



# Touched by a Horse: A Unique Women's Retreat Reveals Surprising Results

BY BOBBIE HASSELBRING

Can a horse reveal your vulnerabilities, your personal style, your innermost secrets and desires? Absolutely, says psychotherapist Melisa Pearce, founder of Touched by a Horse, a unique, five-day women's retreat that uses horses as "equine mirrors" to reflect the inner self.

"Horses are empaths," explains the veteran horsewoman, who also raises championship Paint horses on her ranch in Longmont, Colorado. "They're very sensitive, able to feel the tiniest fly on their backs. With people, they pick up on how we're feeling and they react to that."

Touched by a Horse retreats are held on Pearce's 42-acre Lil Bit North Ranch, which is surrounded by snow-capped Rocky Mountains in the verdant Boulder Valley 45 minutes from Denver. When we arrived at the ranch, it was easy to feel we'd stepped off of

life's treadmill for the part luxury retreat, part group therapy, part goal setting and empowerment seminar. Designed for beginners and veteran horsewomen alike, the all-inclusive retreat included gourmet meals, a professional massage, demonstrations of horsemanship skills, use of a horse, Pearce's psychological insights and lodging at the Niwot Inn, a small, elegant bed and breakfast lodge located a few minutes from the ranch.

Six women participated in our retreat, many of us at crossroads in our lives. Lisa, 44, was a single mom who had recently lost both her parents in a terrorist attack. Diane, a nurse, was facing both a career change and a divorce. Michele, a journalist from California, was redefining herself after the death of her husband of 28 years. Contemplating a career change, I was asking myself, what's next? A few of us had experience with horses.

Others had little to none.

Pearce, who holds an MSW from Arizona State University and is a graduate of Anthony Robbins' Mastery University, has been a practicing psychotherapist since 1989, helping groups, individuals and companies face issues and achieve their goals. She's been an award-winning horsewoman and championship horsebreeder even longer. Pearce says she's always known that horses mirror human behavior and, a few years ago, realized that horsemanship skills and equine behavior could be used to improve human relationships and help people define and achieve their goals. "Horses can reveal who we are," she says. "They can help us find the magic inside ourselves."

During our retreat, we worked in teams in a large arena with the horses. Anne, a young woman with no horse experience, and I were assigned to Sassy, a test-the-limits kind of

*continued on page 32*

## Prevent Post Vacation Blues

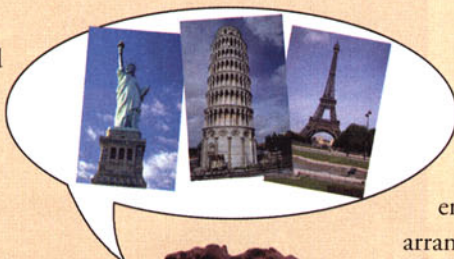
Even if your vacation has relaxed and recharged you, getting back to work can soon make you feel listless and unmotivated. Here are tips to alleviate the symptoms of post-trip letdown:

### Pace yourself

We tend to have high expectations of what we can get out of our vacations, and so can overplan or overbook ourselves for the time meant to relax. Make sure you're not trying to do so much that you never relax and regret it.

### Schedule your return a couple of days early

Give yourself a day or so between vacation and going back to work; it can help ease the transition to your duties.



### Let others know your plans

It is always good business etiquette to let people know you're away and to provide them with alternative contacts. Send important clients and co-workers notice of your time off, and arrange for messages on your voice mail and e-mail. It can reduce the number of messages waiting to be returned.

### Ease into it

If you can arrange it, make your first day back a half-day. You can take care of the most pressing matters at work with this time. **W**





## What's Your Dream Kitchen?

- Built to Order – just the way you want it!
- Save Money – factory direct in Spokane Industrial Park.
- Quality Construction – built to last a lifetime.
- Backed by the West's leading custom cabinetmaker.

# HUNTWOOD

**FACTORY DIRECT CUSTOM CABINETS**

3808 N. Sullivan Road, Spokane Industrial Park, Building 26  
Spokane, Washington • (509) 924-5858 • www.huntwood.com

*continued from page 30*

horse who was easily bored and didn't like following rules. Interestingly, Anne and I found that we shared a lot of characteristics with our equine friend. We worked the horses in a round pen, using our bodies, voices and a crop to direct them. Then we saddled and rode the horses through various gaits and around obstacles, learning to use our eyes and our intention rather than physical force to get the big animals to do as we asked.



## Women's Care

North Spokane Women's Clinic provides obstetrical and gynecological care for women of all ages, specializing in:

- ◆ Birth Control
- ◆ Bladder Control Problems
- ◆ Cancer Screening
- ◆ Childbirth Education Classes
- ◆ Family Centered Obstetrical Care
- ◆ Female Surgery
- ◆ Menopausal Care
- ◆ Office Ultrasound
- ◆ Osteoporosis Screening
- ◆ PMS Counseling

North  
Spokane  
Women's  
Clinic

John J. McKenna, M.D.  
Patrick F. Freuen, M.D.  
Sharon Cathcart, D.O.

John I. McKenna, M.D.  
Karla E. Khan, M.D.

**489-2101**

Holy Family Hospital Medical Building  
235 E. Rowan, Ste 102 • Spokane

In the evenings, we'd gather at the ranch's long dining table and share a delicious meal. Then we'd retreat to big pillows in front of the fireplace to process what we'd learned. As we talked about our experiences with the horses, it was fascinating to see how accurately the horses reflected our personal styles and issues. For instance, when I tried to use my will to "make" my horse Sassy do something, she rebelled. In my personal life, I often try to control people and events, but it rarely works. When I relaxed and provided opportunities for the horse to do my bidding – what Pearce calls "opening the door" – the horse easily complied.

Throughout the days and nights, our group became closer and with Pearce gently guiding us with insightful questions, our fireside conversations became deeper and more meaningful. One evening, one participant's inability to get her horse to do something revealed for her deep feelings of shame and inadequacy. Pearce invited the woman to "process" her feelings with us. With




several members of the group holding and stroking her and Pearce guiding her, the woman wept deeply for several minutes. Another evening, a participant role-played talking back to her belittling mother. Another woman, forced to grow up too soon, was helped to re-discover her playfulness with an imaginary tea party that sent the group into gales of belly laughter.

Goals and envisioning our futures were also a big part of the retreat. We wrote vision statements, detailing how we'd like to be seen in the world, what we'd like to contribute and our view of our perfect lives in the next three to five years. We spent one morning in Pearce's Mongolian yurt cutting and pasting images and words from magazines to make vision boards illustrating our dreams and goals. We also decorated pine boards – one side with things that block us from achieving our goals and, on the other, what we'd like to break through to. Then, working with Sam, Melisa's partner who holds black belts in several martial arts, we used our energy and focus to effortlessly break through the half-inch thick boards.

My five-day retreat passed too quickly. As I boarded the plane for home, I felt lighter, happier and more relaxed than I had in years. I'd truly been Touched by a Horse. For more information about Touched by a



Horse or any of the other seminars and retreats conducted by Melisa Pearce and her staff, call (303) 652-8704 or email [melisa@touchedbyahorse.com](mailto:melisa@touchedbyahorse.com). 

---

# Diamondz

Body Boutique

---

*A Full Service Salon and Spa*

## Spokane's Largest Wig Salon

*Manicures and Pedicures  
Lash and Brow Tinting  
Hair and Nails  
Facials  
Waxing  
Body Wraps  
Massage Therapy  
Full Service Hair Replacement  
Hair Extensions  
Endermologie Cellulite Treatment  
Tanning*

**Spa Packages and Gift Certificates Available**

*Specializing in Human and Synthetic Hairpieces, Clips and Integration Units  
Hair Replacement Consultants Available*

12016 East Sprague Avenue  
Spokane, WA 99206

**509-926-6429**

It's time...  
Now more than ever...

**To take a summer vacation.**



Call Cruises & Travel at 924-9722  
"Selling all types of travel to all parts of the World"