

Sally speaks - the very early years of Centered Riding

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In 1975, when I was 62 and had had all the office work I wanted, I retired from the Holstein Association in Brattleboro, Vermont. My intentions when I retired were to teach a few friends and travel a bit. I started teaching for fun. I began to experiment with some of the things I had learned from Mabel Ellsworth Todd that I had been applying to my own riding for many years. What could you do by riding from your center? What could you do by use of "proper breathing?"

I was in Denver with a friend and saw a book called "The Centered Skier" with a picture of a person with the sun in their middle. I couldn't believe it! Here was a book with the same images and some of the same language as I had been using. I phoned the author, Denise McCluggage, and told her about my work. I asked her if I could use the term "Centered Riding" and she said "of course!"

I started teaching "Centered Riding" at \$10 per lesson and then doing some clinics for \$50 a day. Upon discovering someone who was teaching for \$50 a lesson, I thought "my prices have to go up" but I didn't feel I was worth \$50 a lesson!

As I was teaching my clinics and lessons, I was also auditing clinics given by prominent teachers from Europe. Priscilla Endicott, author of *Taking Up the Reins*, would often ask these instructors who came mostly from Europe to come to her home to teach private lessons and clinics. Priscilla would ask them into her home for lunch and one day, she asked me to come in as well. After that, Priscilla and I became great friends. I went up there for many years to audit every clinic she held. In those days, I wasn't riding because of the scoliosis in my back, but I never missed an opportunity to audit one of her clinics. I learned a lot at Priscilla's from all these great teachers who came. In the meantime, I was teaching riding and all the while honing the Four Basics and developing Centered Riding. It was a lovely part of my life.

During these years that I was auditing clinics at Priscilla Endicott's, I would discuss my ideas with Priscilla and Denny Emerson who rode in these clinics. Denny Emerson rode on the 1974 World Championship gold-medal team and is well known for his life-time dedication to Eventing. Priscilla and Denny both told me that I should write my ideas down, but at the time, I said I wasn't ready to do so. I think I finally started to write what became my first book in about 1980, and it was published in 1985. By this time, I was doing Instructor Clinics, although I have to admit that I cringe a bit when I think of what I taught. There was no screening of who came and I had no assistant.

I never advertised. My work spread by word of mouth and it grew and grew. I went up and down the East Coast. My friend, Betsy Hestnes, who had helped me take on the role of secretary of the Brattleboro Horse Show, said to me "You know, Sally, soon you'll be going out West!" By 1983, I was going to Ontario, Canada. By 1985, Denver, by 1986 California and Oregon. Before you knew it, I was travelling to Australia in 1988 and Europe in 1989.

In 1986, I was in bed when the phone rang and a male voice said "this is Richard Weiss from Australia." 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 and long story short, he became my first apprentice. Next month I will tell you more about the days when I had apprentices travelling with me.