. And he was in the lead. The lieutenant stallion on alert, leading his family. And his family has two new mares, one heavily pregnant, and a new foal. All sorrel. And with Teton, the lone pinto.

The different families became more obvious and distinct as they slowed. And finally, they crossed the road at a walk, and there was a brilliant ray of sun that fell on them like a blessing as the clouds parted directly overhead. I imagined that they were tired. The foals ready to nurse and sleep. And the adults ready to graze and rest. I watched from a distance for a while and

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knew I was ready to go home. And so thankful for having witnessed such a stirring and beautiful sight.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Freedom for Wild Horses*. If you want to learn more, follow me at www.wildhoofbeats.com for more information and for ways to help America's wild horses. See you next time.