

Student Spotlight

Michelle Julian and her horse Regal

Michelle says that when she sends Regal with confidence and high energy he confidently flies over the jumps and then disengages facing me. We have so much fun!



REASONS TO BE PROUD!



My first clinic in August 05' was hard for me, I've never been one to go out and meet new people or go to unfamiliar places, I have a lot of self-confidence issues but Regal made me stronger, he made me overcome that.

The morning of that first clinic was hard, I had only had Regal 4 months and we had no strong connection or communication with each other. I felt like I didn't belong. The other participants there had been to clinics before and were doing amazing things with their horses; like sending them over barrels from the ground, lead changes on the ground at a canter. Here I was with my horse, just trying to get him to stop neighing long enough to hear Sherry's instructions.

At lunchtime I went to my trailer, hid there and cried. Why was I doing this to myself? Why was I humiliating myself?, Why does my horse hate me?

After lunch I hesitantly returned to the clinic, I was thinking about just auditing the rest of the day, but I went back and participated with Regal. To my surprise the neighing totally stopped, we had communication. We were "in tune" with each other. The rest of the day was groundwork, and we excelled beyond my imagination. Were we doing lead changes on the ground? Regal was side passing and jumping barrels just by me sending him. I think he felt like Pegasus, he was so proud of himself. We even rode at a trot!!

Now we had learned our "alphabet", we had learned games of communication that were our A, B, C's. I thought maybe now we can start to make some sentences??!!

January 06'-Out of all 3 clinics, this was the most moving and confidence building clinic I've been to. I am so glad I went. What made this clinic so enjoyable was that all 4 of us had fear/confidence issues. What was strange was that I would have never guessed the others had confidence issues, watching them with their horses. I didn't see confidence issues or a reason for

fear. To my surprise they said the same thing to me.

What resulted from this clinic was that we all faced our fears, and we inspired each other. We all had our demons that we keep tucked away, but now it was safe to talk about them and start to work through them together.

Sherry, I'm so grateful that you put this clinic together for us!

When my fear really hit me was 2 weeks ago when my horse had become more of the alpha leader in the circle game.

We had finally reached a canter in the circle game, but with this came some demons. It was almost like a trade-off. My horse was showing me "you want a canter you got it, all the time non-stop until I'm ready to quit."

His softness was reduced; he no longer would keep that pretty arch even in a trot. He was invasive of my space and would strike his hoof at the ground when I tried to send him further out of my space. I was really scared.

Why is it that at age 13, I was thrown off a 2y/o Arab, broke both my wrists, and was on that horse the next day, totally fearless? Now my horse just looks at me wrong and it scares the h#% out of me.

What I learned in this clinic is that horses (like people) get into a pattern or routine. They are creatures of habit. After a while of the same old boring routine they feel a need to challenge or change the game. That's exactly what was happening with my horse and I.

Once Sherry played with my horse and interrupted the pattern (circle game) and gave him something to think about and watch for (many direction changes) he was interested and soft, thinking, "What is she going to have me do next?" When he upped his energy she upped her energy (mirrored him). He respected her and it showed.

Colleen said something to me in an email 2 weeks ago that really inspired me, I read it when I'm feeling down about my relationship with my horse, I also keep a copy in my tack room. I read this the morning before the clinic and it really helped me put things in perspective:

Don't be disappointed in yourself. This is just a little thing...especially when you think about how far you have come. These are the kinds of obstacles that make the journey worthwhile. If you don't have a few difficulties along the way...then it's too easy and you have nothing to be proud of.

Thank you again Sherry,

Michelle and Regal

Riding without a Bit -When it's Time Just Let it Happen

I purchased Regal in May 2005. In late June 05' we had that VERY scary incident at Cunningham, which opened my eyes and prompted me to start from the ground with my horse.

I attended Sherry's clinic in late August. Three months later I can't believe it's the same horse. It's so hard to put into words, but I'm sure many of you know what I'm talking about.

Now to one of the greatest days of my life, it was Saturday. I started working with Regal at 1pm. We played all the 7 games with a lot of variations of driving games and porcupine games, plus playing in the

trailer. We rotated playing games from the regular arena, to the front arena, to the stable owner's large driveway area, back and forth.

I really felt "in-tune" with him, more than I ever have. We were keeping busy and he was in "think mode". His attention was on me. It's like I could see in his eyes "this is interesting, what are we going to do next?"

I was sooo happy with him and his soft yields to pressure. I really "up'd the ante" at times, expected more from him than usual, and he handled that quite well. He was not flighty. He was an actual thinking horse.

We played games all over the place from one o'clock until about 3:30. I was so happy with our progress. I felt we were ready for a ride. Nothing big or demanding, just around the property. The last time I was on his back was three weeks ago.

I saddle him up, put on my new saddle shims which by the way really seem to work well. Put the bridle with the snaffle bit and reins on. (I need them there just for confidence.) Then I put on the halter with lead rope for reins.

I walk him around the arena once. I do some pre-flight checks (lateral flexion, vertical flexion, circle game at a trot). OK, I THINK WE'RE READY!!!

I get on him, no problem. He's licking and chewing, head low, a good sign! I sit on him in one place for about three minutes then ask for lateral flexion. We then go at a walk around the arena. Then a trot around the arena. We do one rein stops etc. etc. I finally got the one-rein stop down!

So an hour goes by and things are going sooo well. But I keep looking at the bridle and leather reins. I think to myself "do I really need those, does he really need that bit in his mouth? I have been only using the lead rope for reins, do I dare take off the bridle?"

YEP- Freedom! I let go of my Dumbo feather,(remember Dumbo thought the magic feather was what made him fly, but actually it was Dumbo that made Dumbo fly.)

So I get off, take the bridle off, leaving only the halter with lead rope for reins. I jump back on. I did it, I really did it! I lean down on his neck and give him a hug. We are getting there Regal!

I am so happy, I know this is a little step and there are more steps and trying times ahead, but I am so happy!

I really thought I would never be on him ALONE without some bar in his mouth, not

true.

Very happy,
Michelle and Regal

Oh CONGRATULATIONS MICHELLE!

I can't tell you how happy I am for you.

I remember the day I finally took the bit out of my horse's mouth for total freedom also. You did it much quicker than I did.

I received an e-mail from a person who is going to attend one of my upcoming clinics. She is really having trouble with her horse and every piece of advice that she has gotten from people is buying a bigger and harsher bit.

I haven't told her yet that the answer to most of her problems is going to be no bit at all for a while.

She may have to be weaned as you and I were. We all need our security blankets for a while, until we actually see the results and trust what we believe.

I love the analogy of Dumbo. Now just wait until you take the halter off also and go naked. It will be a thrill and peaceful at the same time. But don't do it too soon. Take the time it takes and it will be safe and fun.

Keep it up Michelle! You are awesome! Regal is saying Wow this girl is getting so smart I think I want to be her partner because she is a trustworthy and confident leader.

Happy Trails,
sherry

Sherry, I thought I would never have the confidence to go bitless on Regal without an instructor by my side to coach me. But actually when the times right, it's right. It was not my goal that day to go bitless. The thought wasn't even in my mind. It was the feel and balance we had together that day.

I just remembered the day I bought Regal. The lady said, "He's not one to ride in a halter, you have to keep using that snaffle with shanks or he won't listen." If only she could see us now.

Michelle, It just goes to show you what an open mind, a little education, and the right attitude can do! I really like what you said, "when the times right, it's right!" That is soooooo true!

I was going through my notes today from the Dorrance books that I read during my recovery from surgery.

I was making my lesson plans for this weekend's alumni class. One quote from my notes kept standing out to me. "When it is time, just let it happen!"

Can't wait to see you and Regal again.
Happy Trails,
Sherry

Creativity & Join UP

Things have been great, really great with Regal. It's like an understanding has finally been achieved. I'm interesting to him now and the respect is WAY up!
I'm so glad I was able to borrowed a level 1. I've had it for a month now and I found some major holes.

Front quarter yields were a BIG hole. I never realized how much I avoided porcupine and driving the front. I always seemed to concentrate on the hind quarter. This is why, I believe, striking and disrespect arose. I never earned his trust and respect with his front quarter.

It's been smooth sailing. I even rode him bareback a few times dragging the 22' line attached to a cone(our pretend calf). We did this scenario on the ground at first of course. I would bunch up the 22' then throw it out to establish friendly. Then I would walk around briskly and drag the 22' and throw it at my sides as he followed. Then I attached it to the orange cone and drug it around behind me with him following me.

Every time were together my goal is to be more interesting, keep him guessing. I had been boring to him for a loong time, same old 7 games, nothing ever changed.

I also have a tree stump we play with, it's about two feet tall and two feet wide. I send him to it on the 22' line, with me about 14 feet away from the stump. (You're getting warmer...) when he shows any interest in it or looks at it, I release all pressures and allow. He will put his foot on it now with the slightest pressure(lightly wiggle the popper). It's amazing. He almost had both front feet on there. I got so excited my energy went up and I think I broke his concentration and he stepped down. LOL! We'll get both feet up there, just need some fine-tuning.

He has been very non-challenging lately, never thought I'd say that!

We(boarders at the stable) let the horses have a play day in the arena. Today it was Regal, Max, Sky, Ginger and Cheyenne.

It was fascinating to watch how they split up in to three groups. Then they slowly merged challenging each other, driving, playing circles, sparring. Regal and Max turned out to be the leaders. Everyone else would follow behind them and mirror them. If they jumped something so did the rest of the group.

Then it turned into a big circle game. I went to the middle of the arena with my carrot stick for protection if need be.

Regal was the leader of the pack, so I sent him and off he went with the others following.

After three laps at a gallop, I disengaged him and he instantly halted. He faced me and the others still kept running by. There is Regal, just standing there disengaged. His total attention on me, not the other horses. It made me melt.

I got down on my knees and motioned with my hands "come-in". He walked right over to me. His head was low and he kept it there. He gets to my knees and licks them.

It was like insanity with all the other horses running around helter skelter. But Regal chose to leave them and be with me, calm and willing. I love that damn horse.

Michelle

Tears of Sweat and Joy

I am so happy , I really feel like Regal and I are getting somewhere. After about an hour of doing games with a purpose, (really making Regal think) I said to myself "Why don't you just ride a bit, he is really respectful and yielding, just get the darn saddle already - what are you waiting for?"

You know, Regal seemed excited to, he almost saddled himself, very welcoming of it.

After a few minutes of preflights I do my bounces, get smoothly in the saddle, pet his neck and flex him both ways four times and then disengage him. We sit in one spot for a couple minutes than I ask him to go. Squeezing my cheeks was all it took. I decide to go across the arena to the giant beachball. When I get there I want him to put his nose on it and rest. I am amazed at how effortless this task was. It's like my intent was feeding into him. We get to the ball and he stops at it facing it. I squeeze my cheeks very softly to drive him forward. He tries to go around it but I just kept his nose pointed at it and release all pressures when he gets the right answer. He drops his nose on the ball. I GOT IT!!!

The next thing I wanted to do was circles at a walk, keeping a nice bend on the circle. I cannot believe how well this went. We did three laps both directions! Whenever I felt his attention leave the circle I would just bump him a bit, rather than play tug-o-war with his head. (I was riding him in the rope halter.)

I believe he responded better to this than me just yanking on him, because it was done in phases or rhythmic pressure. While I was on him I pretended like I was on the ground in the middle of the circle. I thought, what would I do on the ground when his head looked outside the circle. I would give the halter little bumps. What would I do on the ground if his hind quarter came to far into the circle? I would drive them away(so I softly bump him with my heel).

Then we did circles with an obstacle(pvc pipe). We did two laps both directions. Again we succeeded. You could of seen me smiling a block away. So with the most subtle cues he amazed me. It was like we had done this a thousand times.

I think back to your clinic I went to in August, my first clinic. I remember how

embarrassed I was when all the other students rode in circles and bullseyes and Regal and I just weren't communicating. We couldn't even make it around a silly cone. You ended up leading Regal in circles with me on him. It was humiliating to say the least.

After I got off of Regal I just started crying. My boyfriend thought I hurt myself. I said "no, I'm fine, just tears of joy".

I feel like I have been in horse college for the past 10 months. I am finally putting the pieces of the puzzle together. I wouldn't trade the last 10 months for anything, ups, downs, tears, sweat, and joy.

Michelle

The Trail Walk

I have really wanted to take Regal for a walk around the neighborhood where we board. Expose him to some different sights and sounds that were out of the ordinary for him.

The only problem is we're in the city and I was worried about exploring along city streets (the stable is grand fathered in / surrounded by homes and busy streets and some businesses.) So I made lemonade from my little lemon of a problem. I feel totally confident with my horse on the ground, I feel ready to handle any possible spook or whatever happens. What better way to check out any scary objects and explore some new territory?

We walked from our place, 106 Military to 102nd Military. There was a lot of traffic tonight but that didn't faze him, it must of looked funny to drivers when I'm walking on the grass but my horse is walking down the sidewalk.

Had kids in cars waving at us, people pushing a baby stroller, a bike and some joggers, and a couple honks. Regal just kept his attention straight ahead and we kept on calmly walking down Military. We then get to a dirt lot that's being prepared for a future business, and this turned out to be a great play area.

We did some circles and some side passing, and backed down some really steep hills. Also did some serpentines backwards between a row of 6 little pine trees.

There was also a lot of rainwater that was like mini-pond so we played right next to that. We approached a trailer w/ some scaffolding material and other construction stuff on it and did some nose touches all over it, there were also some flags marking areas on the ground that were flapping in the wind, I thought this might be a little challenge but it wasn't, he plucked one out of the ground and dropped it, (I hope that flag wasn't there for an important reason :)

We passed by some windows at another business and Regal stopped to look at the reflection of himself, he decided his mane looked just fine and we walked on. I finally came across something that was scary, a huge manhole cover.

We did approach and retreat 3 times and then it wasn't scary anymore. He offered to walk on and over it but I stopped him, don't know how secure that lid is.

After an hour of exploring and playing we headed back home and side passed a little along the neighbor's fences along Military.

I'm sure we looked awful funny to people, but it was a great experience and I think Regal real enjoyed it.

Glad he didn't poo at all; don't think the non-horsey neighbors would appreciate that.

I think we will do this again; maybe we'll hit the Wal-Mart down the street, or Gordmans, or the McDonalds.

What this session taught me was that what we "think" will scare our horses usually doesn't, our own apprehension of approaching an object feeds right into them and makes it a problem.

I approached the scaffolding trailer calmly, confident and had my focus way beyond the trailer, I know if I would have pussy-footed around as we approached it, it may have been a concern to him.

Maybe some day we will be riding along Military, a year ago you couldn't have paid me to walk him out of the driveway and down a busy street.

I wonder where we will be in a year? I'm excited.

Overcoming Cunningham Fears



Doug has had Earl his new horse for about a month and we were really looking forward to playing in a new environment so we thought about what we could do Sunday. His words struck panic in me, "Cunningham". He said, "Why don't we go play there?" As you know, last June Regal and I had a very bad time at Cunningham. Shortly after that experience is when Regal and I started working with Sherry in clinics.

So I really had to think about it before agreeing. I thought about it from 7 pm Saturday until 4 am Sunday. I couldn't sleep. I got myself so worked up I had stomach sickness all night. Geesh, this fear of Cunningham is worse than I thought. All the memories come flooding back, of fear and loss of control. I remembered myself hanging on the saddle horn and staring at pavement. The long ride home after that experience is still fresh in my mind.

I finally fall asleep at 4 am and wake up at noon. I'm able to put things into perspective and think a little more clearly. I do not have to ride. I can just play on the ground. I don't even have to bring Regal. I can just hang out and watch Earl and Doug play.

But..this is a great opportunity. Regal and I have worked SO hard. There is no harm in going there and playing games on the ground around the park. I can't pass this up. I've got to move forward. I need to step out of my comfort zone just a little or we will not grow.

We leave for Cunningham around 3:30 and I've got major butterflies. It was a loooong drive there. We get there, unload and let the horse graze a bit. Both horses are very left-brained and seem unphazed by the new surroundings. I go off to explore with Regal, while Doug and Earl go to the other end.

Regal and I play all over the place. Walking the trails while I drive him from zone three to see if he hits any thresholds. The jungle gym must have looked like a monster. He snorts but is very curious so we do approach and retreat with it. On one side of it there is a slide, the other side has steel steps. He gains so much confidence by approach and retreat that he is offering both front feet on the steel stairs. I think he would of climbed it if I'd asked him! LOL

So the jungle gym is no longer an issue. He's up close and pulling weeds out from under the slide.

Then we go by some big trees, perfect...a squeeze! He goes between the tree squeezes very left-brained and slow, no squirting through. It was like a little playland, great stuff to play with. Did some driving with me at the end of the 22' line. I had him put his nose on the grill and some garbage cans. Did a few circles at a walk and trot and some "forward through" direction changes. I also do some circles intentionally having the line hit the tree trunk to check out his pressure yields.

We do this exploring and game playing all over the place for a hour and a 1/2. He is very comfortable with the environment and showing no right-brained issues at all.

In the meantime Doug and Earl are riding all over the place, they seemed to be having a pretty good time.

I evaluate my own feelings. I too am feeling very calm and comfortable. It is as if a great weight has lifted from me. I feel like a strong leader. I think I will put his saddle on and play with him on the ground a bit more.

Regal is so willing and attentive to me I truly feel that it is safe to mount, so our journey begins. Lateral flexion is great, very soft. Hind quarter disengage works too. Back-up works, woah and go are equal. Let's take a few steps over to the grill. Wooh, we made it, a whole 15 feet! How about another 25 feet to the tree, we make it there too.

Doug and Earl are coming back from the trail and meet us at the tree. We agree that the only speed is a walk, everything on valium.

We get on the gravel trail and head out, the very trail that almost a year ago where I lost all my confidence. Now this trail is bringing it back.

I can't believe this is the same horse, head low, licking and chewing, sticking to the trail like he's been on it a dozen times. He was on cruise control.

I'm able to relax and look at all the things around me, the trees, the rich guys house, the kids coming towards us on bikes. The sun is actually coming out and it stops sprinkling. If I were to never get any further with Regal it would be ok. This past year was heartbreaking at times but this moment has made it all worth it. I can't believe a whole hour of riding has gone by with no "oh-no" moments.

Doug wants to continue on the trail but I know now is a good time for me to stop. I have grown leaps and bounds today and I need to stop and absorb it all in.

We agree and head back to the trailer. When we get there I get off, Regal's head is low and he lets out a big sigh. I do too along with tears of joy all over his mane.

We did it, we really did it!

Take the time it takes, and it takes less time. Slow and right beat fast and wrong, Regal and I are living proof.

Still full of goosebumps,
Michelle and Regal

The Mulberry Mystery

Doug and I hadn't played with the horses in two full days, so we went to see them last night around 7:30. Regal and I played on the ground for about 20 minutes, he was very yielding to everything I asked, and I got a nice little canter for a few laps, I remember when that alone used to be impossible.

I then did some lateral flexion with and without hindquarter disengagement, all signs said safe to ride.

So Regal and I rode out to the driveway and down to the arena. Last time we were down there was probably a week or so ago, and at that time he was totally infatuated w/ all the mulberries lying around at the end of the arena, I knew before we entered this was going to be a challenge keeping him away from them.

So we ride in and he immediately goes to the mulberries, he tries to reach down to eat them but I won't let him, I keep pulling his head up and asking him to move on by walking in my body and squeezing my cheeks and legs.

I realize I am not being effective because he keeps trying to stop and eat, I'm being to wishy-washy with him and he's knows he's got my number.
I know what's keeping me from being assertive, that darn fear thing.

I need to keep the pressure up and tag his rump to move him on but I'm not confident, the "what-ifs" start appearing, "what if I tag his rump and he bucks, rears, bolts?"

Then the truth appears: I am not being the same person in the saddle that I am on the ground.

If he were to have done this with me on the ground, I would ask him to keep moving, if that request was ignored he would get tagged -end of story.

I decide I have to be assertive and stop nagging, even with the "what-ifs" hanging over my head.

I'll give him a chance to do the right thing again, if he doesn't I will tag him. Again he ignores my phases to move, even pinned his ears, so I tagged his rump and guess what- he moved.

He didn't rear, buck or bolt. We rode around the perimeter of the arena and he didn't have interest in those mulberries anymore.

Then something weird happened, we start to approach the "mulberry area" and he side passes all the way across the mulberries, were talking at least 25 feet.

What the heck? I did not even ask him to side pass, at least I don't think I was. And it was absolutely magnificent, nice steady even sidepass; it felt like we were floating across the arena!!

I take it as a fluke and we ride across the arena over to some pvc pipe cavaletti and do back-ups over them. Then we do some circles around a barrel serpentine through some cones; Earl and Doug come riding in so we ride around together. Again we approach the mulberry area and it turns into another side pass all the way across, ok...this is getting weird.

Doug is impressed "you guys look like one of the parelli girls! That is perfect!!!" I guess I would have felt more deserving of the compliment if I had actually asked for a side pass.

Again we ride the perimeter and approach the mulberries; here we go again, floating magnificently across the arena.

What is this all about? He has absolutely no interest in eating them anymore, just side passing over them. Hmmm, this is definitely a "how interesting" moment.

I wonder if my energy may have gone up in that mulberry area without me even being aware of it, I was riding him in a rope halter w/ the 22' line tied like a mecate, I wonder if I did not have enough slack to the horn and this was feeling like an indirect rein in

conjunction with my direct rein? but then again he would only do this in the mulberry area.

Or maybe he knows how happy side passes make me. LOL.

I thought about what Ray had said to a student in his clinic on Sunday, "if you ask for something and your horse offers you something better, take it!!! You may want it someday."

Baby Steps into Big Girl Steps

Today , for me, was definitely one of the best times I've ever had. Colleen, Doug and I decided to do some riding today in Blair. We started out at Colleen's place, doing some groundwork and warm-up excercises with the horses. Then we headed out to the trails. We rode down the roads by some traffic. We did some hilly trails up and down, and some tight squeezes through trees and limbs.

And.... for the first time since I've owned Regal, we loped! It took a year and 1/2 to get there, yes.... I'm a late bloomer. We also played in the pond. The water was about to the horse's knees. This was also a first for me. I remember when it used to be a challenge going through a 1 inch puddle. Colleen assigned me some tasks. Like picking tomatoes on horseback and picking flowers. Working on balance while leaning over and keeping your horse in the right spot to do the task.

We also rode up to a monument, the Black Elk I think it was called. We looked for apples on the trees. Hmmm, makes me think of that song "Black horse and the cherry tree". We rode over some tires that were there for kids to play on. We saw a few deer run through the trees.

Remember how you guys came across a blue tarp on the trail. Well, we got you beat. We came across a helicopter! They must have been doing some search and rescue drills in the park. The horses were so calm and unphased, pretty proud of them. Rode into town through the neighborhood and alleys. Several dogs barking and we all just mosied along.

I feel like Regal and I have matured, we've grown up alot. Seems like all those baby steps have turned into big steps. I can't believe where we are today. I wonder where we will be in another year?

Remember When "The Cattle Drive"

A few weeks ago Doug suggested that he and I ride in a cattle drive with his cousin and friends. Our horses have never done anything like this before. I have never done anything

like this before. I did trail riding at Two Rivers and Cunningham. So the past few weeks I have been preparing myself and my horse, mentally and physically. I have been going over my level 1 and 2, watching the clinicians on RFD, reading, riding and trying like heck to prepare.

All the while Doug is assuring me that the cattle drive is very slow paced, low-key trip with no speed or big challenges. Here's the story:

We get to his parents cabin on the ranch Friday, around 3 pm. Horses traveled great in the trailer for the 3 hour trip there. Got to the cabin and unloaded them. They had a blast running around. There's woven wire and some barb wire fencing around the perimeter of the cabin. I was worried at first they would test the barb wire, but they did just fine. The moon was so full and bright at night you could still see the fence at night. Amazing how much light you get from the moon when you're in the country.

The cabin is very cute and cozy, but primitive. Had to gather downed limbs for the wood burning stove, and use an outside pump for water. No electricity, so you rely on candles and lanterns.

The horses barley touched the hay and alfalfa we brought, they just ate all the grass they could around the cabin. Doug and I went for a short ride around the wooded area of the cabin around 5 pm, it's so hilly out there- not flat at all.

Rode through some dried sumac on a steep hill. I think that's what Doug said it was. It was about 2 feet tall, tough as heck, looked like spears coming out of the ground. I was worried about the horses going through it and getting spooked, but they bushwhacked through like it was nothing. We weaved through pine trees and ditches and down some steep hills towards a pasture of cattle. Earl got very worried and tried turning tail a couple times but settled quickly. Regal mosied right up to them, looked at them and put his head down to eat. Surprised me! We headed back to the cabin to eat and get some rest.

It was a looong night! I was anxious, excited, and scared. What would the morning bring? What would my relationship be like with my horse at the end of this adventure? These things ran through my mind until 1 AM. I wondered if I had made a big mistake coming here.

6:30 am Saturday; my alarm goes off. I get up, make some instant coffee and get dressed. I wanted to allow myself extra time to work Regal before leaving for the cattle drive. So I played with him on the ground and riding a little around the cabin for an hour.

8:30 comes before I know it and we load the horses up and head to the pasture where the cattle are. We get there about 20 minutes before everyone else. It gives me some more time to play with Regal around the cows and the cornfield.

We ride up and down the cornfield, work on one-rein stops, bending, backing. Anything I can think of. Regal is soft and responsive. I'm feeling pretty good about things.

The others show up with their big stock trailer and unload their horses. There's 7 other riders besides Doug and I. All seasoned ranch horses some even in their late 20's, even a mule.

We all get together, mount up, and head across the county road to the pasture gate. Regal and I work as blocks on the road so the cattle can cross it without running off. Regal did this like an old pro. I couldn't believe it. At one point two cows tested our block and I leg cued Regal's body to be sideways, to make a bigger block. He assumed the position perfectly, and pinned his ears at that cow like "don't you dare cross here, I'll take hide off your butt!" There were 140 angus on this drive.

After we got the cows across the road to the other pasture to start driving them, things get a little hairy. A pressure cooker was starting. Cows are galloping off, snorting and mooing . Several of the horses were feeling fresh, nickering, jiggling, the adrenaline was way up there.

Three cowboys right next to us gallop off way ahead of the cattle. Earl starts to crow-hop a little. Regal starts to jig. I feel like I may be losing his mind, and I know if I lose his mind his body will follow.

I one-rein stop him, hold, he softens and sighs. I release his head, and the adrenaline comes right back. I know I have to let him move his feet. Holding him back and asking him to stand still in the middle of everyone galloping away would not be a good idea. So we do big left and right circles at a trot. The big circles at a trot start to turn into canters in a circle. I slow him back to a trot and he's really jiggling, almost a piffe, It was time to get off and regroup.

I bent him, he did three little circles, disengaged his hind quarter, and flexed softly. I hopped off faster than lightning. I tell ya, I didn't think I could dismount so smooth and fast .

We walked, and walked, together on the ground, sending him in serpentines in front of me, disengaging him and backing him. We did this for 20 minutes. The energy of the cattle and other horses came to a walk. Regal's head came down, and he yawned, the adrenaline high was wearing off.

It was just Regal and I, alone behind the cattle. Everyone left us in the dust. But I didn't care, I was doing right by myself and my horse. I was safe, that's all that mattered.

Doug and Earl come back to us to check-in. I remounted and everything is okay. We ride another 20 minutes then we come to a HUGE, steep hill, covered in pine trees, along side of it is a big creek. This next part of the drive is getting the cows up the hill, it's the only way there is to go.

The cowboys in front gallop their horses up the hill along a trail to the top. Doug, Earl

Regal and I get closer and closer to the hill with the end of the herd. We trot up the hill behind the cows. This doesn't seem so bad. It was fun actually, until 30 cows ahead of us stray off the path and start running helter skelter in front of us. There were cows going every which way up the hill. Some trying to come back down, and again, this hill was VERY steep.

Regal and I were almost at the top of the hill when our path was taken over by cows. This was sending us straight into a wall of pine trees with no pass through, and we were cantering up the hill to keep the momentum. I had to think of a plan real quick before hitting those pine trees. The hill was too steep to stop on, but I could see ahead an area of the hill that had a big flat ledge. Regal and I dodged cows and pine trees and got to that big "ledge" safe spot. No matter what - I kept my eyes, my focus, on that ledge and he took me there and stopped on it. Again, I did a lightning fast dismount and we climbed the rest of the hill on the ground together with the cows.

This all happened so fast, and what a rush. Oh My GOD! One of the cowboys rode up to me and said, "Wow, I'm impressed, that was one of the best damn dismounts I have ever seen, and on a hill to boot, damn good job!"

I caught up with Doug after losing him on the hill. Earl was at the top of the hill and kept backing into tree branches, he was locked in reverse, but Doug made it out without a scratch.

So we reach the top of the hill and all is well again. The cows are walking calmly, and very tired. We go through some beautiful country riding by coyotes, turkey, deer, and cow skeletons. Regal is walking out like a champ with his head low. Did all this really just happen? What have I got myself into? This was supposed to be a relaxed slow paced cattle drive.

We make it through all of the pastures back to a county road. Regal and I block the road again. The cows all go in the gate, after 3 1/2 hours of working we all call it a day.

Sunday 6:30 am; I wake up, get my coffee and get dressed and go back out to play with Regal.

My knee is killing me. It's been clicking lately when I bend it and was very sore the last hour of the ride Saturday. Doug asked me if I want to cancel the cattle drive? "No way," I say, "It will haunt me forever If I don't do this, I'm going." I take three aspirin and wrap an ace bandage around my knee for support.

Regal and I play on the ground through the woods by the cabin. We find a small creek and play in there and do some real big circles on a hill and over ditches and downed trees. He's pretty darn athletic.

We head out at 8:30 and make it back to the pasture we left the cows in. I feel ready for almost anything. I feel so much more confident!

We all ride in to where the cows are. This time six more riders participate, 15 riders total.

The energy is in the air again. Two of the new horses are young and fresh. Earl and Regal are much more relaxed today. They know the program better now.

We start to ride out and again six riders take off at a gallop to the front of the herd. This brings up the energy of our horses at the end of the herd, but it is very manageable. As soon as I feel Regal's head and energy come up I immediately put him to work on circles. I learned the day before that sometimes asking them not to move is not the best idea in this situation. Moving his feet with purpose and communication seems to work much better.

We do 3 or 4 circles at a trot and we are good to go. We really just flowed together, like we were in tune with each other. I could read him better and he could read me better. The land we rode on Sunday was unbelievable, just so pretty, hills and slopes and nature as far as you could see, yuccas and cactus, more coyotes and owls. Nothing phased Regal. I don't remember him spooking at anything.

Two hours into the ride the pain in my knee was really bad. It was very sore and stiff, so I got off of Regal to walk. Little by little the other riders and herd were disappearing into the trees. I was lagging way behind and I was going to lose them.

Doug finally came riding back to check in on me. He asked me if I want to continue. He said I need to decide now or we'll lose the rest of the group. For a moment I felt like throwing in the towel. But it wasn't because of the knee pain, it was because I was alone and the herd was so far away now. I knew I may have to canter to catch up with them, and that was what was scaring me. The fear of a buck or a rear. The fear that Regal may trip while we canter and I may fall off and get hurt.

I can truly say that I have never in my life felt the pressure I felt at that moment. I felt it deep in my heart and my stomach. The decision to continue on, challenged myself to another five hours of unknown obstacles. Or I could quit and be happy with the progress I've already made.

I couldn't give up! I have to trust my horse! I have to trust myself! Even with my bum knee that is hurting like hell to move for a leg cue.

Doug asked "Are you sure?" I say, "Yes, let's go." I get on Regal, take a deep breath, ask him to trot, and then ask him to canter. This was the longest I've ever cantered on him, and it was like floating. My body just moved with him, no jarring, no bracing, just floating.

We caught up with the herd after several minutes of trotting and cantering. There were a lot of neat trails on this ride. Some very challenging with drop-offs, some deep ditches, some that would wind themselves in and out of trees. Some trails were narrow and had a drop-off 15 feet on both sides. I just kept my focus ahead, never hesitating in my body, not trying to micromanage my horse. I had to trust him to get us through these narrow trails without me interfering, and he did just that. He never tripped or knocked me into

any trees or anything.

The rest of the ride was on county roads and across the highway. Regal and I were getting the cows that would stray off the road. If they didn't move fast enough he would nip their butts. As the day went on our adventure got better. We would ride along side the herd to the middle riders and visit, then up to visit the front riders, then back to the end of the herd.

Doug and a front rider had a walkie talkie with them in case of an emergency or if someone needed a drink. The front riders would leave your drink on a fence post and you could pick it up when you come to it.

There's nothing like chasing a cow on Regal, at a trot, down the middle of a country road, while holding a Coors light in your left hand, reins in your right hand, and being so relaxed that you don't spill a drop. Now that would have been an awesome picture. It makes me smile just remembering it.

We also went across a long, wooden plank bridge over a creek. I believe Doug said it was 80 feet long. Again, I kept my focus ahead, not on the bridge, not on the water, just straight ahead. It was very noisy with all the hooves on it.

So about 10 1/2 hours total riding this weekend, and Regal and I survived, every obstacle, every situation, even the canter in a very wide open space. My fear is my biggest obstacle, and I think I took a big bite outta that one this weekend. The things I thought would happen didn't. I didn't fall off, and he didn't buck, rear or trip.

I look back on this weekend and I just smile and laugh. There were A LOT of moments I felt so alone and helpless, when everyone was off doing their own thing. But I survived! I never complained about the fast pace. I adapted to what I was dealt with. I am thankful to Sherry for her clinics she helped Regal and I in and the tools Colleen has given me over the past year. This weekend brings to mind an email Colleen sent to me about a year ago, when I was feeling pretty hopeless:

"As you go the way of life, you will see a great chasm. Jump. It is not as wide as you think."

Native American Proverb

On the long drive home after the cattle drive, that Alan Jackson song came on the radio "Remember When".

I know it may be cheesy, but it was so fitting, especially some of the lyrics,

Gave our hearts, made the start, it was hard
We lived and learned, life threw curves
There was joy, there was hurt
Remember when

Remember when old ones died and new were born

Life was changed, disassembled, rearranged
We came together, fell apart
And broke each other's hearts
Remember when

Remember when the sound of little feet
was the music
We danced to week to week
Brought back the love, we found trust
Vowed we'd never give up
Remember when

Remember when thirty seemed old
Now lookin' back, it's just a steppin' stone
To where we are,
where we've been
Said we'd do it all again
And we'll remember when

