Soft Eyes: More than a tool – A state of mind and body!
by Eva Tirstrup, Level II, Norrebro, Denmark

When you direct your soft eyes inward, you can start to feel. You can feel your own body and the movements of your horse, and how that energy moves through you. This opens your mind to the idea of softness. Through your soft eyes, you can access the tools you need to work with, and understand how the connection between your mind/body and your horse should feel.

Exercise – Soft eyes to soft body
First, find your soft eyes. Now, allow the muscles around your eyes to relax and melt. How does this feel? Now, try to let that feeling spread slowly to the rest of your face, your scalp, your neck and down your spine. Let it spread through your centre to your hip joints, down your thighs, over your knees and down your shins, into your ankles. Let that feeling fill your feet and your toes. Last, let it fill your head-and-neck joint, your tongue and the joint of your jaw. If you lose the feeling, return to your soft eyes and memorize it once more.

What can we use this exercise for? We can use it to create the kind of softness we want to feel in our body. But even more important, we want the awareness of that softness. We also learn to focus. Tension and miscommunication are often a result of a loss of focus. Having a simple tool to help you stay focused and aware is important to keeping communication soft and clear.

Remember, soft, inward-directed eyes can turn into hard, inward-directed eyes if we “stare” at an area of tension or blocked energy. Remember that even as you look inward, you can still access your peripheral vision.

Replace tension with soft focus
When your thinking makes the transition from focusing only on what you are doing to combining correct riding technique, dressage exercises and two-way communication with the horse, tension and a blockage of energy often occur. This is normal. Time and practice can change that. When we practice, however, we can help ourselves by training in specific ways.

One way could be like this...

Exercise – Create soft focus
Find and release while riding. Use the first exercise – soft eyes to soft body – to make your body soft, and feel how your body moves with your horse. Then let your soft eyes flow through your body. When you sense a place where you want to be softer, put your soft eyes in that place (here is where muscle memory comes in handy).

For example, you may notice that when you let your soft eyes flow through your body, your elbow may tend to become tense. You can put soft eyes in your elbow and feel how it starts to open up, release and move again. After listening to the horse’s response, you can try to feel once again whether your elbow stays soft, and whether the joints around it benefit from soft eyes by releasing with your soft elbow. Again, if you lose your focus on the feeling, let your awareness return to your eyes and renew the muscle memory.

When you notice any area of your mind/body connection where you need maximum focus and softness, and where you would like to soften and release while riding, try riding while maintaining the idea of creating soft focus through the use of themes. Like this...

Have a theme
A theme is a habit or tendency you would like to change. For example, from the last exercise, a theme would be the stiff elbow we want to soften. It can be whatever you choose. You can stay focused by choosing only one theme at a time. In this way, you can change bad habits more quickly. How long you stay with the same theme is up to you. In general, if you have a release and/or a positive change, it’s a good idea to switch to a new theme. Remember, you can (and should) always go back to the theme, to ensure you repeat it enough to change the habit.

Have working tasks
When your theme is clear, you can add a working task – for example, a dressage exercise you are working on. It’s a good idea to start with easier tasks, so you can familiarize yourself with this concept. You can simply change the tasks within the theme until you decide to switch themes. In this way, you can keep riding and communicating, while continuing to focus on yourself.

Less is always more! So be patient and resist the temptation to “stare” at a particular theme. Let your soft eyes guide the release through your mind and body by creating soft focus. Have fun!
President’s Letter

Greetings to all of you from your new Centered Riding President. This is actually my second time as President (what was I thinking?!). I was president for the years 2006 and 2007. At that time, Centered Riding had between 300-400 members. We now have close to 1,000 members! That certainly says something about the principles and teachings of Centered Riding – it works!

The last half of 2013 was a difficult time for the Centered Riding Board of Trustees (BOT) and our commitment to continue to advance Centered Riding. Moving forward, our plans include the addition of a web-based membership software (thanks to yourmembership.com), and a new website we hope will be easier to navigate and understand. The potential applications of this software include the ability to add multiple pages and groups.

My vision is, eventually, for individual countries to have a page within the overall Centered Riding website. That page could contain information and news for those members in their own language. An administrator will be in charge of that page and will monitor its content. So start thinking about whether you or someone you know might like to volunteer for that job. My goal is to unite all Centered Riding members from around the world in one place. That way, anyone in the world can find us.

The new website will also streamline the way we manage our membership records. It is electronically based, so we will save considerable funds by no longer having to deal with paper and hardcopy mailings, which in the past, have cost up to $7,000. It is costly to send correspondence via snail mail to our European members, and frankly, it is also very inefficient and time consuming.

I am very excited about this and would like to thank our Website Committee for their time and energy on this very important project. The Website Committee members are: Peggy Brown, Kathy Culler, Gail Field, Vivie Fros, Susan Harris, and me. These women deserve a big round of applause for taking on this huge project!

We hope to launch the site by the end of March. As you familiarize yourself with the site, please let us know if you have questions or suggestions.

As always, feel free to contact me or any other board member with questions or comments. We were elected to act in the best interests of Centered Riding and its members. In part, we are all responsible for keeping Sally Swift’s teachings alive and for spreading the word, simply because Centered Riding works, and is good for both riders and the horses.

Respectfully,
Deb Moynihan

Centered Riding at the Global Dressage Forum North America 2014

The second annual Global Dressage Forum North America (GDFNA) was an amazing educational event, held in Wellington, Fla., Feb. 15 and 16. You can check out the website at http://www.globaldressageforumna.com/event-program/. The Forum’s main theme was awareness in riding and training, and the list of presenters read like a “who’s who” of dressage.

I was honored to be invited to give a presentation on Centered Riding. A huge video screen made it easy for everyone to see. Approximately 600 dressage enthusiasts, riders and trainers filled the stands.

With about 40 minutes for my presentation, I focused on centering and its effects on the horse. Using exercises and audience participation, I introduced Soft Eyes, Breathing and Building Blocks (Balance). Then I discussed centering and led the audience through more exercises. Jennifer Wall, whom I met just prior to the GDFNA, assisted me as I demonstrated unbendable arm and other centering exercises. With no prior knowledge of Centered Riding, she was able to give the audience unrehearsed feedback.

On video, my long-time student Stephanie Jones, Level II, demonstrated using and losing her center, and its effect on gaits, transitions, turns and bending. Many people were impressed, as she rode with reins in one hand on her young horse.

Afterwards, several people who had ridden with Sally Swift in the past said how happy they were to see her work being recognized at the Forum. Others commented they were amazed at how centering affects the horse.

Prior to the GDFNA, several presenters gave clinics at the same facility. With five different rings running simultaneously, I found it was hard to decide which to watch! In the end, I attended lessons by Stephen Clarke, Christoph Hess, Bo Jenna, and Conrad Schumacher.

I also reconnected with old friends, including Centered Riding Senior Instructor (Emeritus) Ellie Jensen, who now winters in the area. Ellie took me to Betsy Steiner’s winter location in Wellington. I watched Betsy teach and then we had a nice chat. What an educational few days it was!

About the Global Dressage Forum North America

The Global Dressage Forum North America (GDFNA) is North America’s leading educational platform for the international dressage world. Dressage training techniques for the development of horse and rider are analyzed and presented in both practical and theoretical sessions. The world’s top trainers, judges and officials who have a world wide impact on the development of dressage horses and riders are presented with the latest developments in horse management, veterinary practices as well as sports science educators, are also on stage.

Dressage trainers, riders, officials and serious dressage enthusiasts from around the globe gather at this annual educational festival that features the world’s top dressage educators presenting training demonstrations by international and Olympic champions. By demonstrating with horses and pupils or they themselves riding and lecturing, this unique event allows an in-depth insight into what makes their methods so successful.

Respected judges and equine specialists from all over the world also convene at the Forum to evaluate and discuss or lecture with riders and trainers and all participants. The intention of the GDFNA is to provide a medium through which a common dressage language and philosophy can be maintained and spread globally for the good of our horses in training.

As the world’s foremost independent annual global convention, the GDFNA is unique in itself, and, in its goal to assist in the promotion of dressage education for the further development of dressage horses and riders.

Newsletter reading suggestions from Lotta Mansson-Soderstrom

Translating is very time consuming, as you know, and so many of us have so much to do. My solution for Sweden has been such that I translate all papers that have to do with membership fees etc. And when it comes to Centered Riding News, then we read it together at our Centered Riding colleague meetings, for the few of our colleagues that do not read English.
Centered Riding Board of Trustees (BOT) Meeting Minutes Wed., Jan. 8, 2014

New president Deb Moynihan welcomed the new and returning Board of Trustees (BOT) members. She provided an update on an unemployment benefits claim filed by the past contractor, for which Centered Riding Inc. has had to engage the services of an attorney. Three Level IVs represented Centered Riding Inc. at a hearing concerning the claim, held in December in Pennsylvania. Three Level IVs represented Centered Riding Inc. at a hearing concerning the claim, held in December in Pennsylvania.

The Grievance Committee was happy to report no actions were required.

The Communications Committee has developed a draft Centered Riding Communications Policy, to be finalized in the future. Work on the Centered Riding Policies and Procedures (P&P) document continues.

The Long-Range Planning Committee looks at the future of Centered Riding, and will become the search committee to hire a new permanent administrator. If anyone has experience in human resources, personnel, hiring, etc., please advise us, as we need people with those skills. This Committee includes: Peggy Brown, Carol Parker, Deb Moynihan (chair) and Mary Trafford.

There will be no Symposium in 2014. A committee is working on a possible Centered Riding Symposium, to be held in 2015 in the Netherlands. Regional groups, however, are encouraged to organize local educational activities.

The Centered Riding Nominating Committee is reminding the membership that nominations are now open for positions on the 2015 Centered Riding Board. Participation on the board is a great way for members to contribute their time and talent to Centered Riding. There are two positions open this year. Please send your nominations to Annelie Andersson-Beck, Nominating Committee Chairman at AandB143@aol.com.
Dear Centered Riding Colleagues,
An inaugural Centered Riding European meeting, involving close to 20 Level IIIs, Level IVs and liaison, was held in late 2013.
We would like to share the minutes of this meeting.
Participants were:
Austria: Judith Kremser, Klaus Möller, Rosi Schreiber-Jetzinger.
England: Lisa Pritchard.
Finland: Ursula Turtiainen.
Germany: Stephanie Hornung, Ludwig-Lysan Massmann.
Ireland: Ursula Schweiger.
The Netherlands: Margreet Bouwmeester, Nelleke Deen, Vanda Oosterhuis.
Scotland: Joanne Forster.
Spain: Paula Ohlin.
Sweden: Lotta Månsson-Söderström.
Switzerland: Christa Müller.
Lotta Månsson-Söderström chaired the meeting. Judith Kremser recorded the minutes. The meeting began with participants providing short presentations on the status of Centered Riding in their respective home countries.
Possible Symposium 2015 dates (depending on the Global Dressage Forum) are: Nov. 6 to 8, or Nov. 13 to 15, 2015, but no official decision has been made. The organizing committee includes members from Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands.
A European group and contact list was established, consisting of the Level IVs, Level IIIs and Centered Riding liaisons in Europe. The group will meet every year, on the last weekend in November. When there is a symposium in Europe, the group will meet at the symposium. The meeting location will change each year. The meeting will be held over two days, with one day open to all Centered Riding members, with activities and guest speakers. A small fee will be charged.
The group will be a contact point for the Centered Riding community in all countries, including Europe, and with the Centered Riding Board of Trustees in the U.S.A., Canada and Europe. The group will consider long-term strategies for Centered Riding Europe and how to advance Centered Riding in the best ways possible.
The group discussed the possibility of increasing the requirements for individuals who want to take the Level I Instructor Course. Margreet presented a voluntary, 28-day pre-education program, which she developed with other equine professionals in 2010. The group suggested the organizers of Centered Riding Open Clinics should ask participants in advance if they plan to take the Level I Instructor Course. This will alert Level III clinicians who are teaching Open Clinics to pay attention to the riding skills and general aptitude of those participants. The Level III clinician can then recommend that the person attend a Level I clinic, by including a note on the Centered Riding certificate of participation or by advising her/him as to what areas she/he must work further. This goal is to increase the quality of instructors.
The group all agreed we need more Level III instructors. There is a high demand for Centered Riding Open Clinics in Europe. Level IV clinicians in Europe are looking into how make the evaluation system more efficient. Judith Kremser informed the group on how successful efforts in Austria to make Centered Riding a part of the Austrian Riding Association. The group discussed how to do to similar work in their own home countries. The group is now working to produce information about Centered Riding in different languages for the Centered Riding website.

Original minutes taken by: Judith Kremser
Minutes edited by: Mary Trafford, Centered Riding Secretary
Welcome to the new Publication Chairperson
by Sam Morrison, Level IV, Greene, Maine

I, Sam, will be stepping down from the chairman position but will remain on the Publications Committee. It has been a distinct pleasure corresponding with you all as friends and colleagues.

I would like to introduce the new chairperson, Carrie Scidmore, Level I instructor who lives in Brunswick, Maine.

In her own words:

Like many horse people, horses have been my life-long passion. As a toddler, I rode my brother’s and my rocking horses until they broke down, and one of my earliest memories is of sitting in front of my mother in the saddle on trails. The first “real” horse book I bought for myself was “Centered Riding”, so although I was aware of its concepts, a few bad falls from jumping left me a nervous rider. It was suggested I try to take some lessons from Sam Morrison. I did, and I was absolutely delighted to find that Centered Riding wasn’t just a book, it’s a paradigm shift away from conventional, often coercive, methods to achieve harmony between horse and rider. I work mainly with therapeutic riders, but I love working with riders of all experience levels. I currently have a wonderful young horse with the gift of making everyone he meets his best friend, several exotic animals (an almost 20-year-old macaw we hand-raised, a Bengal cross cat, and a few esoteric marine fish), and a husband.

Please send all future correspondence, reports, articles and news items to me at carrie@scidmore.com

Sally Swift Scholarship Funds

Scholarships are available for individuals and organizers to help finance Centered Riding activities.

Type of Grants

- New Instructor Grants - $200
- Organizer grants - $350 for 7 day instructor course, and $200 for a 4 day update course
- Instructor Update - $200
- Symposium grants – $200

Deadlines for all applications are:

- For clinics held in January, February or March – apply by Dec. 1
- For clinics held in April, May or June – apply by March 1
- For clinics held in July, August or September – apply by June 1
- For clinics held in October, November or December – apply by Sept. 1

Please note that Organizer Grant applications must be sent in 90 days in advance of the clinic. Also, that Symposium Grant applications must be sent in 60 days in advance of the activity.

Did you hear the news? Coming soon to a computer near you!

Centered Riding is finally coming into the 21st century! The Centered Riding Board of Trustees has voted to purchase a new, web-based membership software. The company is www.yourmembership.com.

The New England Dressage Association (NEDA), a United States Dressage Federation (USDF) organization, used the same company to redesign its website. You can view the results at www.neda.org, and browse the NEDA site to get a feel for what’s in store for Centered Riding.

The new website will have many applications, uses, and be much easier to navigate. For example, each instructor will have their own page, which they can update themselves and include thier biography, photographs, and more, all for free.

In the future, we hope that each country will have its own page(s), in their native language, directly attached to the Centered Riding website. We will be seeking volunteer administrators to help develop the country sites.

The new website will also be connected to Google Translate (translate.google.com). While Google Translate cannot provide the same quality of translation services as a professional translator, it can give site visitors a basic idea of who we are and what we do.

We are seeking your input and suggestions on what you would like to see on the new site. For example, we are looking for pictures for the front-page slideshow. Send pictures you would like to share, particularly of Sally Swift, to Susan Harris at sueharris46@yahoo.com.

The Website Committee has been hard at work developing the new site and moving content from the old site. This is a huge undertaking, so please be patient! Unfortunately, the old site has too many articles to move to the new site. We need to decide which can be moved.

If you have a favorite article you think should be carried over onto the new site, please email Deb Moynihan at dmoynihan@snet.net.

As we go forward and learn more about what this new site can do, we will keep you informed. Also watch for our new clothing vendor coming soon!

Sensitive Back by Dr Bruce Indek, DC AVCA
Equine Chiropractor, South Weymouth, Mass

Have you ever brushed your horse to notice that their back is sensitive in the area where the saddle ends? Some English saddles have very narrow gullets that point. This area is called the thoraco-lumbar region. It is where the thoracic and lumbar spine meet. This region is a transition point in the way that the spinal joints are oriented and is prone to injury. The ribs also end at this area so there is even less support for the lumbar spine.

Check your saddle gullet for a nice evenly spaced gullet from pommel to back. Be sure the saddle pads do not ride on the back passed the point where the ribs end.

Have your chiropractor check for subluxations and muscle strain, and have yourself checked as well. You may be subluxated and thus causing abnormal pressure on your pelvis.

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Anatomy in Motion™ The Visible Horse
When I asked Sally Swift why she wrote her second book, she responded, “I had 16 more years of learning to share.” The Centered Riding community continues to embrace this attitude -- an eagerness to learn and a desire to share new ideas.

So this autumn and winter I have been exploring centered riding through the disciplines of ashtanga yoga and dressage training. The yoga demands practicing body awareness, as well as the flexibility and strength of the athlete. There is a strong mental component to it. Classes often begin with a request to set an intention for one’s practice (remember how the horse works better if we have “clear intent?”). We breathe together, deeply, slowly, in unison. As we begin to move, the practice asks us to be precise in our visual focus--a “dritti”—through each posture. It is a way to help keep the mental awareness on the body’s practice, to be aware of what is happening within the body as well as without, without closing the eyes. Sally might call it soft eyes.

This particular type of yoga aligns movement with breath. We know when to move from one posture to another by the number of breaths taken, not by counting. Sally used to remind us to begin transitions with a breath. She suggested breathing to and through your center. Breath is the power supporting and creating movement on the horse and on the mat.

Instead of a center, ashtanga yoga refers to the “bandhas” -- two internal energy gates located in the center of the pelvis -- keeping them engaged throughout the practice time on the mat. No matter what pretzel or extension the practice asks for we are to balance from our bandhas, breathe freely and fully regularly, and maintain soft eyes. It often feels like centered riding--on a mat!

So, why practice yoga? Well, many cannot get on a horse more than once a week -- or not at all during the winter! So, practice the skills you need for riding at a yoga class. I have found that once I’ve located and practiced using the bandhas to help balance in the boat pose or stork pose (go to a class and find out what they are!), for example, it’s easier to find and use my center as I ask for an upward transition or a half halt.

The bands and the center involve the inner structure that we cannot see with our eyes, which is why visual metaphors can be so helpful. Sally’s bottom-weighted doll image helps. No matter where we push on it, it always re-balances uprightly. A developed, grounded center is so secure that the rest of the body stays aligned and balanced, without tension. This is a great way to feel!

A stable center is irreplaceable on the horse. My dressage lessons are re-emphasizing this. The invisible aids will not happen without the center working. I’ve watched so many stiff and locked positions on riders (including videos of myself!) that I understand the value of Sally’s focus on release and lengthening, riding the bones, not forcing the work with muscles. I have discovered that I can’t consistently release that tension—which is really use of unneeded muscles—unless I have an engaged core to balance upon. Something needs to hold me up. It is a naturally aligning spine and the center’s postural muscles we use to sit up straight that help us ride the horse without straining. Try practicing sitting without depending on the back of chair—or putting elbows on a desk! It’s amazing how hard that can become after a few minutes.

An engaged center when we are on a horse allows thighs to release and lengthen, shoulders to open and widen. Then we can ride! I’m understanding these concepts more thoroughly—and becoming stronger -- as I practice engaging the bandhas in yoga postures.

Even if you are blessed with access to a horse every day, cross-training at a yoga class can help. It can provide a safe place to experiment and discover how the body works effectively. It simplifies what to focus on and saves the horse from the discomfort of mistakes on her back. On his website, under the title of job occupation, a Canadian equestrian, a London 2012 Olympian, described himself as “athlete.” Not rider. To ride well on a horse, we all need to be athletes. Learning how to use the body better through centered riding classes and yoga can help us practice this goal.

Does it have to be yoga? No, and not all yoga classes are alike either. Look for a teacher that understands how the body works well and communicates that knowledge effectively, without judgment. Take that class, whether it’s yoga, martial arts, or a drama movement class based on the Alexander Technique.

So I’m off to my yoga class and then onward to my horse to practice with her, patiently, breathing with movement, an engaged center, and awareness that looks within as well as without. Happy practicing!
Finding Your Teaching Voice

by Peggy Brown, Level IV

Your voice is a very special part of who you are as an individual and as a teacher. Your voice and your words are one of the most important ways of teaching and communicating with your students. What kind of voice do you have? Is it loud or soft, high pitched or low pitched, fast or slow, quiet or bossy, grating or clear?

Your voice indicates three things about you as an individual and as a teacher: your personality, your passion, and the strength of what I will call your vocal physique.

Your personality often comes through in your voice as you share yourself and your own unique gifts with your audience, it reveals much about who you are as an individual and cannot be hidden or masked. It can be strengthened or improved but will always be uniquely you; so embrace who you are and what you have to teach!

Your passion is the content and the intent of the information you would like to share with others. I believe that we all are passionate about our love of horses and passionate about what we teach. When you are passionate about what you teach you will communicate to your audience that you are sincere and genuine, that you are authentic and the real deal. If you voice lacks passion your power will diminish and your intention will become less effective and less clear, people won't really believe you.

Your vocal physique indicates the strength of your voice and your ability to project and resonate your words. Unfortunately if people complain that they have trouble hearing you, speaking louder will not necessarily give you a more powerful voice. Often in trying to speak louder teachers raise the pitch of their voice and shriek or screech rather than speak. You must learn to modulate your breathing, your resonance and mindfully project your sound in order to have a clear voice and a pitch pleasing to both humans and horses.

Centered Riding instructors can experience much through the teaching of F.M. Alexander who stood in front of a mirror and discovered how posture and correct breathing affected the tone and projection of his voice. The Alexander “Whispered Ahhh” exercise is a good one to experiment with. Balance your head, free your neck and whisper “ahhhhhhhhhh...” listen to and also feel the sound as you make it. Now whisper “ahhhhhhh...” and slowly look up and down with your head and notice how the sound changes and how it feels to make that sound. Push your head too far forward or pull it backwards stiffly or tilt it off to the side and see what happens to the sound? Can you find a balance of the head, neck and body that allows you to make the most clear and effortless “ahhhhhhh.......”? This balance will be the spot from which you can project you voice clearly and also with the least effort.

Resonance is almost a vibration or buzzing feeling of the voice. High sounds often come from the head and throat while deep sounds come from the chest area. Human sound can also resonate in the face or what might be called the mask. This mask area can create clear sound, no matter how loud or soft. Try this experiment. Say Mmmmmm.... and feel the vibration, the buzz in your face. Now say Mmmmmmm... one, Mmmmmm...two, Mmmmmm...three and so on. Notice if the words one, two and three sound different after the Mmmmmm... sound. Try the Mmmmmm... sound before other words and notice how the words both sound and feel.

Resonators might be thought of as the “speakers in your head”. As the sound comes from your vocal cords it resonates through the head, the throat, as well as the chest. Here’s another exercise to try: hold your nose and say “Many mighty men making much money in the moonshine” with as much force as you can muster. Now let go of your nose and immediately say the phrase again. What do you notice?

To have force and projection in your voice you will need good deep diaphragmatic breathing. Take deep breaths down into your belly using your diaphragm to breathe and then use that air and your diaphragm for projection and resonance. Shallow chest breaths will require you to breathe faster, will raise the pitch of the voice and may make you speak in tones that are breathless and hard to hear. Breathe deeply and speak or sing deliberately.

We each have an optimum pitch. To find yours take a deep breath with your diaphragm and then say “Ohhhhhhhhh...” starting with a high pitch and moving to a low pitch. Can you find a pitch that is good for you? Notice a vibration in your chest as you do this exercise. When you find the greatest or perhaps clearest vibration this will help you find the best pitch for you. You won’t always stay exactly in this pitch because if you did you would speak in a monotone and your audience would soon lose their attention but this spot is a good balanced, home position for your voice to find.

Your words are so important when you teach however remember that you should also consider your enunciation and speed as you say these words. You may want to ask a friend or student to help evaluate your speech or, as much as you may hate it, record your voice and then listen to what you say, how you sound, and how you speak. Make sure your words are clear and pronounced correctly, if in doubt look up the pronunciation in the dictionary. Make sure you have space between each word so that they don’t run together in a garble of sound.

Speak so that people sit up and want to listen to you. Your words are important but how you say those words can mean so much to how your students hear and understand you. Happy teaching!

Foundation Training: Build Something Lasting

by Gincy Self Bucklin

Summer is coming, and with it the camp season. For many of the campers, their summer riding experience is their only exposure to riding. So, how can you make the riding experience the most meaningful for them?

Here are two lessons that will stand them in good stead all their lives, whatever they may do.

Lesson one: if you’re not doing it exactly right, go back to the point where it was right and start again. (The alternative is called ‘practicing your mistakes.’)

I learned this from my math teacher. He gave us a long word problem for homework. I got it wrong. He didn’t make me feel stupid, he just said, “Go back and try again.” It took me five tries, but I finally got it right, and learned the value of taking the time it takes the first time. Also the satisfaction that comes from keeping on trying until you get it.

Lesson two: if you aren’t getting the results you want, listen, negotiate, don’t bully. That applies to working with horses, students and one’s self.

This one a horse taught me. He had been learning to jump small combinations. When I started on them one day, he refused the second fence several times. I got very aggressive and bullied him into jumping it. The next day he was dead lame! He had wrenched his back somehow, and making him jump made it much worse. I felt terrible! Now I know the value of listening, and that anger hurts everyone, not just the ‘victim.’

Think about these lessons as you plan your summer program. Maybe your students won’t be doing quite as much, but they’ll be doing it better, and these lessons will stay with them always in every aspect of life.

by Gincy Self Bucklin

Gincy Self Bucklin
Our groups were divided into three-to-four riders per session – each session lasting about 45 minutes. Although the riding time may have seemed short, we learned almost as much from observing other riders as we did from riding ourselves. In fact, we almost hated to leave watching one session to tack our horse up for the next! Riding on the first day is concentrated on learning to feel centered on our horse. Led by other participants, we were able to close our eyes, experience the feeling of our movement with the horse’s movement. Where are my seat bones? Yes, they are actually there! Wow, it’s amazing how much work that can be.

Day 2 – The forecast was called for passing ownpoms, and that’s exactly what we got except it was a bit more constant and the temperature wasn’t going above 50 degrees. Another morning spent indoors was welcome, although this time a few of the participants brought heaters that opened doors was welcome, although this time a few of the participants brought heaters that were much appreciated. The morning’s discussion included some floor exercises that surprisingly helped many “ailments” suffered by the group. (Don’t we riders always suffer some ailment?) Yes, our arms and legs are a bit longer now! Our hips are a bit more open! And we all felt relaxed. After another incredible lunch – Florida Lobster – we trudged out through the intermittent downpours ready to ride our horses. A very wet and chilly afternoon was offset by the lovely covered arena provided by our hostess. The weather, while a big challenge, gave us a huge learning opportunity with many “aha” moments. Our mounted lesson concentrated on relaxation and feeling centered at the walk and posting (or gaiting) trot. Understanding the breath, feeling the breath, understanding the seat, feeling the seat – we were making progress.

We had some sweet moments, like this one with Sierra, Laura Causey’s granddaughter, sweet talking Gaile’s horse.

Day 3 – Finally, a crisp but sunny morning. After our morning discussions of what we took away from the day before, we warmed up with a Body Shake Out. We took our sore muscles (a good sore) and exercises outdoors to enjoy the Florida sun (finally). We did have a few distractions by the horses – some who viewed our Tai-Chi walk ("centered walking") with interest and others who were utterly bored with being stalled for the past two days – but again we had some “aha” moments using exercise balls and small trampolines to learn how to ride a trot while staying centered. We continued to find our balance and our center. Of course another remarkable lunch was provided and then we rode in the covered arena with sunny, blue, Florida skies above. We focused on trotting – sitting, posting and standing – not as easy as we think to stay centered. During our morning sessions we found sharing peer critiques to also be valuable – it’s always good to hear from more than the instructor. Throughout the clinic, Judy helped each and every one of us who had a question or an issue, spending time on a horse to help with a concern, or to demonstrate a concept. She is a most enjoyable instructor. A great listener who truly tries to address each particular issue into the context of the clinic, always remaining positive and kind. A true thumbs up! When will you be back, Judy?

Your Centered Riding Health Column

The “Fuzz speech” on youtube.com, is a talk about the connective tissue, the fascia, and how stretching is so important. Leads you into other health and well being videos http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiSP-tkSug

Move Well Avoid Injury, DVD by Barbara Conable and Amy Likar, is an Alexander Technique approach to body mapping and using the body. There are also short segments on youtube.com. The DVD can be purchased from Amazon.com or from www.movewellavoidinjury.com.

A cute youtube video about the Alexander Technique can be found at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSsqGOCN02sE&feature=related

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