

Diary of the Women's Confident Leadership Camp at Calamus Outfitters Ranch October 2006

Horse loving women experienced closer relationships with their horses after spending four days doing nothing but eating, sleeping and breathing horses at Calamus Outfitters Ranch near Burwell, NE.

The theme of the camp was *"My heart found wings so my dreams can fly!"*

The horsewomen who attended found wings in their heart to change, grow and overcome fears. They also discovered new dreams and goals to reach for.

The women were from all over the state of Nebraska. They came to learn about horsemanship skills and techniques, but they got so much more than the perfect techniques to use on a horse. They found out that great horsemanship is about "who you are". They discovered the right attitude; focus, feel, timing, and balance make the difference between a skilled technician and a great horsewoman.

The focus on Friday was feeling of, for and with the horse. Each horsewoman took a turn playing with a strange horse in a round pen. They were not allowed any kind of equipment while interacting with the horse. This is called liberty. The goal of the activity was to learn how to accurately perceive the innate characteristics and personality of each individual horse while cultivating a relationship with the horse resulting in "join up".

After a wonderful home cooked fried chicken dinner the ladies spent the afternoon doing passenger riding lessons designed to help both the horse and the rider relax, gain confidence, and become better balanced by moving together in harmony. One lady commented that her horse took her places she would never have asked it to go.

During the four days the humans participated in several games, which simulated what it feels like to be a horse. The games were also designed to help the humans learn to communicate more effectively with a prey animal. As the gals talked about these learning experiences they gained valuable insight about what it takes to be a great horsewoman.

That evening it was interesting to watch a video tape of the days activities, which resulted in a late night of discussion and questions regarding the turns and changes happening in their horsemanship journey.

The theme on Saturday was communication with more expression and less tools. Dancing with their own horses at liberty in the round pen was a highlight of the camp for most women, as they began to embrace their capacity for focus, feel and timing. Through participation in this activity they learned how to communicate with their body language in a way their horse understood. It was magical to see how the horse could pick up the slightest cues. It was interesting how the horses began to mirror and follow their humans. Some people even discovered they were quite a bit like their horse.

Impulsion was the focus for the afternoons riding. Impulsion is where your "go equals your whoa!" The riders performed a series of patterns to help their horses control their emotions and therefore stay in gait consistently without being nagged by the rider. The more the horses used their brains the less the ladies had to use their reins. They discovered it is hard to let go of micro-managing a horse while riding.

Following a delicious steak dinner put on by the Calamus Outfitter family was a lively conversation about what the women learned that day and the positive assets they already have to become great horsewomen.

Sunday was all about overcoming fears then building confidence and leadership skills through discussion, games and a trail ride in the beautiful sand hills. Since it was raining all morning it was the perfect time to stay indoors and share what is safe and what is not and why horses get so nervous. Sherry Jarvis led the group through steps to a calm confident and relaxed focus and what it means to be a confident horsewoman. As the rain cleared that afternoon the ladies put on their cool weather gear and headed for the hills to face their fears and learn to trust their horses. The scenery was great as well as the company and all felt a sense of accomplishment and harmony with their horse as we road back to the ranch for a pizza dinner.

It was sad to see Monday come, as it was the last day of horse saturation and freedom from their responsibilities. The sadness was replaced by the excitement of the dreams and goals each person set. The nuggets of knowledge that each one acquired during the camp will spur them on with a new confidence to reach those goals and dreams.

After a final trail ride through the hills we had a tournament challenge. Both of these activities left many of the participants with a sense of accomplishment that made enduring the wind, rain, and lack of sleep during the camp worth it all.

TESTIMONIES

By Sherry Jarvis

The thing that I learned most this weekend was **BE AS PATIENT WITH STUDENTS AS I AM WITH HORSES!** Also students need soak time and have thresholds just like their horses. Quit micromanaging students, step back and let them learn independently because it is more meaningful to them. People don't need me to baby them along the way, they can do it. Let the students learn from each other.

The camp was better than I expected it to be. The women were open minded, supportive of each other, and hard workers. We laughed a lot, and even shed a few tears. The food was great, and the only complaint I received was they didn't get enough sleep. *(Due to excitement and lack of time to get everything accomplished, weather conditions, and a couple of rebels at midnight.)*

My plan was to be completely finished by 9:00 each evening, but the sharing just kept going on and on. It was valuable and the reflection time was as important as the hands on activities with the horses. The experience was more than I anticipated because of the people who participated.

I had a detailed schedule and lesson plan. At times we were able to follow it and other times it was important to go with the flow. Which included some ladies going to the departure of the fox hunt at Joan Kaylant's place, an extra trail ride on Monday and a tournament challenge of ground games (which was a blast!)

It was such a pleasure to get to know each woman and her horse. I can't thank you all enough for making it such a great weekend. It was more than I expected. I learned more than I thought I would about myself. I loved each one of your horses. Everything about the weekend was a joy, even the sleepless nights, wind and rain.

Thank you again for teaching the teacher this weekend, and allowing me to be a part of your horsemanship journey. It couldn't have been better!

By Cindy

We're back! And it was more wonderful than words can describe! As Sherry said "It went way beyond our expectations!" 13 wonderful women, Keith (that wonderful Keith!) and 14 horses.

I am still digesting it all, trying to journal it and laughing so much every time I think of all our

adventures, encounters, thresholds, and stories to tell. Some of the women were just a hoot and comfort at the same time. I was laughing to myself in Wal-Mart today thinking of these gals then realized others were looking:) But EVERYONE contributed to the laughter and we made memories for a lifetime. We set new goals and definitely gained confidence.

I expected I would learn a lot from Sherry and I did (more than I can put into words), but what surprised me was how much I learned from every woman there:

1. How to calm myself down and talk to my horse!
2. Feeling of, for and with the horse, and also applying that to humans.
3. How to laugh at our perceptions.
4. How to BE a horse! Fluidity.... feeling of, for and with the horse, being NATURAL!
5. Most important thing is to stay safe.
6. Courage, and determination to meet our goals.
7. How to "ride the wave!"
8. Assurance, calmness simple ness in riding.
9. Reflection of ourselves in our horses, playfulness.
10. To be inventive and try new and creative ways to figure out our horses.
11. To still enjoy my dream as I grow older.

On the very first day Sherry talked about how horses live in the Here and Now, not the past. I realized I was hanging on to my fear, doubt and mistrust in my horse from my past accident (broken pelvis from a buck) exactly one year ago this weekend. That was preventing me from moving forward. I was able to let it all go. Yes I had tears of relief. It was refreshing for me to accept Cimarron for the horse he is today. Trust the knowledge I have gained since.

The trail ride through the Sand hills was full of thresholds for me, but every woman there encouraged, rode along side and took care of me. THANK YOU so much to you all. I also learned Cimarron will take care of me.

Sleeping and eating wasn't even a priority, imagine that, it was just so much fun with the horses and being in that environment, trying new things and crossing lots of thresholds and making new forever horse friends. I've never crossed so many thresholds in one day in my life than when we went on our two-hour trail ride through the sand hills. The scenery was magnificent. Cimarron was born and raised in the Sand hills and I could tell he felt at home, and he knew how to maneuver through that sandy terrain.

At one point a herd of horses came thundering over the hill towards us while on the ride, but there was a fence between them and us. Our horses became quite curious and anxious, I was fearful, so Sherry told me to get off. But then the trail turned away from the other herd and while everyone else rode up that trail, I walked it, ankle deep in sand. I was getting exhausted so I reached out to grab Cimarron's mane to help me up the hill and I felt him lean into me as if to say I'll help you! That was so cool because I realized then and there he was going to take care of me. As Sherry was coming down to help me get back on she said "you didn't know this was a fat camp too did you?!!!!) LOL.

Sherry thought out all the details, Class time lessons, no cooking, and no cleaning, not even the horse pens! So all we needed to do was focus on our horse time. I know that took a lot of time and work on Sherry's part (and Keith's) and I want to thank you for all that preparation. Talk about Prior and proper preparation!!!! Yours was excellent Sherry! Thank you everyone for the time of my life!

By Jan

I'm still processing through all the wonderful things that happened at the camp. But I wanted to share with you the "mirroring" that took place for me. Reflecting back on the first clinic I took with

you and the difference in me since that time. It's an incredible feeling knowing how far I've come. Not just with Sully and natural horsemanship, but my life in general. And the realization that Sully's "play" drive is reflecting the joy that I feel being where I am in the journey of life.

Just can't thank you enough for being in the right place at the right time for me. Coincidence???? I don't think so!!!! There's a Higher Power at work here. Thanks again.

By Bert

I don't know about anyone else, but the more time passes, the more I cherish the weekend at Calamus. It was a joy beyond compare. I did get soooo much more than I went for. I will treasure these memories for a lifetime. I was the youngest and almost a loner as a child. Then at Calamus we all bonded so easily it was like the pajama and girl party I had never had.

Then there is the fact that my father died when I was barely over being a rebellious teen. He had actually been a cowboy in the sand hills and probably ridden those very hills. My mother of 91 asked me if it felt like dad was with me. Obviously, the answer was yes!!!! It was a spiritual journey for me too.

As for the riding---better than I could have hoped or prayed for. So much to learn and so little time.

Sherry--you couldn't be more right---there was a tremendous amount of self-realizations gained. Amazing horses and women, I could not have asked for more. I really had to save for this weekend and that made it a special outing to begin with, and I can honestly say it will always be some of the best money every spent!

Blessings to you all on your journeys--and Happy Trails

By Sharon

My four days at Calamus have kept me going through this week. I feel lucky to have been a part of it. Everyone in the group fit in with everyone else. I feel like I have made 11 new friends. I don't have many friends. I prefer my pets. Animals don't have the agendas and schemes that people do. I really did enjoy being with all of these horsewomen. I felt out of my league, but none of you looked down on me, which is what I have experienced in other horse situations before.

Working with another horse was big for me because I am scared of other people's horses, because I don't know them and how they are going to react. I haven't been bit or kicked yet and I don't relish the idea of ever experiencing either, so that's what I'm basically scared about. Cimarron was such a nice boy. It's weird, I am always attracted to big horses but would never own one because I have been on the back of one and it's too high up there for me. I just froze. But I admire their beauty and stature. I went in there thinking Cimarron would make a fool of me. But he didn't.

I've also decided that it's not so bad being like my horse. She's brave, strong, independent, willful and stubborn. Willful and stubborn aren't always good, but then in some instances they can be! This time for me was really a time of self-reflection and a wonderful opportunity to spend four days with just my horse. I wish it could always be that way for us. When I went out in the morning and she nickered to me it was so touching. My heart just melted. Even though she's tough, she's got her soft side too!

The Calamus ranch was the perfect backdrop for this clinic! The beauty of the never-ending land took my breath away. I fell in love with the Sand hills! My thanks to everyone, Sherry, Keith, the Switzers (a true family, in every sense of the word!), and all you wonderful ladies and your horses.

I wish we could always be together and stay together, but there I go again being unreasonable and unrealistic. It's just that you all made me feel so safe and a part of everything. We will always be together in my heart and in the memories I hold close to it!

By Melody

I've been living in the past all day, thinking 1 week ago today I was in Calamus with my horse, being a real cowgirl. At 6:30 I was putting John down for the night & getting ready to have our first dinner! Cindy put it so eloquently; it was the time of my life.

I felt like such a different person when I got back home on Monday. I felt like I really connected with John, but I got more than I bargained for. I feel like I made a lifelong friend in each & every one of the women at the camp. Thanks to everyone for your support & words of encouragement.

I also learned more than I thought possible, & I'm still processing! I will be reliving those 4 short days that we all spent together. They meant so much to me in so many different ways. May we all ride the wave in our own way. Safe trails to all.

By Kay

I enjoyed the individual women and horses so much. I keep thinking of all of you and the personnel tidbits you offered, the laughter was just what I needed. I felt like a kid again. I haven't felt much joy since my mother's death in late May. I think this weekend was healing in some ways.

I keep reflecting on the fact that we are like our horses. One of the things that keep recurring is how I like to have plenty of time to think new material, new lessons, new anything over. I just like my space and not to be hurried into anything. Isn't that just what Lakota likes too? Plenty of time and space.

Sherry and Keith, Thank-You for your knowledge, understanding, and the patience to share with us. It was truly a spiritual experience.

By Leigh

Our theme was I hope your heart finds wings so your dreams can fly!

I'm so glad I got to be part of the Women's Confident Leadership Camp; this was something that was way bigger than myself in a very good way. I learned many things throughout the week but the most important was that "Confidence is the Key".

The many avenues of learning including classroom sessions, simulations, round pen/liberty work, horse play time, trail time, and group reflections created an educational bonanza and emotional roller coaster! Good-bye comfort zone!

Throughout the week I wrote down ideas and thoughts as I was feeling them. Here are some of them: humility, affirmation, admiration, personal development, and provocation of thought, laughter, tears, and predator! animation, play & creativity, keeping of secrets, dignity, respect, storytelling on ourselves and others, frustration, success, learning to live in the moment, insular but expanding, pride, joy, connection, friends, and friendly.

I learned that while playing with my horse it's not that I won't feel emotions but it's what I'm going to do about them. This camp was a very personal journey, that wasn't necessarily about a set of skills, but that was about the horse/human relationship.

Specific highlights for me: I learned to SLOW down, I promised NOT to PULL on my horse (even

though I did it anyway, darn it), I learned I was way over the 4oz for phase one, I learned to be particular while giving up critical, I learned to give my horse thinking time, I learned about arcs and circles as apposed to direct lines, I learned about loosening up one part of the body to free up the rest, I learned I need to be proactive instead of reactive, and of course I fine tuned the seven games. I learned how an AMAZING group of 13 totally different women can nurture and support and share while stepping out of their comfort zones to teach and learn from each other because it was set up to be challenging yet safe for whatever part of the journey you are on.

The camp was an opportunity to change and grow, and I'd say we did-Hobby and I. We are home now and are left-brained, confident, and ready to learn even more! I'd have to say that my heart found not only found wings but also flight instruction, maps to wherever I'd like to go, navigation tools, and great friends to share the journey with.

And finally, I strongly recommend that even if you don't plan on sending in a levels assessment that you sign up for a lesson from Sherry and run through all the ground games and the riding skills while having a particular eye and an open heart watching and analyzing. It's exciting to go home, watch yourself, review, and plan for how you can do it better next time!

A Detailed Diary by Cheryl

Where to start? We were the next to last to arrive. I thought we were right on time, but many had arrived the night before. The pens were set up in two rows, back to back so the horses could interact and establish their herd. They were made of pipe with a single chain for the closure. The footing was grass-covered sand (goodbye grass!) This was situated inside a fenced area that also contained the round corrals, playground and arena. The gate was shut at night, so escapees had nowhere to go, and actually no reason to leave their herd.

The playground was a sight to behold! Sherry had all sorts of obstacles set up. There were barrels to go around and over, bridge, logs, stumps, pole jumps, pinwheels, buckets, streamers in trees, etc, etc. I was ready to play the minute I saw it! After settling in the horses, we joined the others in the Lodge.

Sherry went over the agenda and we chatted for a while, then we latecomers got ourselves settled into our room. To promote relationship building with our horses, Sherry challenged us to bring our horses to water, so we all lined up our buckets on the fence line nearest the hose. This actually works quite well. Definitely easier than carrying buckets. Sherry also challenged us to halter our horses from our knees and to be creative in getting our horses into and out of their pens.

We played a ball toss to learn the names of women and horses. It was fun because several of us had relationships between our names and the horses. For example, Cheryl and Shade, Cindy and Cimarron, Michelle and Major and Sherry and Sorry. We were coming up with creative ways to give hints about a horses' name such as humming Rocky music for "Rambo" and doing a dance for Cha Cha. Lots of laughing. I think several of us are suffering from senior moments, learning names isn't as easy as it once was, but we sure had fun prompting each other!!

After lunch we went to the round corrals to play with a new horse. The object was feeling of, for and with the horse. Leigh played with my friend Cory's horse Bubba. He was more interested in eating grass. Meanwhile in the next pen Loree was playing with the Thoroughbred John. Talk about a study in contrast. John was very interested in playing and Loree was so playful!

I chose to work with Kay's mare Lakota. I was attracted to her from the first time I saw her as we arrived. She is a beautiful red sorrel with a blaze and four white feet and nicely made. The only rule was: The horse has to touch you first - then you can touch him. Getting Lakota's attention was easy and she greeted me right away. Getting her to join up was another story. I started with friendly game, then mirroring her movements. Then I tried porcupine and she was light and

responsive to move her forequarters, rear, and back from both sides. She wouldn't join up and walk with me. So I tried driving game to get her moving so I could mirror her again. Went back to friendly and porcupine, same result, so I phased up on the driving game. Back to porcupine and for the first time our feet/steps were in harmony and as I moved forward, she walked off with me, our feet in perfect harmony. It was the most awesome feeling. Then our 15 minutes were over and we did the debrief. As Sherry, Kay and I were sharing our observations, I moved away from Lakota twice and she came back to me. I considered that a huge compliment, that she now wanted to be with me. When you and the horse are in the round corral with no tools, all you have is the truth.

A gal from Madison (who shows) chose to play with my mare Shade. During the debrief she complimented Shade on being so light and responsive and joining up fairly easily. I told of the two defining moments I saw. Shade is the herd boss at home and therefore dominant. Early on, Bert made herself small, which immediately got Shade's attention, so when Bert offered her hand, Shade touched her right away. After playing for a few minutes, Shade walked over to the edge of the round pen to where I was sitting to check in with me, Bert walked over with her, then using a light phase two driving game, tried to get her to move away and off. Shade replied with her own phase one (what I call "THE LOOK" actually attention still on me, hardening of her expression) Bert replied with a stronger phase two to which Shade gave a phase two (ears flat back, still looking at me) Bert upped it to a phase 3 and Shade said OK, I guess you can be the leader, moved over very gracefully and proceeded to do everything Bert asked of her. It was great to watch someone with that much feel and savvy playing with my horse.

It was a spiritual experience for me too. I have felt (for the last 20 years or so) that the Sand hills are the most beautiful land God made. I'm glad I live here and like Sherry, I'm glad not everybody wants to live here! There was so much more to this camp than I had imagined. I was looking forward to getting away, forgetting life's pressures and spending quality time with my horse. Like Sherry says..."we all want to spend time with our horses, but life gets in the way..." Well, at Calamus there was nothing to get in the way and I am so thankful for that! I also wanted to make new friends that are into natural horsemanship and looking for the same relationship with their horse that I am. You all gave me that opportunity as well, and I am thrilled to have met and gotten to know you and your horses. I am also thankful to Sherry for bringing us together.

The entire exercise was a real learning experience in horse behavior and personality. And human behavior and personality. Some of the teams were well matched and others could have been better matched, but there was much to learn from them all. Next we saddled up for passenger lessons. About 5 of us headed right for the arena. Some started in round corrals, and some in the playground. We started out at the walk, preceded to trot, and then several of us started cantering. Shade offered a canter on the right lead first which was very relaxed and natural. Then she came down to a trot and changed directions and offered a canter again. I started cantering in the left lead with my body, but she kept trotting. I was confused, so I stopped and IMMEDIATELY she picked up a right lead - going to the left! I shared this later; because sometimes we don't realize how much our body position affects the horse, especially in canter leads. Later we did canter on the left lead. I was helping Bert with what to do in a cantering passenger lesson and afterward she said that was the best lope she had ever ridden. She "rode the wave". Feeling of, with and for the horse.

We had a wonderful evening meal and watched videos of the day and had a wonderful time of sharing and reflection. This reads mostly as a narrative, because I am still reflecting. It gets better with day two.

Our morning began with caring for the horses, then to breakfast and the classroom. Some of the gals went to see the start of the foxhunt. Our theme for the day was Focus, Feel, and Timing - Communicating with more expression and less tools. Because we would be allowed our carrot sticks at liberty today, we had a session tossing sticks and experimenting with our accuracy. Getting feel is central to natural horsemanship. It is the hardest to teach. You have to discover it

yourself.

We were told to mirror the horse first, get your timing with his and eventually he will get his timing with yours. Accuracy and timing lead to harmony. The horse is the best teacher, and the more horses you can play with, practice and experience will help you develop the feel. It's our job to make sure the horse understands. We need to appreciate the horse for which she is and deal with the horse that shows up that day. We need to realize that there is no separation between what a horse thinks and what his body says -- they are 100% real, no faking it. So when we read the horse's body language, we read his mind.

After classroom, we went to the round pens to play with horses. We could choose to play with our own horse, or ask to use another horse. I chose to play with Shade. After watching Loree being so playful yesterday, I wanted to try to emulate her and see how Shade would react to the more playful version of me. Shade joined up with me right away and the first thing I noticed was how strong her draw was. There were a couple of times I thought she was going to offer a trot coming in. She would have if I could have run backwards fast enough (that's how I usually get the trot), but just my spirit and playfulness seemed more attractive to her that morning. I had good control of the hindquarters (Sherry says that is the key to liberty) and our feet were in harmony several times at the walk, trot, back and forehand turns both ways. There were several times her attention was outside the pen on all the other fun activity going on, so I had to be more interesting than 14 other horses and people! That is a challenge for me, but I learned the importance of it, and with the inspiration I got watching Sherry and Loree and Jan play with their horses, I think I improved.

After lunch we did the Congo horse simulations. I was one of the handlers and I learned a great lesson from my Congo horse. My strengths were my focus, clear directions and friendly game. My weakness was I did not give my horse time to think. It was task, friendly, next task, friendly . . . This was a VERY IMPORTANT LESSON FOR ME. Thank you Congo horse!!!! I never realized that I have such an agenda when I am playing. In thinking about my morning liberty session, I realized I had done the same thing to Shade. Sure we had friendly sessions. But what about time to just process? It is a lesson I will never forget. Shade thanks you too! And probably every other horse in my future.

After a break, we warmed up with ground games and saddled up for riding. My plan was to ride with two carrot sticks, but my plans changed. A group of us headed down to the arena, started out with passenger lessons, so I dropped the sticks and never went back to get them. When Sherry arrived we practiced one rein stops, indirect reins disengage and direct rein turnarounds. Then we rode the rail, follow the leader and tried to serpentine through horses. There were some issues for some with that. We did point to point riding as Cindy explained and bull's eye patterns to work on impulsion. We finished with follow the leader. Sherry's horse Sorry and Shade both wanted to trot out, so I put Shade behind Sorry and she was a happy camper.

That evening at group reflections, I discovered how unobservant I was. I knew there were some people and horses with issues, but I wasn't paying much attention. Several people and horses had big bubbles to work through. I appreciate the openness of the women in discussing this, I was able to process the information and be more aware the rest of camp. We shared our greatest asset, which is hard for most of us. Each of us could have pointed out each other's assets (strengths) far easier than we could verbalize our own.

Trail ride day, the big day many of us were waiting for. We wake up bright and early to --- rain. Shade is cold, wet and hungry. So is everyone else.

Ever the prepared leader, Sherry has options for us to consider. We decide to wait and see how long it wants to rain before any big decisions are made. So we lengthen the inside morning session talking about fears and confidence. Sherry stressed being proactive by doing less sooner instead of being reactive and doing more later. Our fears shake our horse's trust in us and lead to resistance. We need to plan in our head first to give us confidence. Everyone shared and listened

to each other's stories, experiences and feelings.

After lunch, the rain had let up, so we got the raingear and started ground games. Then for (proactive) prior and proper preparation for a trail ride, we took a trail walk out into the pasture we would be riding in later. All the horses wanted to move their feet and were most enthusiastic about the trail walk. Sherry challenged us to use the traveling circle game, changes of direction, back up and down hills and whatever we could imagine to keep our horses attention. I learned it's all about thresholds. I could see others from time to time, but mostly focused on Shade. She was cold and tense and really wanted to move. As she calmed and settled into the games at each threshold, we would rest and graze (congo horse lesson=wait time) then we would find another threshold to cross. By the time we headed back, the rain had stopped and all the horses were dry. They all seemed ready for a trail ride.

Some of us saddled up for the ride, some chose to ride at camp. The group had an awesome trail ride. The footing was perfect. The rain had soaked into the sand and made for great riding whether following the trail or on the grass. No mud folks!!!! No slipping around!!!! The scenery was awesome. You could see for miles. The lake made a perfect backdrop on several occasions. There were plenty of photo ops. Check out the photos that are posted. There were several hills to challenge us. On one hill Sherry held up fingers and had us call out how many we saw. It was a great ride. We had no mishaps and the ride was a confidence booster for horses and riders. Fairy tale ending for a rainy day.