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Experience Horsemanship From the Heart!

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The MMR Newsletter

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Mom!
Dad!

Team up with your child and have fun learning and playing together. See page 4.

Lightness vs. Softness: why one is just not enough



Julie shows how light and soft a horse can be. A year ago, her mare Mook (left) was tight, uncooperative, and a menace to her owner. Julie bought her because she saw the potential in this sensitive performer. Mook is now a different horse.

(This article was written by newsletter editor Susan Hartje. The italicized sections indicate my experience with my horse and Julie, MMR Owner/Instructor. The non-italicized text is Julie's explanation of why softness may be **the** most important ingredient in riding.)

Confessions of a Student

Most other riders say my mare Autumn is beautiful, well mannered, and really responsive under saddle. She moves with her head down, turns on a dime, and is so smooth that I don't have to post the trot.

She's a joy to ride ... as long as I am not asking her to go faster than a soft trot or to go somewhere she doesn't want to go. At that point, she is gets very tight, and I have a hard time getting her to follow my requests.

How did this happen? I have done most of Autumn's training myself. We have been learning everything together as we progress. It took a long time for me to admit that I was the cause of that tightness. That meant it was time for another visit with Julie.

Julie can easily teach a horse softness. But their rider is the one who must have the skills and awareness to ask for it every time they ride. Otherwise the horse will revert to the routines it knows work with that rider.

Julie's Insights on Softness

Even the best riders often have trouble with softness. It's an advanced skill that has to be developed over time. Horses are so smart that they figure out what we want and then go through the routines we set up for them. They willingly turn when we ask, and look very light to our touch.

It is easy to be happy with that kind of progress. But when you ask for something that isn't a routine yet, the lightness breaks down. That's when accidents happen. That's one reason why it is important to get softness as well as lightness.

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Saddle Fit & Balanced Riding Clinic: Educate your Seat!



Julie helps re-train Karla's leg position so she can ride more balanced and secure.

Julie teams with Susan and David from **Saddles That Fit!** to advance your understanding of correct saddle fit and balanced riding. Both saddle fit and balanced riding with a secure balanced seat are explored in this in-depth 2-day April Clinic.

Day One: covers the essential elements of saddle fit, and creating a balanced rider. It includes an interactive seminar covering the mechanics and function of saddles and the role of balance in riding. Activities on the ground, interspersed with discussion, illustrate how small

fit and balance changes affect both the horse and rider.

Continued on Page 2

The Miracle Mountain Ranch newsletter is produced and distributed quarterly. Its mission is to share MMR news & happenings and to supply continuing knowledge to help everyone improve their equine partnership skills using *Horsemanship From the Heart*.

Please let us know what you think of our content and what else you would like to see. You can contact Newsletter Editor Susan Hartje at ACTSusan@earthlink.net or 209-245-3789 or contact the ranch at MMRI@MiracleMountain.com or 209-223-4421.

Women's Retreat Returns: Enjoy an Energizing Get-Away

Women are well-suited to taking care of others. We put our all into it, and we are good at it. So much so that women often forget to take care of themselves.

"Women especially, need to take personal time in order to replenish our own energy," notes life counselor Evelyn Birnbaum. "Sometimes we have to schedule that time, and get a way from everyday life to make that happen."

MMR's Women's Retreat is designed to do just that. It offers the space, time and guidance to help women refresh and reinvigorate their spirit and explore their most important truths.

Join Julie and Evelyn for a weekend of awareness-building and learning to listen to the language of your heart. Guided experiences help each woman explore her life path as well as the spirit of the horse.

Saddle Fit & Balanced Riding Clinic (continued)



After exercises on the ground and in the saddle to improve riders' seats, Vicki demonstrates a perfectly balanced seat. No matter how hard Julie pushes, she can't budge Vicki from her secure seat.

Days One & Two: participants get invaluable hands-on experience evaluating saddle fit on multiple horses. Then, using their own saddle - or one from the **Saddles That Fit!** mobile store - riders are coached individually to develop a more balanced seat.

Riders apply what they have learned and continue to build balanced seat skills through arena and trail activities.

Armed with an detailed understanding of why your saddle fit and your balance affects your horse, participants will be able to take their riding to a new level.

Get Out On The Trail!

Several additional Camp & Ride Clinic options have been added to the MMR schedule this year. The **Women's Ten & Seven-Day Trail Camps** start out and return to MMR daily. All ten riders sleep in the bunkhouse most nights.

Two brand new **Three-Day Campout Clinics** will be based out of 300-acres in Pioneer (20 minutes from MMR). Six participants camp out under the stars and advance their riding and trail safety skills in the cool Sierra Summer. Includes all food.

Close-up: Evelyn

Time flies when you work with horses. That's especially true for MMR assistant Evelyn Looney. If you've been around MMR recently you have met this quiet study. She's always there to help with clinics, work with the horses and even to feed them. She also teaches beginner riders in Saturday and evening appointments.

Evelyn grew up around horses, but could never afford one. So she always traded stall cleaning for chances to ride. She considered becoming a Vet and earned a Biology degree at UC Santa Cruz. That's where she met and worked with Julie briefly while she volunteered for the Soaring Spirit Therapeutic Riding Program.

"After college, I took some time and travelled in Costa Rica," says the 25-year old who admits she was fearful of failing if she tried to make a living working with horses. "While in South America, I realized if I ever wanted to make it happen I would have to take a leap of faith. So I called Julie and said 'I want a job with you so I can learn.'" She started as a stall cleaner in March two years ago and quickly added horse training and teaching skills. For the past year Evelyn has taught beginner riding lessons and assisted Julie with camps, clinics and horse training.

"Evelyn is a fast study and very good with both horses and people," Julie says, adding Evelyn is an excellent part of her MMR team.

"I love the rewarding feeling I get when a horse, or rider, finally 'gets' what I am trying to teach them," Evelyn explains. "I am extremely grateful to have Julie as a teacher."

Evelyn also hopes people can learn from her life experience. "Whatever your dream is in life," she advises. "Don't be afraid to go for it. Keep knocking on doors, and it will work out."



Top Right: Evelyn helped start this young QH. Lilly was donated to **Hearts for Horses** by someone who realized she needed a more experienced horse.

Right: Evelyn on her **H4H** adopted partner, Cherokee.

Far Right: Evelyn works with a Youth Camp participant.



MMR 2005 Calendar



Date	Events	Cost	Notes*
Mar. 11 - 17	Individual Bookings		In Santa Cruz, CA: Groundwork, seat and riding skills.
Mar. 26 - 27	Two-Day Clinic	\$250	Groundwork, seat and riding skills.
Jan. 22, Feb. 19, Mar. 19 & Apr. 9	One-Day Four-Pack NEW!	\$500	Work on groundwork, seat and riding skills with Julie one day per month for four months - FULL ***
Apr. 6 - 7	Private Two-Day		Private: Groundwork, seat and riding skills - FULL
Apr. 10 - 13	Four-Day Clinic		In Santa Cruz, CA: Groundwork, seat and riding skills. Call Early!
Apr. 14 - 16	Private Three-Day		Private: Groundwork, seat and riding skills - FULL
Apr. 17 - 19	Women's Retreat	\$375	Exploring Your Life Path through riding and non-riding exercises.
Apr. 20 - 24	Five-Day Clinic	\$625	Seat, collection, riding & refinement skills.
Apr. 30 - May 1	Saddle Fit & Balanced Riding Clinic	\$250	Julie teams with Susan from Saddles That Fit! to make sure you have a good fitting saddle and the proper seat to ride your horse safely and effectively.
May 7 - 11	Five-Day Clinic	\$625	Seat, collection, riding & refinement skills.
May 15	Trail Trials Clinic	\$125	Challenge your routine! All proceeds go to Hearts For Horses non-profit.
May 20 - 29	Women's Ten-Day Trail Camp NEW!	\$1150	Build both trail and camping skills - 2 slots left!
June 25, July 9, Aug. 6 & Sept. 17	One-Day Four-Pack NEW!	\$500	Work on groundwork, seat and riding skills with Julie one day a month for four months.***
June 3 - 4	Two-Day Clinic	\$250	In Oroville, CA: Contact Tracy Johnson 530-534-5815
June 6 - 10	Five-Day Clinic	\$625	Seat, collection, riding & refinement skills.
June 17 - 19	Three-Day Clinic	\$375	In Seattle, WA: Groundwork, seat and riding skills.
June 26-July 1	Youth Camp	\$775	Groundwork, riding skills and trail rides, plus food, fun and games! Includes all food, supervision and a bed in the bunkhouse. Participants arrive June 26, by 6pm.
July 10 - 15	Youth Camp	\$775	Same as above. Participants arrive July 10, by 6pm.
July 17	Trail Trials Clinic	\$125	Challenge your routine! All proceeds go to Hearts For Horses non-profit.
July 22 - 26	Five-Day Clinic	\$625	Seat, collection, riding & refinement skills.
July 29 - 31	Three-Day Camp Clinic	\$450	Camp and ride in Pioneer. Practice riding skills on the trail. Includes food.
Aug. 7 - 8	Parent-Child Team Horseplay Experience NEW!	\$375/pair	Each parent-child team and one horse work and play together to build teamwork, groundwork & riding skills. Includes use of a horse if needed.
Aug. 12 - 14	Three-Day Camp Clinic	\$450	Camp and ride in Pioneer. Develop riding skills on the trail. Includes food.
Aug. 24 - 28	Five-Day Clinic	\$625	Seat, collection, riding & refinement skills.
Sept. 2 - 8	Women's Seven-Day Trail Camp NEW!	\$950	Put those riding skills to good use. Build additional Trail and Camping Skills. Starts at MMR, and then go on the road with day trips & one overnight.
Sept. 19-23 & 26-30	Harry Whitney Clinic NEW FORMAT!	\$2500	Ride with Harry five full days, two weeks in a row. FULL . Call to be put on the waiting list. AUDITING is limited. Cost is \$200 per week. Auditors must pre-register.
Oct. 8 - 9	Two-Day Clinic	\$250	In Oroville, CA: Contact Tracy Johnson 530-534-5815
Oct. 10 - 28	3-week Apprenticeship	\$2,100	Concentrated, advanced learning & skills practice.
Nov. 2 - 6	Five-Day Clinic	\$625	Seat, collection, riding & refinement skills.
Nov. 18 - 20	Three-Day Clinic	\$375	Groundwork, seat and riding skills.
Nov. 26 - 27	Two-Day Clinic	\$250	Groundwork, seat and riding skills.

Visit www.MiracleMountain.com for our most up-to-date schedule!

*All Clinics cost \$125/day including horse board and run from 9 am - 5 pm unless otherwise noted.

*Deposits are required to hold your space in all clinics & camps. If you need to cancel, and we can refill your space, we will refund your deposit. If we cannot fill your space, your deposit is non-refundable.

*We maintain a waiting list on all camps & clinics. *Camps include horse board, a bed in the bunkhouse and all food.

***Due to the time constraints of a One-day Clinic, all horses must be under saddle to participate.

Big Girl's Quiet Ride: a Poster Child for Horsemanship From the Heart

By Joy Vandall

She was a Very Sweet Horse...

We purchased Big Girl and Jefe two years ago. During pre-purchase rides in the arena, she was perfect; fast, sensitive, responsive and sweet. Wow, what a horse. We were told she was a field trial horse with tons of experience.



Tom on Big Girl, left, and Joy with Hefe, both work on honing their control of their horses' feet. This develops the riders feel for how their reign and body aids connect to the horse's legs and actions.

Just the other day, after only one year of working with Julie, Tom went for a ride in the neighborhood... **bareback**...on the once crazy mare! She is so much more content, she's even gained weight.

And then We Took Her Home...

The first time we rode out on the trail-zowie, I found I had much more horse than I wanted to ride! I wisely traded mounts with my husband. In one year, Tom had three wrecks and Big Girl was uncontrollable. She crow hopped, reared, and spun on a dime! If Jefe got in front of her she went berserk! The previous owner had her in a severe bit. Now we knew why. Because she was unstoppable at times. She was a nervous wreck and was way too thin.

These were our first horses—and this mare was crazy! We were in way over our heads, dangerously so. I thought we would need to sell or retire her.

In comes Julie...

I found Julie on the web. Her extensive compilation of what horses and trainers have taught her over the years—not just someone else's methods—were impressive.

So Tom and I audited one of Julie's clinics and we watched five people learn to use the round pen. I have to admit we didn't understand what we were seeing and that made the class seem really slow. But Julie was very patient with our questions and when she entered the round pen, WOW, those horses paid attention!

Luckily, my husband is a good sport so I signed us up for a five-day clinic. The first day, Big Girl learned quickly, but was still her crazy self. Day-after-day, Julie chipped away at her old habits. Julie helped Tom realize how subtle his requests can be because of how sensitive Big Girl is. Julie also had Tom adjust the way he rode and she had him quiet the way he asked for changes.

Nothing Less than a Miracle...

Miraculously, by the end of the five days, Big Girl was a different horse...and Tom was a different rider!

Julie helped us understand how to make things clearer for Big Girl. She also provided ways to help her trust Tom and let go of her need to protect herself. It's so exciting to see the metamorphous in Big Girl.

Ironically, the husband that didn't want to go to the first clinic opted for a second clinic in the same year! That clinic resulted in even more progress for Big Girl. More layers of insecurity and bad habits were peeled away.

Tom and Big Girl are now so connected that he wouldn't give her up for anything. We constantly marvel at how much she has changed since our first clinic with Julie.

Thanks to Julie's equine/human teaching methods, Tom and Big Girl trust each other. That is enormous for this mare. Thank you Julie - Big Girl is your poster horse of success!



The Vandall family poses, happy and relaxed.

New Faces at MMR: Glance & Norene



Play Together, Stay Together with MMR's Parent-Child Weekend

Build shared experiences and have fun with your child at MMR's newest clinic option -- the **Parent-Child Team Horseplay Experience**.

This fun filled two-days is relaxed, yet structured to encourage family bonding while building horsemanship skills. What better way is there to spend quality time with a child than to learn and play together?

Each parent-child team will work with one horse; bring your own or use one of ours. Guided by Julie and Evelyn, they will have to work together to accomplish various groundwork and riding goals. It is guaranteed to create memories and skills to last a lifetime.

Lightness vs. Softness (continued from p. 1)



Autumn and Susan on a trail ride. In a moment of softness she has her foot poised, ready for me to tell her where to put it. Some days are better than others, but we are always aiming at Softness!

Looking for the Feel of a Soft Horse

Many horses are very light and quick. But their thought, and consequently their body, is never fully with the rider. "When I pick up the rein to ask for more on a horse like this, I really see that resistance," explains Julie. "The nose pokes out, the back tightens, they lean on their shoulder to turn instead of softly curving from nose to neck to feet to tail as they make a change."

lots of horses will back lightly and quickly, but their nose pokes out, their back hollows and drops away from your seat. When a horse moves with that much tightness, it tells me that's how he is feeling inside.

Softness Starts on the Ground

Julie explains, "every time I lead a horse I am looking for softness. If he is late coming with me and hits the end of the lead rope when I walk off, that is tightness and uncertainty in my horse. I want my horse mentally ready on the ground and yielding softly to the lead rope in all maneuvers before I get on."

To get that, a horse has to feel there is NO confusion from the person they are with. Teaching riders to see and ask for softness is a process. Julie has to help a rider build their timing and handling skills on the ground before they begin to understand softness. Their horse must be mentally present with them and waiting for their cues on what to do next. They must yield to the rein softly from their nose all the way through their back to their hindquarters.

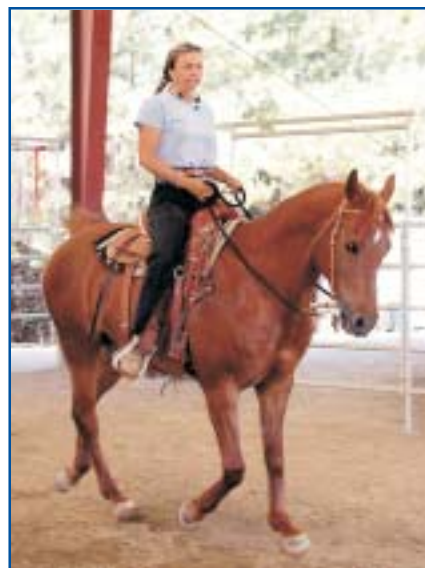
To get softness, a horse has to feel there is NO confusion from the person they are with.

Softness achieved from the ground is not 100% transferrable to the saddle, Julie cautions. But if you have it on the ground first, you have a great foundation of trust, confidence and leadership. So the horse will have an idea of what to expect when the rider is on board.

Many people think that a horse who can bend his neck and touch his nose to the saddle is soft. But unless that bend continues through to the hindquarters, there is no softness. It's not the same. Likewise, lots of horses will back lightly and quickly, but their noses poke out, their backs hollow and drop away from the rider. "When a horse moves with that much tightness, it tells me that's how he is feeling inside," Julie says.

"I want a horse to be light but soft too. Each move should effortlessly flow from my thought to my body, through the rein and my seat, into my horse's thought. When a horse is soft, I feel the whole horse move effortlessly through my rein," Julie describes the *feel* of being 'one with' the horse. "When he tightens, I lose that *feel of the horse*."

Julie works with Regal to help him maintain softness and collection at faster gaits.



realize they take every imbalance they have on the ground into the saddle too. Many people collapse and lean to one side, slouch, or sit out of balance on their horse. Sometimes their equipment encourages these imbalances. These issues must be addressed before a horse can stay both soft and light.

Getting Out of The Horse's Way

Often the rider can unintentionally create tightness in their horse. You can have everything working softly on the ground, Julie notes. But if your body is out of balance or your seat is getting in the way of communicating your intent, you will be sending mixed messages and getting in the way of your horse following your requests.

A rider's seat affects the horse's mechanical movement. Riders often don't

"It is very hard for a horse to follow a rider's thought if it is getting a walk message from your hands and a trot message from your seat," explains Julie. "The resulting confusion creates tightness and frustration for both you and your horse."

How do you develop the softness, and make sure you are not causing tightness in your horse? Get help if you need it from someone you trust who understands softness. Then, **Practice, Learn, and Practice -- always with one goal in mind; Softness.**



Pattie rides Gershwin bareback at the trot and canter to develop her seat and communication aids.

Continued on Page 6

Aiming for Softness (continued from p. 5)

An Evolving Skill

Having worked with Julie and Autumn for several years, I knew my horse needed to be soft. But I let myself believe that light and responsive was the same thing. Now I see that I didn't have the skills or experience before to ask for softness correctly.

One of the biggest skills I have advanced to pursue softness is my seat. I now have a balanced saddle and have retrained my body to ride centered so that my entire body is sending the same signals as my hands.

With some coaching and a lot of practice, I am more clearly asking for Autumn's thought all the way through our actions. Plus, I am waiting to feel her calmly and softly flow into each new request. I am being more consistent; more patient. And she is getting softer and even more 'with me' as well as happier.

On the increasing occasions when we get softness, Autumn moves like butter at my lightest request. It's like we both think the same thing at the same time. **Nothing feels better -- to either of us!**



Left: Idaho is being asked to soften to the bit for the first time. She overbends her neck rather than disengaging her hindquarters. Disengaging is the first step necessary for softness as it allows the topline to relax from tail to poll.



In the first two photos above, this horse has all of her weight on her front end. **Center:** Her front end anchors her body as she tries out different stationary responses to Harry's requests to back.

During the 2004 Harry Whitney Clinic at MMR, Harry works with Idaho, a young filly, to develop softness.



Right: After requests on the ground and in the saddle, the mare has figured it out and now consistently shifts her weight back onto her hindquarters, where her 'engine power' originates. This frees up her front end so she can easily go in any direction upon request. **With a soft topline and her rear end engaged she can softly follow her rider's lead.**

The Ultimate Reward

"It is so rewarding to watch riders progress to the point being able to think about softness. That's when things really begin to take off in their partnership."

"It is exciting that so many of my clients are reaching this point, and so many more want to get there," Julie smiles. "Because once they do, the sky is the limit!"



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