

Sally Speaks: Taking On Apprentices

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My first book, *Centered Riding*, was published in 1985. By the time my book was printed, I had been travelling up and down the East Coast, out west to Denver, California and Oregon, and up to Canada teaching *Centered Riding*.

After my book had been published, I was in bed when the phone rang around 10:00 p.m. on an evening in late fall of 1985. When I answered the phone, a male voice said "This is Richard Weis from Toowoomba, Australia." I can tell you, I woke up! He had been working with what he called "soft riding" and one of his students found my book and showed it to him and said "Look, Richard, this is what you're teaching!" So he called me up that night to say how wonderful he found the book. He asked if there was any way he could come over and work with me, and I said "I don't know, I don't own a barn or a horse." Richard finally talked me into letting him come over to work with me.

In January of 1986, Richard Weis came over to work with me as I travelled around teaching *Centered Riding*. He picked a cold time to travel to Vermont! Richard sold his best horse and a wagonette in order to come. Richard and I travelled together for about three months. He was such fun to work with! We travelled together across the United States and into Canada. I discovered that I liked having the company of a traveling companion. I was in my early seventies at this time, and it quite honestly, was easier travelling with someone who did a lot of the "hard work" carrying luggage!

Richard's persistence in insisting that he come over to work with me is what actually led to me starting the apprentice program. I really never dreamed of having apprentices until he proposed the idea to me. Richard was not actually the first who had asked to work with me, however. Before Richard had contacted me, Sandra Code Cabell, whom I had met when I did a clinic at the Westmoreland-Davis Equestrian Institute in Virginia, had written me a letter and asked to work with me. I told her I really didn't see how it was possible. Sandra was in her second year at Westmoreland-Davis Equestrian, riding in a three-point seat and sitting every night in a bathtub of Epsom salts. She had begun to think that maybe she had chosen the wrong profession. Her instructor, Tad Coffin, who won the 1976 Olympics Three-Day, was her teacher and was doing some pretty unsympathetic teaching. Tad Coffin came to a free lesson talk I was giving one night and he really listened. He came to me for perhaps a half-dozen lessons, and he was like a sponge. He had no idea of how his body worked – but ultimately, he did change his way of teaching. Every so often, Tad would give a private lesson to Sandra and use the methods I taught.

Sandra began to come to take lessons with me. She later said that those lessons were what made her decide to see it through. By now, Richard Weis was traveling with me, so one day when I was having lunch with Tad Coffin, I asked Sandra "are you still interested in becoming an apprentice? When can you start?" "Right away," she replied. So Sandra became my second apprentice. We travelled together for about a year and spent a lot of time out in California where I took on my third apprentice, Mary Fenton.

All together, between 1986 and 1992, I had about 12 apprentices travel with me. We'd travel by car all over the United States. I had fun and interesting experiences with all of my apprentices. Some of them have written detailed accounts of the days they spent working with me, which you will be able to read in the 2008 Yearbook. I think you will enjoy reading these detailed accounts. Several of my apprentices are still part of, and continue to support, *Centered Riding*. These might be some familiar names to you as they still work hard to spread *Centered Riding* to others – Lucile Bump, who has been a lifetime friend, Robin Brueckmann, Mary Fenton, Sally Haney, Susan Harris and Sue Leffler. Others have

retired but still remain friends of mine to this day.

A couple of specific memories I have are travelling with Sally Haney through Hoosick Falls, NY and missing the turnoff. As we turned down a side street to turn around, we saw a huge painting by Grandma Moses on the side of a building! We would never have seen it if we hadn't missed our turn.

Another time, I got lost with Sandra Code. We were on the West Coast and the people lent us a Volvo to go up and down the coast. I remember having so much fun with Sandra that my stomach was hurting from laughing. We were sent to stay in a place in Carmel, a huge place with high gates and two to three bull terriers barking furiously. It was quite scary – but it turned out they were gentle dogs. The person who let us in said to go down to the corner grocery store to buy our groceries. We did, and came back to a HUGE kitchen, countless cupboards, but hardly anything to cook in!

Most of the time, we were prepared in our travels, but I remember one time, ten miles before Brattleboro, running out of gas. It was coming on nighttime, and fortunately a policeman came and helped us out.

The time I spent working with my apprentices was a special time in my life. It was a mutual opportunity for each of us to grow in friendship and spread Centered Riding to others.