

Student Spotlight



Cindy & Cimarron resting at the Calamus Camp



Cindy & Cimarron a real success story!

Horse-man-ship in relationship to the Childbirth Experience

Many of you already know me, but for those of you who don't let me introduce myself. My name is Cindy. I am married 23 years now. I have 4 children ranging in ages from 9 to 21 years old. I also have a new son-in-law. We have 3 horses, a Collie, and 5 cats. So I tell my kids we are a very large herd!

I am a Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator. I have been teaching Childbirth classes for St. Elizabeth hospital in Lincoln for nine years now. I recently returned to a Childbirth class after facing one of my biggest fears relating to horsemanship. My class asked me how the trip went. I responded by saying "I went through labor and gave birth!" It was then I realized that my horsemanship journey was intertwined with my teaching methods as well as my Childbirth knowledge is equipping me for my horsemanship journey.

Let me explain a little history here:

Two years ago I had the opportunity to fulfill a life long dream of owning my own horse. I bought a big dark bay quarter horse and I named him Cimarron. He is strong and majestic. My riding experience and horse savvy was based only on the job I had thirty years ago as a trail guide for a stable near Pioneers Park in Lincoln Nebraska. I thought that was all I needed.

Oct. 9, of 2005 was a beautiful fall day. My daughters' wedding was only 8 weeks away. I took Cimarron out into the fields near my home for a Sunday afternoon ride by myself. My lack of horse savvy and lack of preparation for the ride proved a mistake that day. I did not have the knowledge to understand how to read a horse's body language, he spooked and I was thrown. I landed on my hip, rolled a few times, tried to get up and

couldn't. My cell phone flew, and I couldn't find it. I had no choice but to walk ½ mile to the nearest house for help. I spent the next 5 days in the hospital with a broken pelvis and compression fracture in my back. Then I spent the next 3 months recovering at home.

My goal at that time was simply to walk down the aisle at my daughters wedding, with out my walker, two days before Christmas. I honestly did not feel despair during that time, I had such wonderful friends, co-workers, and family that helped, and encouraged me all along the way. But my biggest challenge now was my relationship with my horse. My dream felt crushed. I didn't go near Cimarron for 5 months. It's important to note, I did not blame Cimarron for my accident. I blamed myself for my lack of knowledge in my horsemanship journey. It was most certainly an accident that could have been avoided.

In March of 2006 I met a trainer named Sherry Jarvis of Heart in Your Hand Natural Horsemanship near Burwell Nebr. Sherry gave me her time, encouragement and most of all hope for a relationship with Cimarron. I had a ton of fear to ever get back on him again but knew I was not going to let my dream die with that accident. Sherry has taught me how to move closer, stay longer. Having no trailer to transport Cimarron, and no savvy to even do it, I took a step of Faith and signed up for a clinic with Sherry in May 2006, as well as a Women's Confidence Camp in Oct. of 2006.

Here I begin my journey, just like a pregnancy in Childbirth. Sherry started preparing me with simple baby steps. While I was still healing she had me go sit in Cimarron's stall on a bucket and learn to read his body language. May came and a friend helped me transport Cimarron to my first clinic with Sherry.

There I learned ground games to play with him. I even got back on him for the first time since the accident. Slowly, I began building my relationship with him. Moving closer and staying a little longer, stepping out of my comfort zone a little each time by approaching and retreating. Over the summer I did my homework and practiced my ground games.

I could see the change in Cimarron starting to trust me because I finally looked like a leader! The time came to head to camp at Calamus Outfitters near Burwell Nebraska. It was October 6, 2006, exactly one year to the weekend since that accident in the field with him. I can't tell you how much I had anticipated going to this camp. The fear in me was tremendous.

The camp was four days long. One goal was to ride two trail rides through the Sand Hills towards the end of the camp. I thought of all the "What if's"? Cimarron is from the Sand Hills, what if he feels his oats and remembers how fun it was as a colt to race through the hills? What if Cimarron bolts or bucks again? What if he steps in the many holes out there and stumbles? I'm a mom, should I really be taking these risks when my kids and aging parents need me? In 23 years of marriage I had never left my husband or kids. I was WAY out of my comfort zone!

Sherry arranged a ride out to Calamus for Cimarron and I with one of her more advanced students. God could not have sent a better angel to come along side me. The 4 hour drive

allowed us time to bond as we shared each others lives stories. I won't be shy about saying when we arrived at camp and settled in our horses as well as ourselves, I prayed and gave this experience all to God. He did not disappoint me once.

There were twelve women just like myself, looking to gain confidence and savvy, build relationships with their horses, and give birth to new dreams. During those four days Sherry had great educational lecture time in which we learned horse psychology and behavior, exercises in the round pens and arena, goal setting, fun icebreaker activities, planned out menu's (no cooking!) and so much more.

There was tremendous respect for each other and where we individually were in our personal horse journey. We had serious times of discussion causing us to think deeper, balanced with an unbelievable amount of laughter. On the third day of camp came the most anticipated day of the year for me. Trail ride day!

It rained all morning; my first thought was "Oh THANK YOU GOD, maybe I won't have to ride out there!" My second thought was, "no way, I am doing what I came to do!" We spent the morning inside with lecture and discussion time. By noon the rain had let up and, we went out to prepare the horses. They were cold and wet from the rain and sudden temperature drop, an unexpected obstacle for me. I was concerned about Cimarron as he was shaky. We did ground games to warm them up. Then we saddled, mounted and headed out to the trail.

I followed Sherry knowing she would coach me through. Cimarron seemed excited to head out with the rest of the horses. The corral we were in was at the bottom of a hill, so we couldn't see what was ahead. As we headed up and crested the hill to the trail I saw breathtaking vast seemingly endless Sand Hills. My heart was beating so hard my chest hurt, I was reminding myself of all the ground game lessons I had learned. These games transfer to the saddle, and I was trying to relate how. Every woman there understood my fear, some had the same fears, others came along side to support and encourage. Every hill we went over looked like a contraction on a monitor strip to me. My focus was intense; I took it one hill at a time. I breathed my way up and over. I leaned on my coaches beside me for support. I believed in myself and the knowledge I had gained since starting my training with Sherry. I believed in my horse, an extension of my body that he knew what to do to get the job done. I tried to relax and enjoy the beautiful Sand Hill views and Calamus lake.

There was a time into the ride where a herd of horses came thundering over the hill towards us. They were on the other side of a fence, but the situation caused our horses to become very excited and got their adrenaline flowing. I became very fearful and unsure of how to handle the situation. Sherry told me to "get off now!" I did. You might say I took my meds! (*Ok, not really, but the point here is it got too hard for me and I did what I had to do to regroup!*).

The trail turned away from the other horses and I had to walk up a hill in ankle deep sand. It was tiring, so I reached out and grabbed Cimarron's mane, I felt him lean into me to

help me up the hill. That was a moment of truth to me. I saw he knew what to do, and I could trust him. Just like your body knows what to do in labor and you can trust it.

Not too long after that we were riding back towards camp. As we were entering the corral we raised our arms and shouted “We are Women, hear us roar!” (Thus our own motto: “Here us roar, watch us walk!” We had a little ditty where we learned to walk like Marilyn Monroe to help stiff hips—one of those things where you might have had to be there to understand how funny that was).

The fourth day of camp we planned another trail ride. Could I really go through this again? The answer was YES! Our second ride into the Sand Hills was not nearly as scary for me. Cimarron knew the routine and so did I. Kind of like having that second child is not nearly as scary and usually only takes one half the time in labor.

Sherry’s theme for camp was that our “heart would find wings so our dreams could fly”. I think she helped each one of us find those wings. I know I felt I gave birth to new dreams.

For my 18th birthday while I worked at the ranch near Lincoln, the owner of the ranch gave me a beautiful sterling silver buckle. It had a pink and brown rock inlayed in the center. I never wore it. I only rode that summer, never owned a horse, I didn’t feel like a real horsewoman. I put the buckle in my jewelry box as a reminder of my dream. It stayed there for nearly 30 years. After I returned from the Women’s Confidence Camp, I bought a belt for my buckle and proudly wear it now. I finally feel like a true horsewoman.

How does all this relate to teaching Prepared Childbirth Classes? As new parents you are embarking on unknown territory. It may be a long awaited journey. You may be anticipating your labor just as I anticipated going to camp and riding those Sand Hills. The view of the big picture may be overwhelming to you. In horsemanship we train horses to deal with their fears by moving closer, and staying longer, approach and retreat. Your journey through pregnancy and the preparations you make help you to move closer and stay longer.

Recently I was teaching a childbirth class and I had a dad tell me he wasn’t sure he could go up to the hospital to be a part of his child’s birth. He had been a patient in the burn center at that same hospital. Too many bad memories. I responded by telling him I would move closer, stay longer, approach and retreat. Make a few trips to the hospital go a little farther in and stay a little longer each time. It’s like horse training! His eyebrows raised and he said he once trained a horse that was afraid to cross a stream this way. After applying approach and retreat the horse went all the way into a moving river and stood in the middle!

Women approaching labor seem to fear the pain of labor the most. I believe your body was even designed to give birth with approach and retreat. In early labor your contractions are short, mild, with longer breaks in between. As you progress into labor your contractions become longer, stronger and closer together. Your body moves closer and stays longer, giving you your rest breaks in between. Your conscious role is to relax and let it do it's job! You'll learn you can lean on your Doctor, midwife, nurses and everyone around you to support you through the process. Knowledge is power and the knowledge you gain will help defuse your fears.

In childbirth classes we call these coping techniques your "tools for labor". In our horsemanship journey, Sherry calls this a quiver full of arrows. You never know what will come your way. But if you are prepared, you will know what arrow to pull out for the situation you are dealing with. You will learn to believe in yourself, your partner, the knowledge you have gained in preparation for the birth. And if the time comes that you need to regroup during your labor, it's ok to "get off". If need be take some meds, get your rest, relax, and regroup. Do what you have to for a safe and healthy birth.

You will use these arrows in many aspects of your life, far beyond the Child birth experience. The reward you take home will be much more than a new buckle to show off! That beautiful baby and parenting will bring a whole new quiver of arrows!

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Cindy M. Nelson L.C.C.E.



Cindy & Cimarron on the trail at the Calamus Camp