

The Horse Whisperer

By

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In the summer of 1968, while I was taking courses in research methodology at Michigan State University in Ann Arbor, I was unable to rent an apartment nearby because I had my pet dog with me (“Ladybug”). I had to drive back and forth from the town of Milan (pronounced “Mylan”) ten miles west of Ann Arbor. While doing so, I noticed a saddlery along the way. So, one Saturday I went to the saddlery and asked the owner if I could ride one of his horses. He agreed, helped me get into a horse’s saddle and told me to ride.

Unfortunately, the last time I had ridden a horse was when I was a child, sitting on a pony in South Philadelphia so a picture could be taken of me to show my grandparents.

Well, as one might expect, I had no idea how to actually ride one---how to use the stirrups, push my heels into the side of the horse or turn the horse’s head with the reins in the direction I wanted to ride. As soon as the owner saw my inability to do so, he angrily told me to get off the horse and never come back.

Being somewhat ashamed but also annoyed at the owner’s lack of courtesy, I decided to return the following Saturday with nine other students from Michigan State. Realizing he could not turn me away under the circumstances, he told me

he had just the horse for me, and led it to me while he helped the others access their own rides. While he was doing so, I began to rub the horse's nose saying "Nice horsey!" "Good horsey!" "Sweet horsey!" similar to the way I'd pet my dog.

When he returned, I got on the horse and followed the others riding around the farm, without ever having to use the stirrups, reins, etc., in the process. I was delighted!

However, a few minutes into the ride, I noticed a man on a horse wearing a flat-topped hat, following me, closely watching me, then watching the horse, back and forth, over and over again, until the end of the ride. When I got off the horse, he asked me if he could ride my horse. I told him "Of course! It's not MY horse."

So, he did! And immediately, the horse bolted and threw him into the fence! When he got up he said: "I knew it! That's Devil! No one rides Devil! How did you do it?"

Astounded, I replied. "I don't know. I guess I just made friends with the horse!"

Is this what it means to be a "Horse Whisperer?"

PS: Never again in my entire life have I ridden a horse!