

**ON A BUCOLIC RANCH NEAR LONGMONT, THE POWER OF HORSES IS HARNESSSED TO TEACH PEOPLE TO CORRAL THE INNER POWER WITHIN THEMSELVES.**

To “expose people to the beauty and wonder of horses,” is the goal of entrepreneur, horsewoman, success coach, and psychotherapist Melisa Pearce, is owner of the 42-acre Lil Bit North Ranch near Longmont. Pearce raises world-class champion American paint horses.

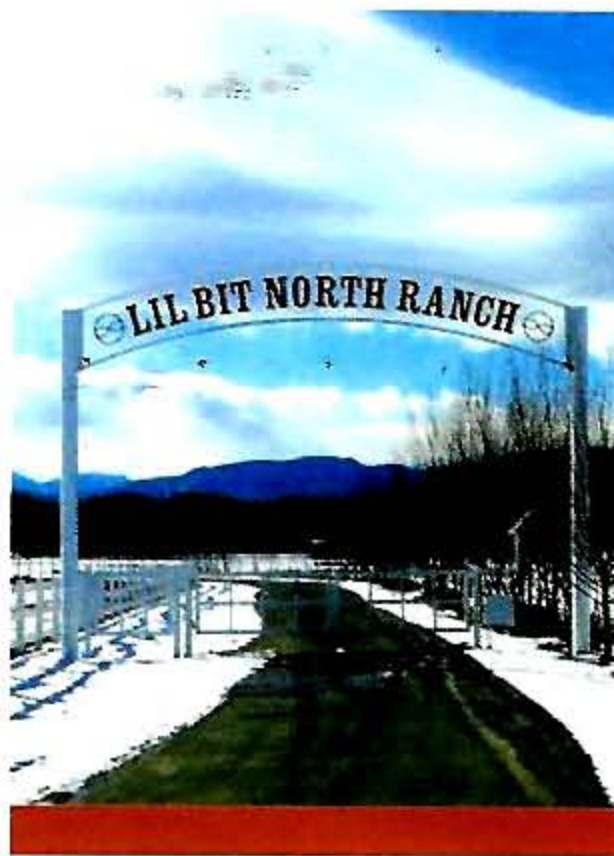
“Then I integrate that with positive guidance on examining how people have chosen to create their past and how they choose to create their future.”

Year round, Lil Bit North Ranch is a standard equestrian learning center offering programs and lessons for novice through professional riders, as well as breeding facilities and clinics. Award-winning professional horse trainer Joby Priest gives instruction to individuals and groups utilizing the ranch’s majestic paint horses; approximately 40 horses owned by the Pearces live alongside other horses boarded by their owners. The ranch also has a gift store selling everything from tack and feed to T-shirts with fun “horsie” sayings.

On the side, however, Melisa Pearce transforms the Lil Bit North into a retreat center, designing her seminars and retreats at the ranch with personal transformation in mind. A psychotherapist with a master’s degree in coun-

seling, Pearce worked in private practice in Flagstaff, Arizona, for over 10 years.

“I feel privileged that I can take all that I’ve learned personally and professionally and combine it with my love for horses,” she says. “My expertise is in capturing people’s ideas and directing them in a way that allows them to access



their own inner power.”

Horses, explains Pearce, act as mirrors to human personalities and temperaments. “They reflect us,” she says.

“Many of the ways in which human beings move or relate in our social interactions are mirrored in how we relate to horses. For example, if a handler is nervous, the horse becomes nervous. If the handler is controlling, the horse becomes controlling. But if the handler is giving, the horse wants to give too.

“While dogs are interested in unconditional love, horses meet you as partners and enroll you as

partners. If you’re fair to a horse, the horse will be fair to you. If you’re not fair, the horse won’t be fair. Horses have boundaries, just as people do.”

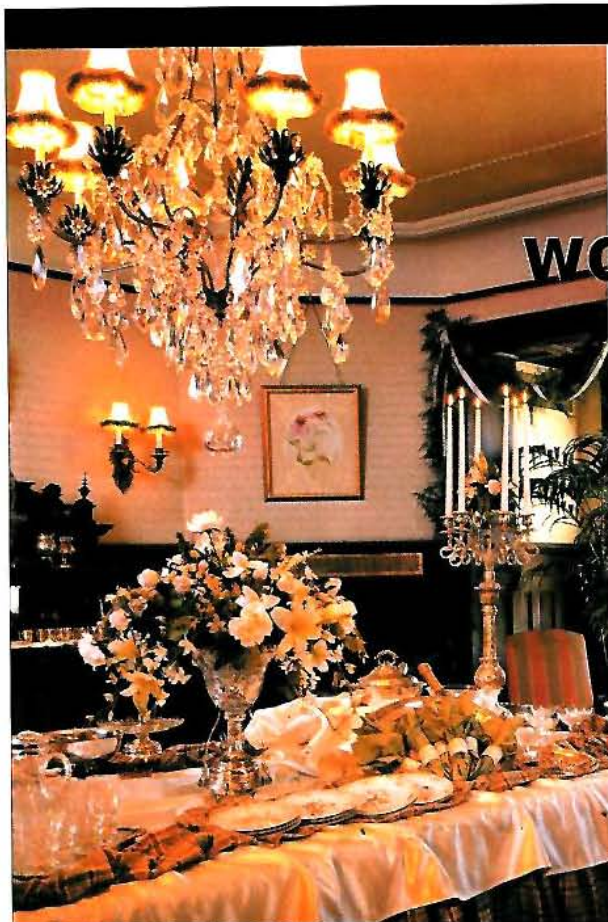
Pearce offers a number of programs at the ranch; at the same time, she is a motivational speaker and personal coach for entrepreneurs around the world. Onsite at the Lil Bit North, programs are designed to teach participants the lessons horses can provide, she explains.

Group and corporate teams are the focus in the one-day “Corralling Your Power Team,” while “Harness the Horsepower Within” gives participants a two-day experience on the Lil Bit North, including live horse demonstrations with trainer Priest, as well as group activities, presentations, and some meals.

A four-day program, “Touched By a Horse,” is geared toward groups of 10 to 14 women (typically hard-driving, Type A businesswomen) giving them an opportunity to network with others, explore and identify their top values, expand their personal identities, and explore what horses have to teach.

“Although you’ll learn about horses, you’ll learn more about yourself,” explains Pearce, whose philosophy is a sort of New Age potpourri, with tidbits of Oprah Winfrey, Dolly Parton, Tony Robbins, and Mary Ann Williamson mixed in with a heavy sprinkling of horse clinician, John Lyons.

Pearce speaks continually of the “choices” people make and



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necessary equipment, such as notebooks; Pearce's presentations; gifts and goodie bags.

"We deliver a high value for a high price," says Pearce. "We work to under-promise and over-deliver. 'Touched by a Horse' has been really well received at this price, which is comparable to or far less in price than other women's equine spa retreats."

A more value-priced women's program, "Retreat at the Ranch," will be held for the first time this April (dates still to be confirmed), priced at \$2,000. This 10-partici-



pant retreat will include accommodations onsite at the Lil Bit North Ranch in an 1,800-square-foot well-appointed bunkhouse with three bathrooms. Meals will be prepared communally, and there will be more actual work with horses. "Retreat at the Ranch" will be held during foaling season.

"We have seven pregnant mares," says Pearce, "and we can almost guarantee that one or two foals will be born during the retreat."

All levels of horse knowledge and experience are welcome at all of Pearce's retreats. In fact, Pearce notes, "Our perfect demographic is someone with no experience with, or who has fear around, horses."

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urges them to “manifest” their visions for the future.

“Many of life’s lessons can be learned through horses,” she maintains. “We challenge women to look at their lives and the contributions they have made to the world. Again, we can see an analogy to horses—why do some horses, like Secretariat, achieve so much, while others just graze? Why do some people decide to do more than others?”



“Touched by a Horse” is not a horse-back riding retreat. In fact, all of the contact with horses happens at the indoor arena, not outdoors. Participants are assigned to one of Pearce’s champion paints, with which they will get acquainted by brushing, stroking, and leading. There are three actual riding sessions in the arena, each for about 90 minutes.

“Touched by a Horse,” priced at \$4,997 per person, includes all lodging (usually at the nearby cozy and elegant Niwot Inn); buffet-style meals and evening entertainment; a professional one-hour massage; the use of a horse inside the arena (no outdoor riding is included); equestrian training and

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Donna Koontz, a California businesswoman who runs personal-growth seminars of her own, attended the first "Touched By a Horse" event last fall. A self-described horse novice, Koontz says Pearce's program was "A very holistic experience, involving the whole self. I feel empowered and inspired, and I deeply enjoyed the experience on every level.

"I had never ridden a horse previously. As I was learning to ride and develop a relationship with my horse for the week, I was trying to process all the information in my head and trying to remember to do everything correctly, at the same time that I was directing the horse. I ended up sending different messages and instructions, so the poor horse became confused.

"On a more subtle level, we play life just as we play anything else. I asked myself sincerely, where else do I send mixed messages? Parenting? Business? Are my boundaries truly clear? I realized at the retreat that this was actually a very subtle pattern in my life.

"I always enjoy challenging myself to take an honest look at my thinking and how it impacts my life. At this retreat, you may be delightfully surprised at the 'gifts' awaiting you on many levels."

For information on the workshops, contact Pearce at 303-652-8704 or visit [www.lilbit-northranch.com](http://www.lilbit-northranch.com).

IRENE MIDDLEMAN THOMAS IS AN AURORA-BASED FREELANCE WRITER WITH WORK PUBLISHED IN THE DENVER POST, TRAVEL FEATURES SYNDICATE, AAA THE MOTORIST, COSTCO CONNECTIONS, TWINS, HISPANIC, POSTAL LIFE, LATINA STYLE, AND COLORADO PARENT.

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