

What Horsemanship Means to Me

There is no great work, no great accomplishment or discovery without first the passion to pursue something yet undiscovered and unattained. I believe this is the foundation of horsemanship.

Somehow the Native Americans of the west figured out how to get on a horse. But before that they had to figure out how to capture his heart and his mind, knowing that once these belonged to them, so would his body. Perhaps this is why they achieved so much, why they were able to accomplish so much with so little equipment and resources: they understood that relationship is far stronger than fear, and in the long run, far more successful.

There are precious few people that I would consider horsemen. I know a great many horse lovers, riders, trainers, coaches and clinicians. Many are great at instructing, some great at understanding, and some great at putting on a show. But the soul of the horse is in none of these and how can one claim to be a horseman if there is no "*horse*" in the process?

Horsemanship, the purest and truest form of horsemanship, comes from the heart. It is that desire which burns from within. A longing, a hope, a desire to see from another's point of view- in this case, the horse. I believe that the best horsemen in the world, also understand people well. They have mastered the art of harnessed power; which is gentleness. Yet they do not strive for control or prestige. Their purpose is to connect with another. They are the men and women who have attempted new things and charted new waters- not for their sake; not for money or show. But when they look at the horse, something is mirrored back to them- some reflection of themselves. They understand that this journey is really not about teaching or training the horse, it is about listening to the lessons the horses are willing and able to teach us.

Today there are many riders who know only that- to ride and show. They tack up, ride, and maybe even muck a couple of stalls (if they're very dedicated). That's not the point. That's not horsemanship. It was never about a task. It was about listening and understanding. Of hearing words in the silence, and learning to dance. I am saddened to see young people who treat their horses as objects to be used for their own personal pleasure. Who are willing to discard once the horse has outlived its usefulness to them. They have lost the simple joy of being around horses. The honour of being in the presence, and on the back of such a noble creature has long been lost. Perhaps this is due to our consumer driven society but it is a crying shame when the focus is on showing and has little to do with the horse.

I believe horsemanship is simply this: to understand less with your head and more with your heart, this incredible gift we have. To strive for excellence and understanding where perhaps there is none yet. And to put ourselves aside for the sake of the horse.

To understand the soul of a horse is the closest human beings can come to knowing perfection." ~ Author Unknown