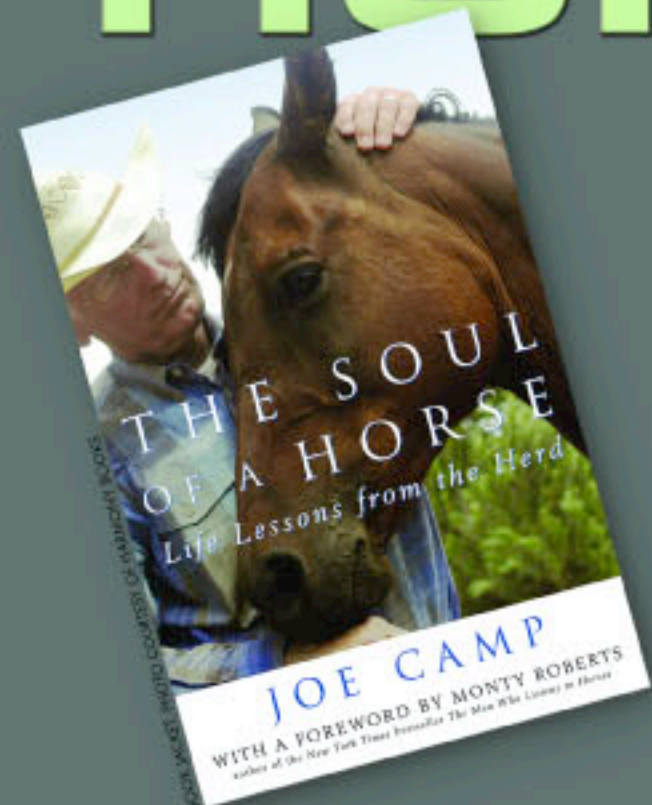


BY DEBBIE L. SKLAR

Benji's creator

TALKS HORSES



"...The man is a natural when it comes to understanding how animals tick and a genius at telling us their story. 'The Soul of a Horse' is a must-read for those who love animals of any species."

For years, Joe Camp has been known as the creator of the popular "Benji" movies but that's all changing. These days, Joe, 69, has a best-selling book called "The Soul of a Horse: Life Lessons from the Herd" (Harmony Books) that is already on its second printing - and it was just released in April. As the creator of the beloved Benji series, Joe has spent most of his life luring us into the heart and soul of a floppy-eared dog, but now in this engaging, emotional, and often humorous story, he deftly lures us into the heart and soul of a horse.

"Written for everyone who has ever loved a horse or even loved the idea of loving a horse, this memoir leads us on a riveting voyage of discovery as Joe and his wife, Kathleen, navigate uncharted, often politically incorrect territory on their way to discovering an astonishing truth that will change traditional thinking about horses forever."

It all began when Joe received a surprise birthday gift from Kathleen. As complete neophytes, Joe and Kathleen were without a clue as to what horses needed or wanted, but they plunged head first into this new world and the result is "The Soul of a Horse: Life Lessons from the Herd."

"The parallel journeys of a fabled herd in the wild and a wide-eyed couple thrust into the enigmatic world of horses are blended into a riveting expedition of discovery about relationships, choices, trust, and love - one that will change traditional thinking about horses forever," according to Joe's camp.

Joe has long been considered an animal lover and an advocate for increasing awareness of animal issues including adoptions and the proper care of horses, as seen on the cover of this new book with "Cash" one of his herd. Cash was adopted from the Animal Rescue League.

Joe also works with children's charities, is a film writer, producer, director, author, public speaker, and of course, the creator of canine superstar, "Benji."

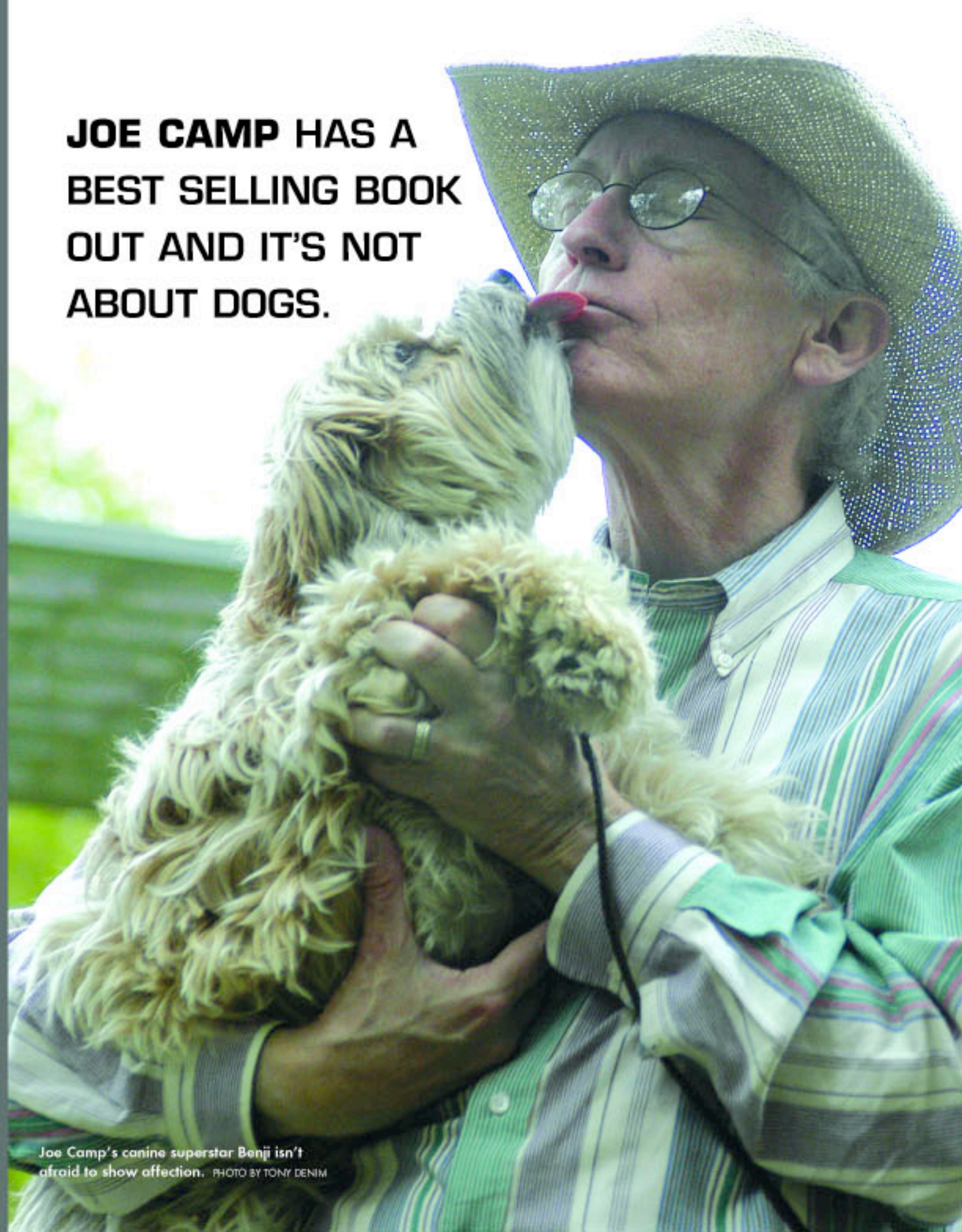
He has said that he believes that anything is possible if you work hard enough and have faith in yourself. And he should know. Joe encountered many naysayers when he was first working on the "Benji" concept.

Industry "experts" told him not to bother with the original "Benji" film; that it wouldn't work. He proved them wrong, and now he's at it again with his new book.

Joe wrote, produced, and directed seven theatrical motion pictures (including all of the "Benji" movies), which cumulatively grossed well over the equivalent of \$600 million in today's dollars, making him one of the most successful independent filmmakers of all time, according to his bio.

Joe has written three novels from his own screenplays, the inspirational nonfiction book "Benji & Me," several children's books and he has also produced, direct-

JOE CAMP HAS A BEST SELLING BOOK OUT AND IT'S NOT ABOUT DOGS.



Joe Camp's canine superstar Benji isn't afraid to show affection. PHOTO BY TONY DENIM

JOE CAMP

ed and written four network television specials and a series.

To produce the original "Benji" movie, Joe raised the money from private sources. When the film was completed, it was turned down by every major film distributor in Hollywood.

Joe and his partner then formed their own distribution company and released the picture worldwide. In spite of the many obstacles, Variety reported that the picture was the third highest grossing movie of the year. The fifth "Benji" movie, "Benji Off the Leash," was released in 2004 and is available on DVD.

His new book is poised to enjoy success as well. Monty Roberts, author of the New York Times bestseller "The Man Who Listens to Horses," said, "Imagine how inadequate it makes me feel to realize how recently Joe came into horses. The man is a natural when it comes to understanding how animals tick and a genius at telling us their story. "The Soul of a Horse" is a must-read for those who love animals of any species."

When he isn't busy with his horses or writing or thinking about his next film, Joe speaks to families, churches, corporations, civic and philanthropic organizations, pet adoption and equine groups, as well as students, inspiring everyone within earshot to reach beyond any conceived perception of his or her limitations. He spells out the choices that will create success.

Joe and Kathleen, along with their three kids, five horses, and four dogs (including Benji), as well as two cats, reside on a five-acre hilltop in Valley Center, north of San Diego.

He recently spoke to Image Magazine about his newest and latest venture, "The Soul of a Horse: Life Lessons from the Herd."

Image: What's the biggest difference between your latest book and the Benji franchise?

JOE: In many ways, no difference at all. Both are trying to connect with an animal ... To have a relationship ... To communicate ... To not dominate. The difference is how that is accomplished.

Image: There are thousands of horse books on the market. Why did you write another one?

JOE: I didn't actually. I mean, yes, of course, it has to do with horses, but first and foremost, it's a story. I've spent most of my life telling stories, most of them involving animals. And I found this one particularly fascinating. Two complete novices - my wife and I - leaping into this enigmatic world of horses literally without a clue. The mistakes, the fear, the fascination, and the frustration with some of the answers we were getting. And ultimately, the discovery that something was very wrong in this world of horses. Imagine a couple of newcomers wrestling with the notion that either we were completely nuts or that we had truly stumbled upon

something that was very wrong. That's where the book got started. It's a story about the journey.

Image: How did you become interested in horses?

JOE: I don't really know; it's always been there. Just latent. The first book, I remember as a kid was "Misty of Chincoteague"

Image: What is the most valuable lesson you have learned from a horse?

JOE: That a relationship begins and nourishes when you are working from their end of the lead rope. And that lesson applies to all relationships - horse, human or otherwise.

Image: How many horses do you own and do you have a favorite?

JOE: Five at the moment, I once had seven. Yes, the horse on the cover of the book, Cash, is my favorite. I haven't ridden regularly since promotion on the book began. We like to trail ride but I haven't done much lately. But, then, it's really not just about the riding. We're with the horses at least twice a day, every day at feeding time and in the pasture.

Image: Do you have another in the works?

JOE: I would like to do another one, but I guess that relies on how well this one does. It's in the second printing after only three months, so that's a good sign.

Image: If you could be a horse, what would you be called? Where would you like to be?

JOE: I wouldn't care what as long as I was called. I'd like to be with me ... I'd know I would be treated well.

Image: Where do you get your inspiration in general? What drives you?

JOE: Passion; I care about things.

Image: Are there other "Benji" movies in the works or have America's movie values changed? Is there still a need/want for family movies in your opinion?

JOE: Oh, there's definitely a need ... But a want? I'm not so sure. Wants today tend to circulate around sex, violence and special effects. There might be one more "Benji" movie, made for DVD with wild horses.

Image: What makes this book different than "The Horse Whisperer" and what are your thoughts on the movie version with Robert Redford? What were your thoughts?

JOE: It was a good movie. I didn't care for dropping the horse on the ground to "force" it to listen - that wasn't necessary. That was done for dramatic impact. The real way to do that is too simple and easy (and sometimes, too time consuming) to make a good scene in a movie.

Image: What should we know about you that we may not or have never read?

JOE: Perhaps that my driving goal is to leave this planet better than I found it. Why else are we here?

Image: Tell us about your home.

JOE: It's 5 acres and much of it unusable because it's on a steep rocky hill.

Image: How do you give back to the community?

JOE: I'm on the board of trustees at the Piney Woods School in Mississippi - a historically black boarding school sending at-risk kids off to the best schools in the country. And the Helen Woodward Animal Center in Rancho Santa Fe, California, one of the finest examples of how an animal shelter and education center should be run.

Image: What do you hope the main message will be that readers take away after reading "The Soul of a Horse: Life Lessons from the Herd."

JOE: That you can live your life every day, go to work, tend the kids, mow the grass, and still make a positive difference on this planet at the same time. That your soul prospers from sharing, caring, relating and fulfilling. That nothing can make you feel better than doing something good for another being. Not cars. Not houses. Not face-lifts. Not blue ribbons or trophies. And there is nothing more important in life than love. Not money. Not status. Not winning. It is the synthesis of this book, and why it came into being.

And you should always give the choice of choice. To your horse, or your employee, or your friend, or your loved ones. Care enough to want them to be healthy and happy. It will come back a hundredfold. And always question everything. Be your own expert. Gather information and make decisions based upon knowledge and wisdom, not hearsay. Know that if something doesn't seem logical, it probably isn't. If it doesn't make sense, it's probably not right. **IM**