

Heidi Potter Shares Valuable Life Lessons

by Mary Trafford

“Open Heart, Open Mind – A Pathway to Rediscovering Horsemanship” by Heidi Potter

As our Centered Riding experiences show us, we can always learn something new. Most of us take these “Aha!” moments and tuck them in a mental file or jot them down for future reference. Heidi Potter took those moments one huge step further – she wrote a book about them! And the title reveals how she made that journey from learning to sharing what she learned: “Open Heart, Open Mind – A Pathway to Rediscovering Horsemanship.”

Heidi is a Level III Centered Riding clinician, Certified Horsemanship Association Master Clinician/Instructor and Horse Agility Accredited Trainer. To this special blend of expertise, Heidi brings many profound life lessons learned through the martial arts – lessons she says “...enhanced my horsemanship, my teaching and my everyday life.”

Right away in the book, you can sense the strong connection between Heidi’s Centered Riding background and her martial arts experience. Both disciplines have common elements through which the practitioner can gain knowledge, understanding and skills that deeply impact her life.

Heidi lists these common elements on page 29, as “Breathing ~ Centering ~ Grounding ~ Energy ~ Awareness ~ Mindfulness ~ Blending.” Many will sound familiar to us, as Centered Riding practitioners. But as Heidi points out, she experienced them “...first in the dojo [martial arts class] and secondly when I got involved with Centered Riding.” This reminded me of Sally Swift’s path in developing Centered Riding, how she encountered various key systems of mind/body awareness, and bodywork and movement modalities. Then she eventually applied them to riding and to life, and came up with Centered Riding!

Heidi goes on to discuss these elements in a clear, accessible way, including exercises and anecdotes that make the book very personal, memorable and engaging to read. That personable style continues throughout the book, which I found very informative and quite delightful.

Heidi truly “walks the talk” of the book’s title, and her open heart and open mind come across throughout. She is very open about her life, including its ups and downs, easy lessons and tough ones. At the outset, in a section entitled “The Journey Begins,” Heidi tells us about her early years. She shares really sweet photos of herself as a little girl and teen, when she first began to fulfill the “unexplainable kinship” she had always felt with horses. And she shares images of “Tobi” and “Thunder,” those special first horses who formed a kinship with her. I really loved that section, getting to know more about Heidi and her equine soul-mates, and relating so well to that enduring love of horses.

In the next chapter, she tells us about “The Martial Art Connection,” describing her journey as a “personal one.” She reminds us that this is her own opinion and interpretation of her experience in the martial arts. As she writes, she continually refers back to her horses and her riding life, as she describes the lessons she learned in the dojo and how they applied to working with the horse. During this period,

Heidi married, raised a family, and trained and developed as a riding instructor, rider and stable owner in the horse business. It's a busy life, and I was impressed at how well she was able to gather, nurture and gain from the insights and lessons she learned, then share them so articulately in this book.

I don't want to be the kind of book reviewer for whom "spoiler alert" is the operative phrase! But I will share how much I enjoyed reading chapters on such topics as "Natural Style Training," where I learned more about the horse's brain and how to be a more effective trainer. Other intriguing chapter titles include "Obstacle Training to Improve Relationships," and "Negative Reinforcement vs. Positive Reinforcement." Each section is well written, clear and engaging, complete with photos, lists of questions to ponder, step-by-step exercises, and case studies. Heidi uses this format to share great how-to lessons in solving some of the tougher issues our horses present to us now and then.

Heidi's done a great job with this book. It fills a niche beyond the usual range of equestrian publications, thanks to her personable approach, and her wealth of knowledge and experience. At the end, Heidi invites the reader's feedback, hinting that she may have another book coming that includes "your story," too! Why not get this book, read it, then let Heidi know what you think? I'm glad I did – and I can't wait for the next one!

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