

Offering a fresh, new perspective on herd dynamics,

Karen Scholl explains how fear creeps in, why it invades our thoughts regardless of our attempts to eliminate it, and most importantly, how to move through it to even greater levels of confidence with horses.

***Karen Scholl's** formal education began by earning a degree in Equine Science and attending extensive symposiums and seminars from equine professionals and clinicians. Karen taught Parelli Natural Horsemanship courses and clinics for over ten years and in 2002, made the decision to teach independently, developing her own perspective on horsemanship; a fun, effective, supportive format that has a special appeal for women.*

It's common for people to become confused when first introduced to my program, "Horsemanship for Women." The name alone gives many impressions, some favorable and others not so supportive, but once people understand it, they agree (women and men both) that this approach is both unique and helpful to women and horses.

"Horsemanship for Women" is best described as an approach that teaches women their horses are not big cute puppy dogs, but without giving up their nature to nurture.

It's a woman's nature to care for others, including animals. From a young age, girls are taught to be 'nice' so others will like us, so it makes sense that we would try to be 'nice' with our horse. Asking a woman to act against her nature is an impossible task, but 'nice' with horses doesn't always work, especially when a large, powerful animal wants to do something different from what we're asking! That's where leadership skills are needed.

Now consider the many opinions about the proper handling of horses, from preferred techniques and tools to dealing with exceptionally talented or extremely difficult horses. Yet

there is relatively little study on how to teach the person, especially women, to enhance their style of communication with the horse other than showing a technique and the instruction to keep practicing until skills improve. This approach doesn't always work for women because we act from our emotions. We can worry about making a mistake, doing it wrong or if the horse is going to like us!

This is where men and women are very different. Men learn through the act of doing something, while women need more explanation, especially when learning a skill that could possibly harm them. Men will ask "how" to do something, while women will ask "why". When a woman understands "why" a particular technique or tool has a certain effect on the horse, their ability to demonstrate the technique increases and their fear of the horse decreases.

"Horsemanship for Women" is simply presented from a woman's point of view and in a style of teaching that is both challenging and supportive. When women understand that the qualities of leadership are what horses are attracted to from their instinct for survival in the wild, we can learn "why" certain techniques positively influence the mind of the horse. When a woman has the skill to influence the mind of a large, powerful animal, the feeling of risk reduces while confidence builds.

Participants in the hands-on horsemanship clinics learn to recognize the language of the horse and how horses influence each other in the herd. Learning specific techniques to establish leadership begins first on the ground and transfers to how we ride the horse. Because riding is where many women feel most vulnerable, the ground skills are critical to helping a woman feel more confidence while riding.

When a woman understands that demonstrating true leadership to a horse is done without feelings or anger or aggression, they become more comfortable in that role. As they become more skilled in their ability to speak the language of horses, they discover the happy, loving relationship they've always dreamed of with a horse that truly understands, respects and trusts them in all situations.

It's my personal goal with horses to be able to go anywhere, anytime and do anything and have fun doing it, even if I'm not good at it! Activities with my two main horses, both Andalusians, range from cattle management to jumping to polocrosse to dressage. My personal study is that of the California Vaquero and how to develop the full talent of a horse over many years and ongoing study.

This commitment to horses is what drives me to share my knowledge with others throughout the United States and beyond. Because I have struggled with my woman's nature of self-doubt and fear of making mistakes, helping women build their confidence with horses is very fulfilling for me.

By the way, there are almost always a few men in my horsemanship clinics. The men are usually there for support, but say they enjoy gaining not only a deeper understanding of the horse, but how they can better help their wife, girlfriend or daughter. This program should be called, "Horsemanship for Women, and the Men who Love Them!"

Enjoy your journey with horses!