

## “Riding The Wave”

c. Marlis Amato

Have you ever watched the spectacular beauty of a surfer gliding on top of a huge wave? The surfer sits on his board, waiting for the next surge of ocean energy. When the right wave builds, the surfer stands, balancing with the flow of the wave, and rides until the energy dissipates. He has no power over the energy. He can't control the wave. He must flow with the wave. If he doesn't "go with the flow", he'll be un-boarded (Is there such a term as that? I'm not a surfing expert, for sure.) The success and thrill of the surfer's ride lies in his ability to balance and connect with the energy beneath him.

I know that comparing surfing to riding seems like a stretch. I see the two sports as being very similar, only riding a horse involves another live being providing the energy beneath you. The concept is the same, though. To have a thrilling and fun ride, you must be able to relax and go with the flow. Give direction to the energy, don't try to control it. When you counter the energy beneath with your muscle energy and tension, you will more than likely end up "unseated."

There's that word again – Control. We humans are instinctively built to try to control everything in our environment. We're very active, and incorporate every thought into physical action. Our mind is very busy dictating to our body. We're generally not even aware of many of our body actions. We don't have to tell our body what to do. It instinctively does things for us. When you stand and walk, do you have to consciously find your balance first before taking a step? When you first learn to walk you do, but then it becomes totally subconscious. Your body finds the place of comfort.

Each one of us has a different center of balance. There is no set prescription for finding your center, and you can't control it. When you mount your horse, it's important to let your body do its own thing. There is a proper riding posture that's taught. Shoulders above the hip, ankles in line with the hip, contact with the thigh, heels down and into the stirrup. As soon as you try to tell all those body parts what to do, they all become overactive. You can't feel the horse and the horse can't feel you. You will have difficulty with your balance. The horse responds to very subtle energy changes and reads muscle tension. Effective communication with your horse is only possible if you relax and flow with your horse's energy. When you let your body find your balance, guess what? You will be in proper riding position, and, you will be a part of your horse. You'll find that your horse responds to seat alone.

One of my most enjoyable jobs here at the farm is teaching my grandchildren to ride. I have four, ranging in age from 9 months to 10 years. They each started sitting, or laying, on a horse at only a couple months of age. Actually, I don't really teach them to ride. They figure it out all by themselves! I just put them on the back of the horse, and then guard them in case they fall. Children are amazing. The 9 month old, Gianna, was just on my Night Shift the other day. When we first put her on, of course, we set her on with legs spread. Now, that's quite a feat if your legs are only 10 inches long! She supported herself with her hands to stay balanced. Within 20 feet, though, Gianna tucked her legs up under herself, and then let go with her hands. So, no, her legs were not around the horse, BUT, her ankles, hips and shoulders were all in alignment, and she was balanced enough that she didn't need the support of her hands. Without conscious thought or control, her little body found its balance.

We adults need to figure out how to do that! Give it a try. Drop those stirrups and feel the flow. You'll be amazed at how great it feels to just "let go." Your horse will also thank you for it. You'll feel the difference in his/her movement immediately.

