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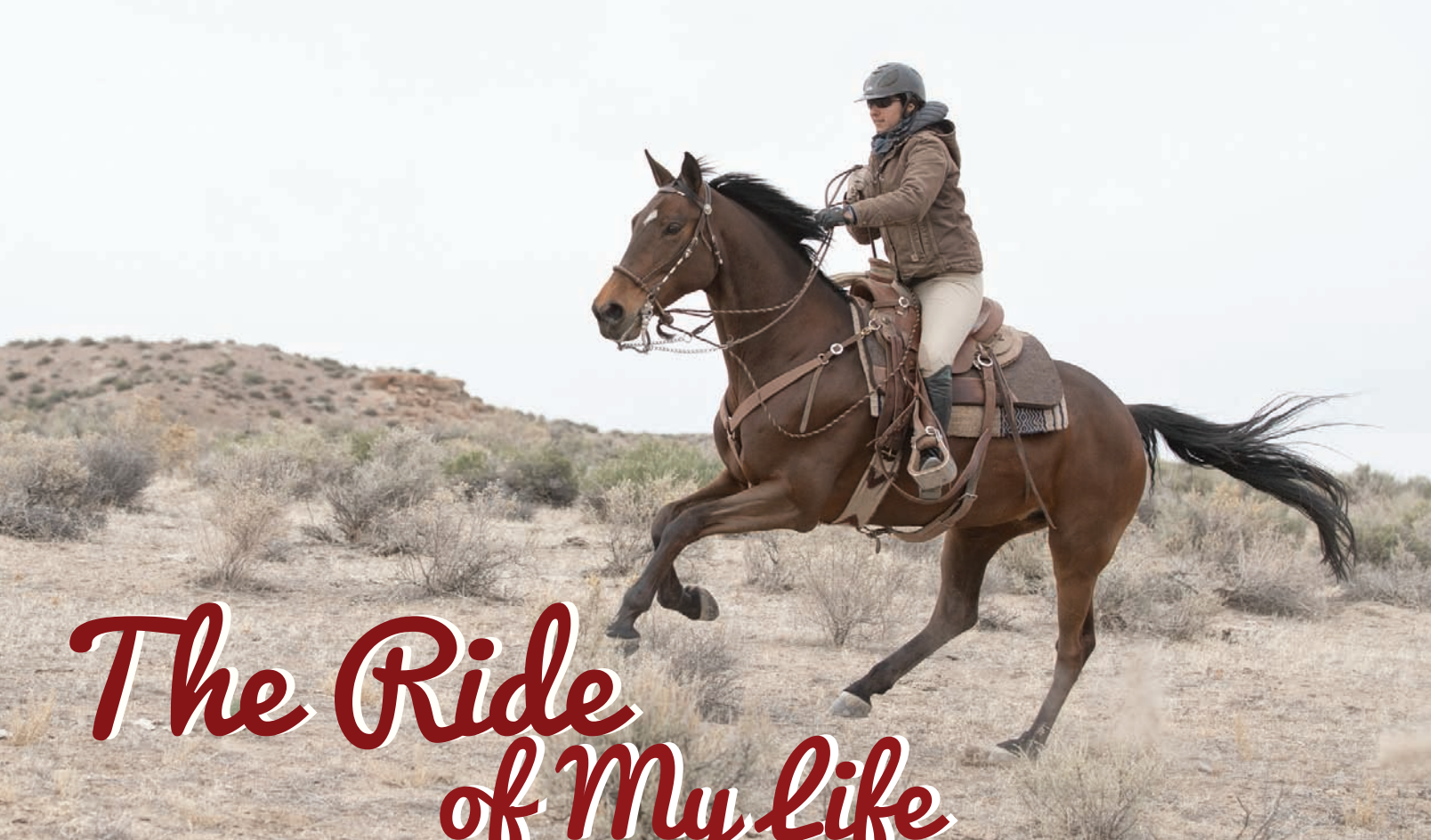
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ECLECTIC HORSEMAN



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The Ride of My Life

By Kristin Jacob Photos by Kim Stone

I run a competitive Hunter/Jumper show barn based in the area of Longmont, Colorado. Although I might be like other H/J barns and spend most of my time training for and traveling to “A/AA” shows across the country, I am different in that I place a large emphasis on education and horsemanship in my program. I was introduced to the world of good horsemanship through Mindy Bower in 2013 when, as a last resort, I brought her a highly talented show jumping mare. I have not looked back on the lifelong journey of good horsemanship that Mindy opened my mind to.

I was on the road again, driving a shipment of horses from Longmont to a show at the Desert International Horse Park in Thermal, California, when I realized how stagnant I felt in my growth as a horseman. If I place such an emphasis on education and horsemanship in my program and to my students, shouldn't I be at the forefront, learning and growing my own horsemanship, so I, in turn, can help them better their own horsemanship?

My business had grown and I was so wrapped up in riding through my list of horses for the day so I could start my afternoon/evening lessons on time, so I could then rush home to spend my evenings returning client's texts and emails, setting up vet/chiropractor/farrier, etc. appointments, filling out more show entries, and the million other details required to run my business. What I had been yearning for, for quite some time, was an educational experience where I was removed from my everyday routine and I could fully submerge myself in an experience that would allow me to expand my own riding and horsemanship.

A couple of weeks before I left on my trip to California, I glanced at the cover of an issue of *Eclectic Horseman* magazine that had a beautiful photo of a colt being ponied along the beach by Martin Black. This photo led me to Martin's website. I was amazed to find that he offered various week—to monthlong schools at his beautiful ranch outside of Bruneau, Idaho. What a dream to go to ride out in that big, beautiful country and learn from an exceptional horseman! But alas, what was I thinking? I have my own clients, about 30 horses in training, and was gearing up for the upcoming show season.

As I crossed the plains of northern New Mexico on my way to California, I began to daydream about horses and cattle and riding out across the Owyhee desert. It was in the desolate expanse that I realized I was the only person stopping myself from my own continued growth. I was driving with my assistant, Katie Glass, and asked her to pull up the phone number for the Y6 Ranch. I sat with the number dialed up on my phone for a few minutes and thought, “what the heck, what's a phone call? No one



Above: Kristin working Frosty's hindquarters to prepare him to back up the hill by pulling from his hind end while Martin coaches. Frosty is one of Martin's best special forces horses. **Right:** Martin and Kristin go for a long trot down the road that leads up the valley to Shoofly. Kristin is on her mare, Gulika.

is going to answer anyway,” and hit the green call button on my phone.

To my surprise, a lady, whom I later learned was Martin's business partner, Jennifer, answered the phone. I have to admit I was a little nervous and started out the conversation saying, “Uh, so my background is in show jumping but, umm, would I be able to attend the April Ranch School with my assistant?” Jennifer said they had two spots left and that my background in show jumping was not a problem at all—that Martin welcomes riders from all disciplines. I took the leap right then and said I'd take the two last spots in the school!

I love the show in Thermal, Calif., and have enjoyed attending that show since I was a child. Getting out of the cold and snow in Colorado and being under the warm sun and swaying palm trees in the middle of winter is sure nice. However, this year, even with the excitement and business of the show, I couldn't stop thinking about my upcoming trip to Martin's place at Shoofly (Martin's new operation under the Y6 Ranch). I'd be home from California only a few weeks before leaving again to Idaho for a month.

The day came and I loaded four of my horses and two of my assistant's horses in my trailer and began the two-day drive to Martin's Shoofly outside of Bruneau, Idaho. I wasn't sure quite what to expect but I kept thinking about two quotes on his website, “When you're ready for the real deal...” and, “Join us for the ride of your life.” As I pulled my trailer down the county road that led to the turnoff for the ranch, I lost cell service which signified to me that I, whether I had fully accepted it

or not, was going to be liberated from my business for the next month to focus on my own growth and riding. As I turned down the little, unmarked dirt road that led up the valley to the ranch, it fully sank in; this is where I'd be spending the next month. As I passed by some old structures next to the dirt road I thought about the history and people, past and present, who have lived off and worked this land and what stories they would tell. I thought too, after spending a month on the ranch working with Martin, what stories I would tell and how this month would enrich my life.

When we arrived, Martin greeted us and showed us our and our horse's accommodations. Katie and I would spend the month in an 1800s dugout, sleeping in a canvas bedroll with the stars twinkling above us through a large skylight above the bed. Our show horses, accustomed to living in stalls bedded deep with shavings, would live out in open pens with a spring as their water source. The valley that the ranch sits in was surrounded by BLM and the Jack Creek Wilderness area. The country was vast and rugged with the sprawling high desert plateau abruptly broken by steep, barren mountains and adjacent, deeply carved canyons.

The following morning, after an introduction and discussion of what we were wanting to get out of our stay at Shoofly, we saddled up our horses and rode out with Martin and his student, Sabrina. We climbed straight up out of the valley the ranch sits in and out onto the sage and greasewood-dotted desert expanse. We then got to work on our first horsemanship exercise—backing uphill. We got in time moving our horse's

hindquarters from side-to-side with the goal being for the horse to lift its back and pull themselves up the hill with their hind end tucked underneath them as opposed to hollowing out and pushing up the hill with their front end. This also became helpful when riding down a steep hill; the horse could gather themselves, be in balance, and thus make the saddle level on the descent. What a fantastic exercise for my jumping horses, since they, too, have to transfer their weight to their hindquarters and come up in their backs to jump.

As we continued our ride I knew Martin was trying to get a sense of us, our riding, and our intent bringing our show horses out to the Owyhee. We came to the bottom of a canyon and he looked up and asked if we felt OK about riding up the hillside. I still don't know if Martin specifically planned this route, but the ride up the hillside turned into a scramble up a scree and cobble slope with a canyon cliff just below us. The only way out was up with no looking back. As each of us climbed out onto the flat desert, our horses puffing for air, big grins spread across Katie and my faces. "Join us for the ride of your life" had begun. And it was then that Martin knew there was no limit to what we'd be open to doing, trying, and learning with our horses.

One of my big goals while at Martin's was to re-start my homebred filly, Radka, with the help of my saddle horse, Queen. Queen is the mare that led me to Mindy and ultimately to the world of good horsemanship, and she is also the filly's mother. Queen has come full circle and has gone on to help to start and flag many colts and "problem-solving" horses, not to mention has become a great teacher to young show jumping riders in the show ring. Martin talked me through and helped me flag my filly off of Queen by bringing up the filly's flight with the flag and getting her to yield in a leg-yield type patten around the round pen. This is similar to disengaging the horse's hindquarters but instead of the focus being solely on the hindquarters, it is an exercise for the whole horse. Both the hind and the front feet step out to create a drift with the hind stepping out further than the front. If, say the horse was to get scared or tight, the horse would maintain its balance, coming to a pivot around the inside front foot. If you were on the ground, you would not be inviting the horse's front end into you, as you would be if you were only focused on disengaging the hind. This eliminated the opportunity for the horse to come into you and potentially run over the top of you if he were to become scared.

I find it fascinating, whether working with show jumping professionals or teachers of horsemanship, that each person has their own interpretation of various exercises. Martin, of course, learned and spent time around Tom Dorrance and Ray Hunt, as did Mindy, but I found it quite interesting to see the variations in how each started and worked with young horses, both following the methods of Tom and Ray. We are all an amalgamation of our experiences from the horses and people we have worked with. I do not believe that there is a black or white, right or wrong way when working with the horse. Each person has their own feel

and timing and way they present themselves to the horse. One could physically copy another great horseman or rider and not get the same result from the horse. I believe through being open to learning from different accomplished horsemen and through listening to each horse you work with, you develop your own style, system, and feel. This was exactly what I was wanting to work on and develop for myself during my month at Shoofly.

On the same day I re-started my filly, Martin invited his dear friend, Tish Lewis, out to meet "the show jumpers" who had just arrived in Owyhee County. Tish is the widow of show jumping legend, Gene Lewis, who was born, raised, and cow-boyed in this region before moving to California where his career producing and showing top-level show jumping horses lasted for decades. He was known in the show jumping world for his "cowboy magic" and keen sense of feel, and for bringing out the best in a horse without the rider's interference. Tish is a remarkable lady in her own right. She was born in England and has traveled the world to some of the biggest shows and international venues because of her own involvement with the horses.

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Tish is one of the most vibrant, positive, and kind people I have ever met, and at 89 years old, is still sharp as a tack. This was the first of many visits she would make to Martin's to support Katie and me, and see the tremendous versatility our show jumping horses would display.

Another one of my goals while at Shoofly was to improve my roping skills. I had previously been introduced to some basic roping, was comfortable handling a rope and dallying, but was a beginner when it came to swinging and actually catching anything. Through various muscle memory building exercises, Martin had us swinging our loops and practicing on the dummy and Hot Heels and eventually roping live cattle. What really stood out to me was Martin's never-ending patience and his total belief in his students (even when they maybe didn't even believe in themselves). He would take the time to explain whatever the exercise or task at hand was in endlessly creative ways until it resonated and his students understood. He allowed and made you feel comfortable about mistakes and made you want to try again and again until you gained some ground. Martin has a very special gift for teaching, which showed time and time again during our month at Shoofly.



Left: Martin shows Kristin the traditional buckaroo way to tie bridle lead on Kristin's saddle horse, Queen. **Below Left:** Kristin with Tish Lewis and Kristin's mare, Queen, in the entrance to the round corral at Shoofly after Kristin started her filly. **Below:** Kristin flagging her filly, Radka, off of her saddle horse and the filly's mother, Queen. Here she is getting the filly to yield her hind and front quarters simultaneously, perpendicular to the round corral fence.



One piece to the horsemanship community that has always stood out to me is people's neverending kindness and generosity. Once you are around it, it is infectious as it is part of the culture. We had only been at Shoofly five days and already Martin's giving approach in his teaching style and Tish's radiant and endlessly supportive personality was filling my tired heart. While running a competitive show business has its rewards, there are times when the demands of it become draining and can be incongruous with the world of horsemanship. I so strongly believe and teach to my students that you are not only a good horseman when you are on or working with your horse, you are a horseman in every thing you do in your life; how you treat other people, what you give to your community, the attitude that you possess towards life. Now that I was submersed in the Shoofly community, built around good horsemanship and generosity, I finally started to feel at peace.

Katie and I had started to settle into some of the routines of the ranch. An important part of our daily routine was our morning discussion with Martin where he would lay out the objectives for the day, answer questions from the previous day, and discuss a vast array of topics ranging from starting a horse in a halter/hackamore/snaffle bit, a comparison and history of the styles of roping and stock handling from different regions of the country (vaquero/buckaroo/Texas cowpuncher), and the history, lore, and legends from the Owyhee, including Martin's family history and his acquaintance with outlaw Claude Dallas (made famous by Ian Tyson's song) who lived in the region, not

too far from the ranch. The morning discussions are an important daily routine as Martin believes that other people may have the same question and learn from the answers. Martin possesses quite a curious, intelligent mind and he also asked us about the foreign world of high-level show jumping we came from and how the horsemanship we were learning could be applied to the jumping. After all, a good start and solid foundation built on feel and timing are the basis for any partnership between horse and rider regardless of their job or discipline.

While we were getting our daily intellectual fulfillment through our discussions, we were also expanding our horsemanship through various exercises we were doing with our horse's feet. Martin's key fundamental exercise, which he refers to as The Eight Exercises, is to isolate one of your horse's feet and pivot or walk your horses both forward and backward around that specific foot; the smaller the circle, the more difficult the exercise gets. These are the movements that anything we ask of our horses are based off. This sounds simple but requires precise control and communication and elucidates any holes that might be in your or your horse's straightness and your communication with your horse. Martin said to rope successfully one must possess not only good roping skills, but good horsemanship and stockmanship. If one of these elements is weaker, another must be stronger. These horsemanship exercises not only came into play while roping but are basic exercises that I now incorporate in my daily work with my horses; they apply just as much to roping as they do to jumping, or opening a gate, or anything



Above: Kristin and Katie above the cliffs at the Shoofly Oolite. Kristin is on her mare, Gulika, and Katie is on her horse, Elliot Z. **Right:** Kristin riding her filly, Radka, across a stream as Martin provides support. It didn't matter if this filly stepped or jumped across the water so long as she knew to go forward from the leg. This experience made a positive impression that will be with this young show jumping horse for the rest of her career.

else where precision, control, and communication are required to get a job done.

As our horsemanship was improving, so was our roping. Martin was helping us with various shots on the dummy in addition to the Hot Heels. He was also helping us with other exercises needed for successful roping; dallying, feeling the tension on the rope, slipping rope accordingly, dragging logs, and shortening up on the rope. I have to say my expertise and favorite job on a horse will always be jumping, but roping on a horse is such a thrill that requires the same level of feel, timing, and partnership between horse and rider. I wanted to make it a goal to rope live cattle off of my Grand Prix show jumping mare, Gulika, during my month at Shoofly.

As the month progressed, the weather started warming up and a few more students started arriving; Lynn from Utah, Bill from Colorado, and Luther from Louisiana. Kim Stone from Maine also joined us to take some beautiful photos. Each of us had a different story to tell and were interested in getting different things out of our time at Shoofly, but what stood out strongly was how we all supported one another. There were no egos and everyone was more interested in the journey than the end goal. We each helped each other out, gave each other encouraging words, and recounted the day's lessons and adventures with a glass of wine around the campfire in the evenings. These are the people that I truly want to surround myself with; their giving nature and their happiness for you when you "get it" or make a leap in your learning is genuine.

One goal that the group of us had was to improve our stockmanship. Balance point and flight zone were the two key principles we worked off of. When roping, these are the key elements

we considered when positioning ourselves on the cow to take our shots. Of course, the horsemanship is integrated into this as well. One exercise that demonstrated this was work in the "A" Pen (see Martin Black "Working Cattle in the 'A' Pen—and Intro with Martin Black DVD). Using the "A" Pen at the Y6 Ranch, we not only got a feel for the balance point and flight zone but we got a feel for the timing of the release of pressure on your horse when the horse is in position on the cow and increased pressure when he is not.

This brought to mind Gene Lewis's genius and his belief that when horses are left to their own devices, they will figure things out rather nicely for themselves without a lot of interference from the human. The "A" Pen work required a feel for the timing of the release and that is what motivated the horses and brought out an instinct for rating the cow that they naturally possessed. The same principles of getting the horse mentally with the job, giving them relief when they are in position or seeking the job, and applying increased pressure when they are not, are applicable no matter if the job is working a cow or jumping or anything else. It is an example of "making your idea their idea" through feel and timing and without any kicking, pulling, or force.

Through our work in the "A" Pen and our increased feel for balance point and flight zone, and the horsemanship we had been working on, we went to practicing our roping on the Y6 steers. We had a branding to go to the following week and needed to put everything we had been working on together. We spent several days tying together our stockmanship, horsemanship, and roping to set up and practice different shots. There was great camaraderie as we worked together in pairs consisting



Above: Kristin on Gulika with Luther while tracking the Hot Heels while Martin coaches and drives the ATV. We first got our horses comfortable tracking the Hot Heels before practicing our roping shots on the Hot Heels. **Above Right:** Kristin ropes a steer off of one of Martin's top bridle (or special forces) horses, Stinger, at the Y6 Ranch while Lynn hazes on his horse. **Right:** Kristin and her filly, Radka, and Katie and her horse, Jord, move cattle with the support of Bill and Martin. Radka had never seen cattle before and she built her confidence and curiosity when she realized the cattle would move away off of her presence and pressure.



of a hazer and roper, and much cheering and “thumbs up” with each successful shot.

Throughout our time at Shoofly, Martin also allowed us time to practice and “soak” on what we had learned. In the book *Evidence-Based Horsemanship* that Martin co-authored with neuroscientist Dr. Stephen Peters, it is discussed that a period of myelination takes place in the brain after a new skill is learned. In Martin's empirical observations, this period takes about two weeks, as corroborated by Dr. Peters' scientific studies of brain development. Katie and I would ride whichever of our horses was not used during the day's activity out onto the desert in the evenings and practice the horsemanship exercises we had been working on, discuss philosophical ideas of horsemanship, and just be in the moment with our horses in the expanse and timeless stillness of the vast country.

Our horses, being high-level athletes, also needed to stay physically conditioned and our rides out on our “off” time also provided a wonderful opportunity to work on their fitness. One of our favorite places to ride was down a sandy creek bottom where Martin's uncle had build a several-mile-long track decades ago to condition his race horses. We loved to let our horses really open up and gallop down this track, smearing the greasewood bushes that lined the track into a blur as we flew by. We additionally loved riding up and down the steep hills and canyons and going for long trots out across the desert. Having so many places to ride kept our horses physically in shape, provided a mental break from the monotony of arena training, and was just plain fun.

In amongst our work we certainly had fun. Martin is a character with neverending curiosity and creativity. He is open to

trying anything, and no “fences” surround his thinking. “Hold my beer!” was one of his favorite figurative sayings. Martin has let go of something that I think holds so many people back and that so many people are afraid of—making a mistake. “You'll wreck plenty of them [horses] to make a good one” is a saying Martin has to encourage people to come out of their comfort zones and search, try, and think to improve themselves to better work with their horses. I believe this has allowed Martin to learn and develop such a keen sense of timing and feel. There isn't anything he isn't willing to try or do on a horse or in life, but he stays on this side of trouble. No matter the outcome of anything, Martin always remains positive and finds the good in everything. He recognizes and builds on the slightest try or the tiniest bit of good in both his horse and his human students. This gave the student the confidence to try but also made learning fun. We had some great “experiments” such as the one-man doctoring to castrate a bull that turned into a four-man doctoring and several adventures with the Hot Heels.

We also had some great outings that increased our camaraderie and allowed us to further take part in the history and culture of the high-desert buckaroo. Martin owns an incredible collection of spade bits spanning all eras and from many different makers, not to mention other artifacts and gear such as spurs, bosals and hackamores, saddles, and articles/news clippings about himself, Gene Lewis, and other influential people, historical ranches, and historical events of the area. We got to visit this museum of sorts or as he calls it, the “vault” on several occasions, although days, not hours would be more the amount of time required to fully take in this extensive collection of gear, artifacts, and history. We also had a great weekend outing to see

Dave Stamey perform in Weiser, Idaho. Martin had no shortage of stories to tell about the ranches he's worked on, the charters he's worked with, and his life cowboying and living in the high-desert, Great Basin regions of northern Nevada, southeastern Oregon, and southwestern Idaho.

Our month-long stay at Shoofly culminated in attending Martin's cousin, Chris's branding. We woke before dawn and Martin already had the first batch of his sourdough pancakes off the griddle when we walked down to the cook tent. After a quick breakfast, we saddled and loaded our horses and gear in the Freightliner and headed south of Bruneau. The prairie grass was lush and as the sun climbed higher in the sky, the distant snow-covered mountains hung like blue ghosts on the horizon. We started by gathering and then sorting off the pairs with calves to be branded. Brandings are an important part of Western culture that bring together a community of people through work (though no one is paid), food, and passing of traditions from one generation to the next. After sorting off the pairs and before the branding began, Chris provided a hearty meal for all of us with all the fixings and sides.

In the words of Brenn Hill, "Build a big wide loop and let the fun begin!" We had a great crew of people, each following the proper etiquettes, helping and teaching each other without egos, and just having fun together on the glorious spring day. We all took turns roping, with Martin, Chris, and Jennifer, showing us how it can be done so smoothly and quietly for the cattle through the applications of the good horsemanship and low-stress stockmanship that we had been working on. We rotated jobs so everyone also worked ground crew and helped with the ear tagging and notching, vaccinations, de-horning, castrating, and branding. Despite the afternoon being quite windy, the branding went off without a hitch. And for me, I was filled with pure elation sitting up on my incredible mare, Gulika, in the two-rein, swinging my loop, holding feet, and her doing the job with all the mental calm, finesse, and heart of a seasoned horse.

Our time at Shoofly drew to a close with a fun but melancholy evening around the campfire. We recounted our adventures, some of the laughs we had, what we learned and how we and our horses had grown during our time there. The following morning, hugs were exchanged and some tears fell as we said our last goodbyes. As I pulled my truck and trailer, loaded with all our horses, back down the long dirt road leading to Shoofly, I couldn't believe a month had gone by. Out in the desert, with the only focus of working on ourselves and our horsemanship, times moves differently. Out here we could really "take the time it takes" without the pressure of meeting the deadlines of shows, achieving timely mile markers in training to keep clients happy, and the daily race to get all the horses back home ridden, lessons taught, communications kept up on. I felt like I wouldn't be able to integrate back into my regular life and routine.

I watched the Owyhee Mountains fade from view as I drove further towards Interstate 84. I spend a good portion of my life behind the wheel of my truck as I travel to various horse shows

around the country. I enjoy this time in that I can be peaceful and alone with my thoughts. Although I did have the reality of returning to my normal life and business, I thought about how I could keep my time at Shoofly alive. I believe a large component of horsemanship isn't what we do but rather how we do it and our approach to both horses and people. As Martin puts it, "ask the horse, do your own research." Of course, there were tangible skills we learned from Martin including various horsemanship exercises, colt starting, roping, and so much more, many of which I have since incorporated into my regular routine and work with the horses and my students, but as a bigger picture, the time I took for my own self and my own development was invaluable. I slowed down to work with an incredible horseman, which filled my mind with philosophical pontifications about good horsemanship and satisfied a piece of my never-ending curiosity about the horse.

Another piece to horsemanship I think is vital is passing it on to and sharing it with younger generations. I am in my 30s and, in part because of my age, but also because of my youthful and upbeat way of teaching, I can connect with the younger generations and bridge the gap between the "old cowboys" and the younger girls who at first don't think that those old men

"I believe a large component of horsemanship isn't what we do but rather how we do it and our approach to both horses and people."

riding quarter horses around in stock saddles have anything to offer that could help them with their show jumping horses. I have taken many of my students to Buck Brannaman clinics, whether to ride or audit, and several have been down to Mindy's ranch. I felt that it was especially important to bring my assistant Katie, who is 18 years old, along with me to learn from Martin. Katie is a very talented young rider and pours her heart into everything that has to do with the horses. I wanted to provide her with an unforgettable learning experience, submerged in horsemanship, taught by an exceptional horseman. I knew this experience would open her mind and be with her forever. Perhaps one day she might have students of her own and introduce them to good horsemanship. To keep this going, I think the younger generations must become involved, find value, have an excitement about, practice, and ultimately pass along good horsemanship to the next generation.

Upon returning home, I of course had my usual work and routine to get back to, but now it didn't seem so monotonous and rushed. The experiences and lessons at Shoofly fueled greater creativity in my everyday riding and teaching and the memories freely floated through my mind throughout the day as I rode and taught. I was only back from Shoofly for two weeks before leaving again with clients and horses to a show at the Colorado Horse Park. After spending a month at Shoofly working on timing, balance, communication, and keeping my horses



Left: Kristin ropes a calf off of her mare, Gulika, at Martin's cousin Chris's branding. It should be noted that she is riding her in traditional buckaroo gear - the two-rein and western wade saddle. **Below:** Two weeks after the branding, Kristin and Gulika are pictured jumping the final fence in the \$25,000 LEG Grand Prix at the Colorado Horse Park where they jumped a clear round, placing 3rd in the class. This demonstrates the tremendous versatility and heart horses can have when prepared to understand and seek the job at hand.



fit by working up hills and on long trots across the Owyhee desert, my mare, Gulika, jumped some of the best rounds of her life to that date. She jumped a brilliant clear round in the Open Jumper Welcome Stake and we were 3rd in the \$25,000 Grand Prix. Katie had great success with her horses, too.

The weekend after our return from this show, Katie and I were invited to move cattle and attend a branding outside of Wheatland, Wyoming. We got to put to use the roping and stockmanship Martin had helped us to develop and proved the versatility that any horse can have. After all, our horses didn't know that they were imported warmbloods, bred for high-level jumping, doing the work that a cow-bred quarter horse would stereotypically do. To the horse it does not matter what is presented and asked of them, but how it is presented and asked of them. At first, through the various horsemanship exercises done with feel and timing, I got my horses with me. But through time, that grows to something much greater. "First you go with the horse, then the horse goes with you, then you go together." It's that togetherness—when your horse is really with you in mind, body, and in spirit that enables you to do anything you can dream of or desire with your horse with no boundaries set by preconceived ideas or notions of what you and your horse can be or do.

Another takeaway is, if you have a dream or there is something that you really want to do, now is the time to do it. Upon my arrival back home, the barn that I was running my business out of sold, causing a massive disturbance to my business due to a dearth of suitable barns to move to in the Longmont area.

Later that summer, my incredible partner, Gulika, stepped on a nail while at home. After two surgeries and nearly three weeks in the hospital at CSU, an infection had completely taken over her navicular bone. She was a strong and beautiful athlete with the mind and heart of the greatest of horses. She was only 10 years old and was the most talented jumper I have ridden. Beyond that, she was my partner, whether gathering cattle in the mountains or jumping a Grand Prix course, and my relationship with her transcended the physical and mental, and entered into the realm of spiritual. I sat with her as she passed on, relieved of the tremendous pain she had endured for the past three weeks. I don't know that I will ever be over the grief of losing my partner, but I do feel peace in that there is nothing I ever held back doing with her and I will always have the memories of our long trots across the Owyhee, the thrill of roping live cattle off of her, and the feel of our togetherness as she gave her heart over the massive show jumping jumps.

Because of my time at Shoofly and then the events that unfolded in the months following my return to Colorado, I have thought about life differently. Our time here is ephemeral and so are our relationships with our horses. If there is something you want to do, try, or be, now is the time. You and your horse are only limited by the fences and parameters you build. I encourage you to go out and work with the horseman you have always looked up to, ride your horse where you have always dreamed of riding them, and take the steps to become the horseman you have always wanted to be. Go out there and "have the ride of your life," and you will have no regrets.



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What were they thinking?

"I was feeling so grateful to be able to ride through the open desert in Idaho, everything being peaceful and still. Having the opportunity to go to Martin Black's beautiful ranch for a month was a dream come true and I honestly had never been happier. I felt so lucky to be able to escape the 'real world' for a while and be without stress or expectations. In this moment, I felt I was one with my horse and had the feeling of true peace and happiness."

Katie Glass is an assistant for Kristin Jacob at Blue Star Farms in Longmont, Colo. Katie is galloping her horse, Elliot Z, across the Owyhee desert outside of Martin Black's place at Shoofly. Photo by Kim Stone.

