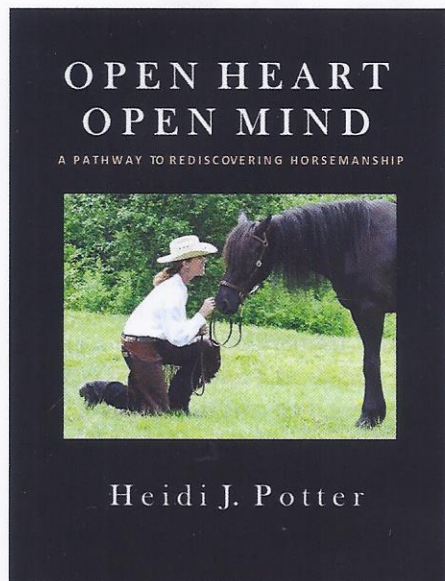


# OPEN HEART OPEN MIND

BOOK REVIEW BY NICKI ESDORN



What is horsemanship? According to Google, it is “the art or practice of riding on horseback.” But it is so much more than that! Horsemanship is everything we do with our horses—from raising and caring for them to all aspects of training and, of course, riding. In the past hundred years, the role of horses in the western world has changed completely, and horsemanship with it. Horses have become partners in sport and recreation and are mostly no longer used for field work, in the cavalry, for transportation, or working cattle all day. Today we can find many varieties of evolving horsemanship—classical, traditional, “natural,” and methods based on the science of animal behavior modification.

Heidi Potter is a very accomplished horsewoman, trainer, and instructor. She is a certified Centered Riding clinician, a CHA (Certified Horsemanship Association) master instructor/clinician, and a Horse Agility accredited trainer. She and her husband Rob own and operate the New England Center for Horsemanship in southern Vermont. In her book *Open Heart Open Mind: A Pathway to Rediscovering Horsemanship*, she shares her path to her unique, gentle, and effective philosophy of horsemanship, using her extensive knowledge of various disciplines and train-

ing methods. It is not just a personal story, though, but full of practical advice and exercises for horse and human.

As a horse crazy teenager, Heidi was lucky to live close to the Circle C Ranch in Westmoreland, NH and spent all her free time there riding western style, showing, playing, and working. Later on, she and husband Rob opened a riding, boarding, and training barn in Guilford, VT. They were interested in martial arts and began regular training. When Heidi started to study Centered Riding with instructor Lucile Bump, she realized there were many connections to what she had practiced in Karate and Aikido, both physically and philosophically. In her book she uses concepts from martial arts to explain topics like how to deal with a horse offering resistance, grounding, posture, breathing, and mindfulness in depth, and it is extremely interesting. Heidi also studied natural horsemanship with John Lyons and others and tells how she incorporated those lessons into her training; she also considers their drawbacks.

Soon after Heidi began working with obstacles, she discovered the sport of Horse Agility. She describes well how working correctly with obstacles will improve the horse's confidence and balance and create a trusting relationship with its rider. The goal in Horse Agility is to run an obstacle course at liberty, with the horse freely choosing to perform. Heidi tells how she began to reflect on the different ways of training she had studied and incorporated into her method. Did her horses want to be with her when the halter was taken off? Heidi learned to incorporate reward-based (clicker) training to solve certain problems, and she explains how and when she chooses this method.

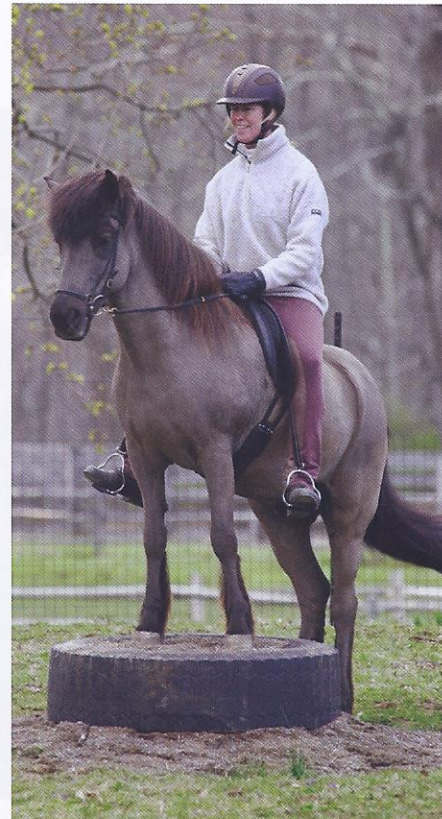
Lastly, she tells us how she embarked on finding the “missing link” for true connection with her horse in a relationship clinic with Piet Nibbelink. She concludes with this observation: “My journey in horsemanship continues to evolve as I hope yours does. I don't believe there will ever be one set of methods that will work every time, for every horse. Instead

of learning ‘methods’ I encourage you to learn and practice philosophies. Make these philosophies part of who you are, how you live and how you interact with all living beings.”

I met Heidi at Equine Affaire a few years ago, where she gave a talk about Horse Agility. I was very impressed and invited her to teach a combined Centered Riding and Agility Clinic at my farm. (See the article in Issue Three 2014 of the *Quarterly*). Heidi loves working with Icelandic horses, and we had a wonderful time. Even though this book is not specifically about Icelandics, the lessons in it are all applicable to our breed.

It is rare indeed to find a teacher of her caliber who is open-minded enough to study and apply different training methods, evolving them into a coherent philosophy—and then to share her insights and journey in a really good book!

Order from [www.heidipotter.com](http://www.heidipotter.com).



Author Heidi Potter teaching a combined Centered Riding and Agility Clinic at Nicki's farm in 2014.