

# WILD TRADITIONS

Story and photography by  
Henry Dallal



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KEEN TO EXPERIENCE AND PHOTOGRAPH DIFFERENT HORSE CULTURES OF THE WORLD, PHOTOGRAPHER HENRY DALLAL STUMBLED ONTO THE OMAK INDIANS BY CHANCE WHILE TRAVELING FROM ENGLAND TO SEATTLE TO PRESENT A COLLECTION OF IMAGES ON BRITISH EQUINE PAGEANTRY TO ONE OF HIS SPONSORS. DALLAL'S ENCOUNTER LED TO HIS BEING INVITED TO JOIN A HUNT FOR WILD HORSES.

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“IT IS OUR TRADITION. WE GO OUT LOOKING FOR THEM IN THE WINTER WHEN THE SNOWS ARE DEEP.”

George Marchand, a several-time winner of the Suicide Race whose father was regarded as one of the top horsemen, generously invites me to stay with his family on the reservation. Marchand is the president of the Owners and Jockeys Association that runs the Suicide Race, and enthusiastically carries on his tribe’s traditions, sharing them with his children and other youths on the reservation.

Marchand proudly shows me the nearly 30 horses pastured outside his home. “We have wild horses that live on our reservation, and each family is entitled to catch three horses per season,” he says. “It is our tradition. We go out looking for them in winter when the snows are deep.”

Early on the morning of the hunt, Marchand loads four horses in a trailer, and with his sons Lauren and Jordan, we drive higher and deeper into the reservation. His friend and one-time bull-riding star, Jerry Sam, meets us to plot the day’s strategy. The objective is to track a herd of wild horses, with one group getting close to begin the chase and to move the herd to where the others are waiting.

Marchand and I are assigned to wait. For more than an hour, our horses do not move or make a single sound. It is very quiet, until the herd comes thundering past. Wildly, we gallop full speed in the deep snow, over fallen trees, stumps, up a ravine and down a steep hill, with Marchand ahead of me, trying to get close enough to rope a wild horse. Even if you are lucky enough to get near, you need to be skilled enough to lasso a wild animal that is



Above: The wild horse is brought in. Below, left: Jerry Sam, a one-time bull-riding star.

## HENRY’S HORSES

London-based photographer and author Henry Dallal is adding to his collection of photography of horse cultures around the world for a 2008 exhibition planned at the International Museum of The Horse in Lexington, Ky.

He recently retraced the steps of Lawrence of Arabia on horseback, and returned from a ride across the Thar Desert in Rajasthan. Dallal is working on a coffee-table book about India’s 61st Cavalry, the last active mounted cavalry regiment in the world. His photographs of Britain’s Household Cavalry are included in his self-published book *Pageantry and Performance*, and were exhibited at the Naples Museum of Art in 2005.

His work has also been exhibited in Blenheim Palace, the Smithsonian Institute, Windsor Castle, Royal Geographical Society, the State Apartments of Royal Hospital Chelsea, Queen Mary II, Kensington Palace and at the Dubai International Arabian Horse Championship in March.

Dallal’s parents, Naim and Loris, live in Naples, and he visits them when he can between his globe-spanning adventures.



Henry Dallal

## RITE RACE

The crowd teems with anticipation. The medicine man has prayed; the jockeys and their families and support groups have spent all morning mentally preparing themselves and their four-legged partners to meet the adrenaline-filled challenge ahead. An eagle feather is woven into the mane of each horse. This is the Suicide Race, an annual event during the second weekend of August that serves as a rite of passage for participants.

Powwows take place all night among the visiting tribes and friends prior to the race, which marks the grand finale of the Omak Stampede Rodeo. The race is derived from a tradition of the Native American Colville tribe, which lives in the high plains and mountains of northeast Washington, close to the Canadian border.

"If you blink, you miss the race," says Ernie Williams, a former racer, tribal elder and committeeman of the Suicide Race, whose own son died following the tradition. Despite the risk, the participants live and breathe this way of life, training all year to face the challenge that requires the best of speed, strength and agility, and most of all, courage.

The tradition is subject to controversy, with some critics calling for the race to be stopped because of the danger to the horses, which charge at a gallop to the edge of a cliff where they literally dive off, plummeting down a 65-degree slope, practically flying for about 350 feet into the Okanagan River. The racers swim across the river to a packed rodeo arena on the other side. The joyous whooping of the winner and the rest of the jockeys at the end of the race mix with the sighs of relief when all have completed the event safely.

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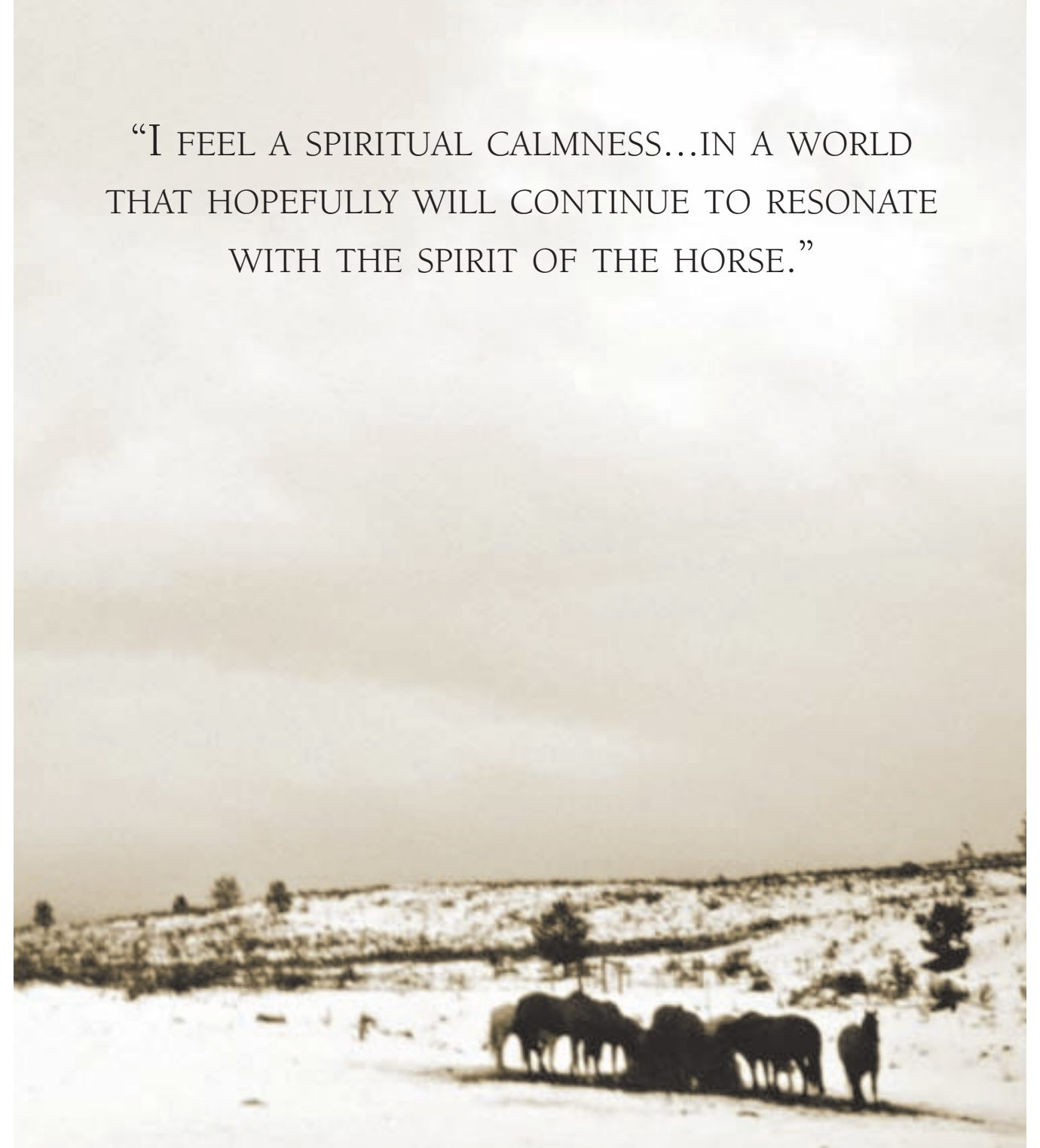


Top: The captured horse does not come willingly. Above: The domestic herd greets the new arrival gradually.

intent on evading capture.

Each rider has a short time to get near the thundering herd. Our horses are saddled and carrying riders. The wild horses are carrying no weight and seem to fly across the open country. Marchand is already ahead of me and swinging his rope, closing in on one horse. He throws the rope and misses. Quickly coiling the rope while still chasing at full speed, he readies for another try. This time, he lassoes a different horse. The caught horse is wildly pulling and bucking, confusion reflecting from his wild eyes as the rest of his herd and the life he knows escape through the snow. Eventually, the rest of us

"I FEEL A SPIRITUAL CALMNESS...IN A WORLD THAT HOPEFULLY WILL CONTINUE TO RESONATE WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE HORSE."



Each family on the reservation is allowed to add three wild horses a year to their herd, but they have to catch them first.

catch up with Marchand, all celebrating the success.

One of the traditions of the hunt is for the youngest "brave" to be the first to ride the wild horse. It is only a matter of seconds before he is bucked off. As a guest, I am also allowed to ride. Promptly, I am airborne, landing softly in the deep snow.

At Marchand's pasture, it's intriguing to see how his herd interacts with the wild horse. The domestic horses visit the wild horse one at a time. For three days, the wild horse does not eat, as he is not used to being fed. Slowly he comes to terms with the new environment and joins the new herd.

Eventually the horse will be broken, and if strong enough, trained for the Suicide Race.

It's difficult to imagine that wild horses still roam free in the mass consumer society of America. I was intrigued to see this tribe proudly protective of their heritage and culture, keeping the traditional ways of life alive. After spending a few days with Marchand and his wife, Codi, and their family and friends, I feel a spiritual calmness in tune with the rich nature on the reservation, a world that hopefully will continue to resonate with the spirit of the horse. **NI**