

RIDE MAGAZINE INTERVIEW, MAY 2004

1. How did you get started in the business?

Well, the joke is on me. For so many years I was trying not to make my business 'horses' and yet they have been my business for over 35 years. I guess I wasn't satisfied with being a traditional horse trainer. I found early on that I could train the horse to refinement, but when I turned the horse back to the owner they would have problems with the horse. Teaching the rider proper use of tools and techniques had limited success as well. I found that the horse reflected the rider's internal state of mind, their self-confidence (or lack of it) and their self-limiting perceptions. For example, if the rider lacked self-confidence, the horse would lose respect for them.

So, I began to train the rider how to train their horse. Training horse and rider together has proven to have long-term success and the rider gets to feel the joy that comes with accomplishing their goals with their horses.

I took several self-development courses to get more comfortable with working with the human aspect of training, and began incorporating what I was learning into my horse/human training. The results were so powerful that I started offering public programs in Leadership & Horses™. I use the term, leadership as a reference point for self-responsibility. I continue to be profoundly awestruck by the horses keen reflection of the human and how it relates directly to the rest of their life.

Working with the whole horse (mind/body/spirit) and that of their rider propelled me deeper into my work. I had finally found a game worth playing and a new way to think about the art of horsemanship.

Anyway, I can't not work with horses: it's not possible for me in this lifetime. I guess I finally got clear about that.

2. Who had the greatest influence on your riding and training?

The horses themselves had the greatest influence on me. I learned early on that each horse is a unique individual, just like people are. Some horses learn better with an english technique while others learn better with a western technique, or a combination of both. I learned that it is hard to have 'set rules' about how to work with horses since they each have various personalities, breeding and environmental circumstances.

Growing up, I worked at a variety of english and western stables. At each stable there was an implied, "This is the way you work with horses and if you don't do it 'this way' you don't know anything about horses." Wanting to know everything about horses, I remained open and learned many different

techniques and tools for training horses. I began to ponder whether the methods I had already learned elsewhere weren't just as effective as the new methods I was being introduced to. I began to prefer some methods over others, because they were consistently more effective.

I observed many masterful horsemen and women who could get their horses to do what they wanted, when they wanted, but the horse was not always a full participant. To have a horse move around correctly, but with an attitude that was resigned, agitated or depressed, didn't inspire me. On the other hand, an impassioned horse that loves his work continues to capture my attention. I realized that I didn't want to just move a horse around by subordination—I wanted to engage the horse in a win-win relationship.

My students also have had a tremendous impact on me. Trying to find words for how the rider needs to attend to the 'who they are' behind their ropes, reins and saddle, has been challenging. In my quest, I attended many clinician's programs, most of which still focus on proper use of tools and techniques. I totally get why, because it is an entirely different issue to deal with the rider's mind/body/spirit. It takes a different kind of competency than training horses. Perhaps that is what led me to Somatics (the study of the whole self: mind/body/spirit) which taught me how to work with the 'people' part.

3. What is the mission of your business?

I am a commitment to bring people to horses and horses to people and to encourage a healthy relationship between the two. Through 1-on-1 and group programs I encourage both the horse and human to honor their unique gifts and help them find the right place to contribute the best parts of themselves. I believe that horses have an amazing ability to heal the human psyche and connect people back to the natural world.

4. What do you consider to be your greatest success?

I think my greatest success has been creating the work that I do. That I continued to pursue a new way of approaching horsemanship, despite other people's disbelief, has been huge for me.

And finishing my first book has been significant. It is due out in June of this year.

5. How would you describe your style of training?

When I am just training the horse and rider together (English or western, it doesn't matter which discipline), I train the rider to be self-responsible and to work from the inside- out. I teach the rider how to think about what is working and not working with their horse, so that they can learn to find their own solutions. I teach them why, when and how to use certain tools and techniques; the underlying principles about how they work. I also teach the

rider how to understand the horse's perspective, to resist the temptation to humanize the horse.

6. What does Intuitive Horsemanship mean to you?

Intuitive Horsemanship™ means focusing on the horse-rider relationship from a 'feeling' perspective rather than a 'knowing' perspective. In a sense it takes natural horsemanship one-step further. The more we apply our intellect and 'knowingness' to horses, the further away they get, emotionally and spirit-wise. By working from the inside-out, and learning the difference between subtle cues and exaggerated tools, the rider can learn to embody the confidence, reliability and consistency that horses are looking for.

It is important to learn how to communicate with horses on their terms; they perceive the world from an intuitive or sensate perspective. They listen to body language and what is not spoken. If the rider can learn how to listen and direct themselves from this place, they will find that 'harmony' that we all seek with horses.

The most effective way to learn universal horsemanship principles is to become a student of the horse. Our job is to lead them effectively, their job is to tell us when we are being effective and when we are missing the point. Yes, learning this way sometimes takes longer than applying a whip (or carrot stick), but the equestrian learns a universal way of working with horses that they can apply to any horse in any situation. The equestrian learns to respect the horse as a somatic being, a unique mind/body/spirit.

In Intuitive Horsemanship™ I draw the distinction that the human may guide the direction or purpose of the team, but the horse guides the emotional/spiritual terrain. This eventually leads us into a whole new world where the horse becomes the teacher/healer.

7. Explain a little about the EGE Certification Program.

Equine Guided Education is a rapidly expanding field in which the horse acts as a 'guide' into human growth and learning. I offer a certification program to teach the Equine Guided Educator how to create a supportive environment for clients to learn about themselves and develop skills relevant to the life they say they want to create.

Some people are familiar with Equine experiential learning or equine assisted psychotherapy. Equine Guided Education encompasses this type of work. The horse becomes more than an assistant, he literally 'guides' the student into their inner beliefs and possibilities about life.

The combination of the human educator (coach, therapist, educator) and the equine guide offers unique, powerful, experiential exercises geared towards developing self-knowledge and self-responsibility. Some common topics of exploration include:

- o Identify and refine one's ambitions and goals for the future,
- o Enhance communication and relationship skills,
- Encourage self-confidence and self-esteem,
- Develop trust and respect for self and others.

8. What other services does Strozzi Ranch offer?

Strozzi Ranch offers a year round array of equine activities including:

- Leadership & Horses™
- Intuitive Horsemanship™
- Equine Guided Education Certification Program
- Training for horse & rider
- Equine purchase & facility consultation
- Colt starting
- Lessons for kids & adults
- Problem horses welcome
- Horse Herd Observation

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