

## **A WOMEN'S HORSEMANSHIP RETREAT? YEEHAW!!!!**

I sat at the long table with 17 other women, and candles flickered along the table runner. Each woman explained why she was there, some glancing shyly around as others spoke.

“I’m Michelle, I’ve been riding for two and a half years and need to learn loads of stuff,” I told the group when it was my turn. I was with nine other women from Grass Valley, Calif. who had caravanned down to Ojai for this retreat. The weekend’s participants were women in their 40s and 50s with varying levels of riding experience, from near beginner, me, to “All my life” riders.

We ‘Grass Valley horsewomen’ hauled our horses over 450 miles to participate in this All Women’s Horsemanship Retreat with this sought after trainer. Renowned horse clinician Richard Winters and his wife, Cheryl, explained what we’d be doing over the next 48+ hours with our horses. “We’re gonna do some riding and have some fun, and we’re gonna play with cows.” Winters told the group. The yips went up around the table. Everyone was eager to try her hand at cutting and moving cows around the arena.

Horses are big business; \$39 billion worth of big, according to the American Horse Council’s 2005 horse study. This is generated in part by the 9.2 million horses in the U.S., 2 million people who own horses, and the 4.6 million Americans who are involved in the horse industry.

“Our clinics are made up of almost 100% women,” Cheryl Winters said. “Men prefer to have a job to do when they get on their horses, so the horsemanship aspect doesn’t interest them as much. Women want a relationship with their horses.”

Is it any wonder that women’s horse retreats are a growing business? The women attending these retreats typically range in age from their 30s to their 60s. The retreats offer a variety of activities including yoga and horses, religion and horses, therapy and

horses, and camping with horses. Stay a weekend or a week, and do a little or a lot. The offerings are as diverse as the riders.

Our weekend began the Friday evening we arrived and ended Monday morning after breakfast. Over the next two days we ate very well, (including waffles, chicken, baked salmon, and lots ice cream) cut cows, watched as Winters demonstrated his horsemanship techniques with participants' equines, went on trail rides, attended cowboy church and partied outside our rooms in the evenings. In short, we learned about our horses, ourselves and each other.

“Make the right thing easy and the wrong thing difficult,” Winters told us repeatedly throughout the weekend, as he worked with riders and their horses. Your horse doesn't want to stand still? Move him. Make him want to stand still. Your horse doesn't want to be caught? Move him. Make him want to stand quietly at your side for his halter.

“And when he does the right thing, rub him; rub him like his mama did,” Winters told us.

And what a gorgeous place for a retreat. The Thacher School, a private high school, is nestled into the top of the Ojai Valley, against the Los Padres National Forest. The Ojai Mountain range is nearby and, facing the school, is the 6,244 foot Topa Topa Mt. which offers a spectacular sunset photo op. Here, at Thacher, the Winters family lives and teaches, and here, during the summer months, is where they hold their clinics and women's retreats.

Our weekend retreat ended with a long evening trail ride to a wooded spot where we tied up our horses and ate a light picnic. We sang songs, accompanied by Winters and his guitar and wished we had more time. Not only for another song, but for another day of learning, riding and friendship.

And what was everyone's favorite part of the weekend? Cows were the hands-down winner of that question.

“I especially liked bonding with my horse and doing what she likes to do, and cows,” said Andie Kim, 57, of Grass Valley, CA.

“My favorite part?” said Carter Chess, 56, Roseburg, OR, “It’s a toss up between girlfriends and playing with the cows!”

**(SIDE BAR –word count 213 )** *Contact Information for Women’s Horsemanship Retreats:*

- **Richard Winters All Women’s Horsemanship Retreat** – Ojai, CA  
Horses, cows, cowboy church, demonstrations and trails! 805-640-0956  
[www.wintersranch.com](http://www.wintersranch.com)
- **T&T Horsemanship** – Haines, OR, offers six days in the Oregon mountains, where groups of six to eight women play with cows, learn to use the lariat, improve their riding and tell tall tales around the evening fire.  
Susan Triplett 541-856-3356 [www.tnthorsemanship.com](http://www.tnthorsemanship.com)
- **Women’s Quest** – Steamboat, CO, offers a horse camp adventure in Steamboat, Colorado. Colleen Cannon offers this four-day retreat of horse camping, with guides and all the gear you’ll need to experience the wilderness.  
Colleen Cannon – 303-545-9295 [www.womensquest.com](http://www.womensquest.com)
- **Horse Medicine** – Livingston, MT, offers a weekend retreat for women “seeking emotional and spiritually enriching experiences to release stress and generate personal growth.” This small group of eight participate in ground work only.  
Diane Boehm 406-333-9555 [www.horsemedicine.org](http://www.horsemedicine.org)
- **Home Ranch** – Clark, CO, offers a women’s yoga and horsemanship retreat in the spectacular northwestern Colorado wilderness of Elk River Valley.  
970-879-1780 <http://local.homeranch.com>
- **Tides End Farm** – Georgetown, ME, On the coast of Maine, Tide’s End offers a week or a weekend of riding, yoga, and pampering. Liia Becker – 207-371-9050  
[www.midcoast.com/~lbecker/retreats.htm](http://www.midcoast.com/~lbecker/retreats.htm)

- **Lynn Palm** –offers a weekend of women and horses with clinicians and lecturers. Vendors and more! 906-932-0770 [www.lynnpalm.com](http://www.lynnpalm.com)