

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

Sarah R. Swift
Founder
1913- 2009

The seeds of Centered Riding were sown in my childhood. Born in 1913, I developed at seven years of age a scoliosis (lateral curvature of the spine) which I still have. Mabel Ellsworth Todd, a remarkable therapist ahead of her time, took care of my problems until I was in my twenties. Believing that muscles not activated easily by movement can be reached through the mind she instilled in me the knowledge of accessing with my mind the power of the muscles in the lower body and in my pelvis where I was weak. In my teens, I discovered that, using my imagination, I could drop a ball through my body; it landed in my pelvis with a thunk as if in mud. Using this mind exercise, I could do anything while riding on my horse. Miss Todd always encouraged my riding, my passion, as it strengthened equally both sides of my lower body. What a gift.

I used this knowledge for my own riding. As a riding instructor for twelve years after graduating from school, I was too shy to teach something so radical. I went on then to other interests.

On retiring from office work in 1975 at age 62, I decided to teach riding “to my friends for fun and travel, a bit.” I started experimenting with teaching how to use that ball of energy and control; Centered Riding began to evolve. The success of the concept was so exciting that the news spread quickly by word of mouth. I never advertised but gradually found myself teaching multitudes of new “friends” and traveling over the United States, Canada, Europe and Australia. My book, *Centered Riding*, which they now call “a classic”, was published in 1985 and is currently published in fifteen (15) languages. The two videotapes (now in DVD format) of the same name, *Centered Riding* Part I and Part II, came soon after the book was released. At this writing, I am finishing a new book enlarging on the basic Centered Riding principles. (Published in 2002).

Centered Riding was incorporated in 1993; we have a firm and growing bank of Centered Riding instructors at four levels of expertise. I am semi-retired and teaching a limited amount from nearby Southmowing Stables; some people come from long distances for lessons. My followers are carrying on my work; Centered Riding continues to evolve.

Good use of our bodies produces maximum efficiency in movement. The body likes to move in balance with itself, yet social customs and expectations, such as sitting with legs crossed and wearing clothing that inhibits natural movement, build in tensions and imbalances. Knowledge of Centered Riding can improve our balance and efficiency,

which in turn improves our communication with our horses and helps their efficiency and beauty of movement. The tools for Centered Riding are the four basics; Soft eyes, Breathing, Centering and Building blocks (balance). The foundation for all four basics is Grounding.

These enable us to become more aware of our bodies, their tensions and releases, and to allow natural movement to occur. We can learn not to interfere. A knowledge of the skeletal anatomy and the function of the joints in balance and movement is needed.

All this is most easily done by allowing the directives from the brain to become active through our center. Use of Grounding and the four Basics triggers this process which is reflected in our horses and our students. Essentially the combined aspects of Grounding, soft eyes, breathing, centering and balance, being aware, allowing movement to occur and receiving without interference produce balance, softness, rhythm and harmony plus energy and power as needed in both ourselves and our horses.

Sally Swift
Brattleboro, Vermont
December 1, 1998

