

The Literature and Landscape of the Horse

“Through the Eyes of the Horse”

An Interview with Sheri Griffith

Sheri has been a professional guide and leader of outdoor adventures for more than 35 years, owning and operating Sheri Griffith Expeditions for most of that time. I had the good fortune of working with her for ten years while facilitating my River Writing Journeys for Women, which are outfitted by SGE. And now I've had the good fortune of working with her for 5 years on our latest venture, brought about by our mutual love of horses – the *Literature and Landscape of the Horse Retreat* held at the Vee Bar Guest Ranch in Wyoming.

Sheri has been riding horses since she was eight years old. In her early twenties, she worked at a racehorse ranch, training colts, working with them on the ranch's track until they were ready to go to the professional track. Guided by a deep desire to understand the horse, she questioned many of the training techniques commonly used and began relying more and more on an instinctive style of natural horsemanship. As her riding diversified – from trail riding, to cattle work, to western barrel racing, to English jumping, even fox hunting – her understanding of the horse deepened. For the last seven years Sheri has been competing in long-distance endurance riding, going on multi-day horse events in the back country (from 50 miles a day up to 250 miles in five days). She has logged in over 7,000 competitive miles.

“As you know,” Sheri told me a long time ago, “horses have always been my passion. I've partnered with horses for over forty years. I've competed in the arena, trained horses, pushed cows, climbed through downed timber and crossed swollen creeks. I have a degree in Animal Health Technology but I'm a constant student of equine health, soundness and nutrition, seeking always to expand my knowledge base.”

And, Sheri goes on to say, “I am continually amazed at the sensitivity horses show us, if we just pay attention and give them reason to trust. Some people call those quiet horse trainers Horse Whisperers, based on the book by Nick Evans and the Robert Redford movie of the same name. It's really about the powers of observation – like with writing. Horses have their own strong feelings, their own body language (since they have no words) and the sensitive horseman reads their ways and feelings, creating a partnership that is enjoyable, rewarding and connected. I call it ‘soft connection.’”

Sheri practices the Natural Horsemanship philosophies of trainers like Clinton Anderson and Bryan Neubert – whether helping people get over their fear of horses, making doing the wrong thing hard for the horse and doing the right thing easy, learning western dressage where *feeling* the horse is just as critical as *thinking about* the horse, or educating the horse by providing a peaceful learning environment.

“I always want to expand my knowledge, especially in the natural world. And as many of you know, my world is all about the adventure. This year, I've traveled around the U.S., studying and observing the best natural horsemen/women I could find. Never

enough time, I'm not done searching them out, but I have some great stories and 'natural techniques' to share at the Vee Bar. We'll work with the horses one-on-one, on the ground and on their backs. We'll start on the basics of the human/horse connection. I look forward to an incredible Retreat and some rewarding horse partners."

"All these philosophies lead to a deeper understanding of the *nature* of the horse," she told me. "Natural Horsemanship training gives horse lovers like us a kinder more thoughtful way to interact with our horses."

Sheri went on to say, "Our connection with nature and horses offers a mirror into our lives and give us a glimpse of how we interact with the world. Mindfully observing our behaviors and reactions to our horses offers us personal insight. The goal is to see beyond the mechanics and find a deeper connection with your horse. This is then reflected towards nature and self."

A few years ago, Sheri co-founded the La Sal Creek Ranch, a horse retirement ranch located near Paradox, Colorado (www.lasalranch.com). She is also the Ride Manager for the Moab Canyons Endurance Race (www.moabendurance.com). Sheri lives in Moab, Utah, with her miniature Greyhound/Chihuahua mix Lizzie, her cow dog Mandy, and her endurance horses Diego, Tripper, and Streak.

Sheri will be incorporating Natural Horsemanship methods into everything we do, whether we're at the barn grooming our horses, or saddled up riding toward the mountains. I will be drawing from this same philosophy for much of the writing facilitation. As we learn more about the instinctive nature of the horse, we'll learn to trust our own instincts as writers.

We often forget, in our modern technical world, that *the outdoors* is our natural environment, just like it is the horse's natural environment. Human beings did not learn to tell stories by sitting at computers; we learned by sitting around the campfire listening to our elders speak of the profound connection between heaven and earth, reaffirming our ancient bond with nature. I am excited that Sheri will once again be helping us to explore this inner and outer world, the landscape of both horse and human.

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