

RIDING FEAR FREE

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Help for Fearful Riders and Their Teachers

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and
JENNIFER BECTON



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Disclaimer: Horseback riding and all equine activities are inherently dangerous, and these activities will expose participants to above-normal risks of bodily injury and/or death. You are responsible for your own safety while engaging in any and all equine activities, including those described in Riding Fear Free.

Riding Fear Free is designed to provide information and motivation to our readers using Laura Daley's methodology, concepts, and practices. It should be applied with the understanding that at no time are Laura Daley; Jennifer Becton; Whiteley Press, LLC; or any of Whiteley Press LLC's independent contractors, agents, and employees responsible for the implementation of these methodologies, concepts, and practices. This book is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged to render any type of psychological, legal, or any other kind of professional advice. No warranties or guarantees are expressed or implied by the publisher's choice to include any of the content in this volume. Neither the publisher nor the individual authors shall be liable for any physical, psychological, emotional, financial, or commercial damages, including, but not limited to, special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Our views and rights are the same: You are responsible for your own choices, actions, and results. Should readers not fully understand the implications of these techniques or be in a position to carry them out properly, they should seek the advice of professional horse trainers, riding instructors, or therapists.

What Trainers Are Saying about *Riding Fear Free*

Normally, I don't read books like *Riding Fear Free*. It's not that I haven't had fear issues with riding, but I'm just not into self-help books. Once I started reading *Riding Fear Free*, I found that I didn't want to put it down! I was enlightened by the process, and it gave me new insight to what my clients go through. I have already incorporated some of the ideas in dealing with fearful clients. This book has amazing potential to help many people.

—Raye Lochert, Trainer, Raye Lochert Horsemanship

Riding Fear Free is a valuable resource for any horse owner. After reading *Riding Fear Free...*, I have a newfound respect for what [fearful riders] were going through. *Riding Fear Free* has given me the knowledge I need to patiently and respectfully help others become fear free.

—Josh Rushing, Professional Horsemen, 2010 EXCA World Champion

Riding Fear Free is going to help so many people to overcome their fear and to not feel so alone. This book will help them.

—Brandi Lyons, Trainer, No Limits Horsemanship

The science behind [*Riding Fear Free*]...made addressing the fear as an issue itself as legitimate and important as what I always thought of as the "real" lesson. This is required reading for any instructor.

—Blaine Rankin, Level 4 CHA Certified Instructor

[*Riding Fear Free*] helped me to see my students in a new and hopefully, a more empowering way.

—Kim Robotille, Trainer, Two Minds One Ride

I recommended [*Riding Fear Free*] to one of my clients, and she got a lot out of it.

—Charles Wilhelm, Trainer, Charles Wilhelm Training Center

[*Riding Fear Free*] is the book I've been waiting for — without even knowing it. Trying to help riders with fears I often didn't understand was frustrating. And there just wasn't much help out there for fearful riders or those working with them — until now. These authors truly understand the various types of fear and most importantly commonsense, simple ways to fix them

—Kathy Huggins, Owner, Cedar Creek Training Stables

What Riders Are Saying about *Riding Fear Free*

I happened upon [*Riding Fear Free*] by accident and was pretty skeptical. I skimmed the book and found some interesting things that I decided to try, and was I ever surprised by the difference in my fear level. I was trapped by the negative thoughts and images in my mind, but no more! I truly am *Riding Fear Free*!

—Jenny Zogg

[*Riding Fear Free*] forced me to re-think how I view fear, in myself and in others, and how to react to it. I believe my daughter's riding experience would have been much different if I had read this book ten years ago. I would highly recommend this book to everyone who has any fear or deals with people who may be fearful. Parents, riding instructors, spouses and those who ride with fearful partners would all benefit greatly from reading this book.

—DeborahLynn Sherwood

Riding Fear Free gave me steps to take that built my confidence and riding ability. The progressive, small steps the book encourages as well as the techniques such as journaling and short rides has made good horsemanship an obtainable goal.

—Jen Hooker

I have spent the past year working my way through the [*Riding Fear Free*] process. One day everything clicked, and I took the next step up into the saddle. It was a fifteen-minute ride that felt like old times. I have ridden since and feel the confidence growing with each one as my enjoyment returns.

—Joy Senger

Riding Fear Free is more than amazing! It is life-changing. I tried it all-the traditional advice to "just do it," reading anything I could find on the subject, watching training shows, reading self-help books, etc.... Nothing had the answers I was searching for. And then, one blessed day, I found the one! Laura Daley and Jennifer Becton have researched and written a guide to put fearful riders back in the saddle in a manner unlike any I have experienced before. This is a must read for anyone experiencing horse-related fear, no matter what the cause. You will not regret it!

—Jennifer Woodruff

This book is dedicated to our families
Dave, Sean, and Tyler Daley
and
Bert Becton
and to our perfect horses
Im Aneat (Anita)
and
Call Me Crazy (Darcy),
and it was made possible only through the grace of God.

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Foreword by Jody Lyons

I have the passion to learn to ride, but fear has been a huge obstacle for me. I have never had a wreck or been hurt by a horse. I have the best trainer—my husband John Lyons—available to me 24/7 and the best trained horses to work with, and yet my fear takes over. I have cried, prayed, and beaten myself up plenty for not being better at riding. Many people ask with disbelief in their voices, “What? You’re married to John Lyons and are afraid? What is wrong with you?” Or they say, “You could ride my horse. He’s the best trained horse ever!” But it doesn’t matter how skilled the horse trainer is or how well the horse is trained, I am still afraid I am going to get hurt.

But there is someone out there who really understands what I go through in trying to learn to ride, so it is such an honor for me to have been asked to write the foreword for *Riding Fear Free: Help for Fearful Riders and Their Teachers*. Laura Daley and Jennifer Becton have absolutely nailed the topic of fear from a scientific perspective and given me real techniques for managing it in the saddle and around my horse Charlie. This book gave me hope.

I carried the manuscript around with me for two weeks and read parts of it when I could. I couldn’t put it down. In fact, I found myself thinking about it most of the day. I have already started to use Laura and Jennifer’s principles myself. For the first time, I am excited about going to the barn and spending time with Charlie, and I love to visualize myself taking perfect, fear-free rides. *Riding Fear Free* has given me the confidence I needed just to start somewhere, to realize that wherever I start is okay, and to know that I can—and should—walk away if I become scared.

I met Laura Daley and her two handsome boys about twelve years ago at the Western States Horse Expo in Sacramento, California, where John and I had a booth. Laura’s enthusiasm, kindness, and love of her boys, horses, and helping others shined through her. Even though I knew what a special lady she is, I am in awe at the magnitude of her understanding of the fearful rider and her knowledge of how to help them. The inclusion of Jennifer’s research helped explain what was happening from a scientific perspective, and I am impressed by the book they have written together. Honestly, I have never met anyone with their level of understanding on the topic.

Riding Fear Free has truly given me hope of one day being fear free, and I know this book will help many teachers and students. I am so thankful for the two ladies who have taken the time to write it. I would highly recommend *Riding Fear Free* to anyone. In fact, John Lyons is going to read this book and learn the principles also. Even though he is already a great trainer, this information will help him understand where the fearful riding is coming from and why. Meanwhile, I am excited to work with Laura and my horse Charlie so that I can learn to ride fear free too.

Jody Lyons
July 2012
JohnLyons.biz

Introduction by Laura Daley

Some people say I was born to work with horses and to teach children. Growing up surrounded by both, it was a natural progression. I have always had a passion to help other people, children and adults. I believe this desire is a gift from God, and without that foundation, I could not have developed these techniques or had any success with my clients and students over the past thirty years.

I grew up on a large-scale Arabian breeding ranch and have spent my entire life learning about horses. My first horse-training experiences came as a child, but I never stopped learning. As an adult, I became a Brandi Lyons Certified trainer. I firmly believe in continued education and shared experiences, and I often attend clinics with respected trainers such as Brandi Lyons, Pat Parelli, Richard Shrake, Ken McNabb, Raye Lochert, Julie Goodnight, and John and Josh Lyons. In addition to my horse training experience, I study and practice natural hoof care, equine massage, and chiropractic care. I believe in and merge conditioned-response training methods with physical therapies to create a balanced, peaceful, and willing equine partner.

But I'm not just a trainer of horses. I'm also a teacher of riders. I became a registered Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH) riding instructor in 1997 and have studied the methods of Sally Swift, who pioneered Centered Riding techniques, and Eckart Meyners, a German dressage and body awareness teacher. I am a veteran 4H leader and teacher of underprivileged youth and special needs clients. Physically challenged riders have a special place in my heart. I have had arthritis in my ankles since I was seventeen, so that has given me a unique and personal insight into the struggle to overcome physical hardships and pain.

My specialty is helping fearful riders overcome their fears. Using techniques that I have developed over a lifetime of teaching, I have helped hundreds of once-fearful people become fear free. I combine the same conditioned-response methods I use on horses with techniques that help riders accept and take control of their emotions in healthy and safe ways.

A Note to Fearful Riders

I hope you read this book with an open heart and that it helps you become the fear-free rider you dream you could be. You have started on an amazing journey. Like any long journey, there are a lot of twists and turns, rabbit trails, and even road blocks, but you can do it, and we are here to help. I am proud of you for choosing to stop living with your fear. My prayer for you is complete peace.

A Note to Teachers

Thank you for reading this book. Whether you picked it up yourself or one of your students has asked you to read it, you are to be commended for putting your students first in this process. It is obvious that you have a great passion for teaching and willingness to keep learning. *Riding Fear Free* presents ideas that differ greatly from the ways most trainers and riding instructors have dealt with fearful riders. In order to help fearful—and not just slightly unconfident—riders, you may need to change some of your teaching habits and maybe some of your core beliefs about fear. You are not required to take on fearful riders as students if that is not truly what you want to do. Not all teachers want to delve into this area, and that's okay. Be honest about your interests, and then relay the truth to the prospective student.

Thanks again for taking the time to read this book.

Introduction by Jennifer Becton

I am a fearful rider.

Actually, I am a fearful rider in recovery.

Even as a horse-crazy child, I was never a particularly bold rider. I never got to experience those carefree childhood days in the saddle when nothing was scary and everything was magical. I was always too aware of the vast size and power gap between me and even the smallest, most ancient lesson pony. As an adult rider, I took dressage lessons and grew tremendously from them. Still, I remained timid, and then a runaway incident made my fear nearly unmanageable.

My friend, a dressage instructor and trusted judge of horses, and I were looking for my first horse, and I was having one final canter on a lovely prospect, a warmblood cross, when suddenly we were flying around the arena at a full gallop. I literally froze in terror. My arms and legs would not move. My friend shouted at me, trying to get me to use the outside rein, keeping the horse on the rail to avoid having him take me unwillingly over the jumps that dotted the center of the arena. I managed to keep him away from the jumps, but other than keeping a tight outside rein, I was just a passenger as we galloped madly around and around.

Finally, the horse's owner, who had given us privacy to bond, rushed out of the barn and leapt in front of the horse. In that instant, my life did not flash before my eyes, though that's what I expected. Instead, as I saw her position herself in front of us, I mentally composed my obituary: "Rider killed by crazy horse; owner injured in the accident." The horse jumped sideways to avoid his owner, and the whole affair ended with my face in the gravel driveway and a hoof grazing my helmet. I was never so happy to see gravel in my life. Or that I had worn my helmet.

After the runaway, my fear rose to a new level. Everything about horseback riding was terrifying, even skills I knew well. Still, I managed to purchase my first horse: a National Show Horse (Arab x Saddlebred) mare with the registered name Call Me Crazy. And I really felt like people should be calling me crazy. I was almost too terrified to ride the horse I'd waited twenty years to own. Forget trotting a twenty-meter circle. I was fighting to let someone lead me around at the walk for five minutes. And my terror was rubbing off on my new horse, whom I called Darcy. She became increasingly nervous, so I became even more terrified. We were on a definite downward spiral.

I couldn't even handle taking my usual weekly dressage lesson on Darcy, so I decided it was time to hire a professional trainer to help us out of the spiral of fear. I chose a John Lyons certified trainer because John seemed to be the most well versed of the big-name trainers in dealing with fearful riders. He often says that "fear is common sense in disguise," and his policy is to "ride where you can and not where you can't" (*Fear in the Rider*). And after various well-meaning people had advised me just to grit my teeth through it or take a gallop in the pasture to meet the fear head on, being told that my fear was keeping me safe and to ride only where I felt comfortable appealed to me.

Our Lyons-certified trainer worked miracles for Darcy and me, but our time with him ended before I was able to address my biggest fear: cantering. My horse was now soft on the bridle, responsive, and happier, and my fear had diminished greatly, but it was still there, waiting below the surface. In the intervening years, I hired other wonderful trainers to help us. Each one filled in another piece of the fear puzzle, and my confidence grew, but I still

had not accomplished my dream of cantering in a pasture.

Then, I met Laura Daley, a Brandi-Lyons certified trainer and a horsewoman with more than thirty years of experience training horses and helping fearful riders. Actually, I had known her for years through an online discussion board, but she approached me about editing her book of inspirational horse stories, and in exchange, she told me that she would help me become a fear-free rider.

I was skeptical.

I had done all the traditional things to help me overcome fear. I took riding lessons on good horses. I was fit and balanced. I wore a helmet. I sought training for my horse and created a trusting bond with her. I figured I was naturally more fearful than most people, and I would just have to live with it. I would never canter in a field.

“No,” Laura said, “it doesn’t have to be that way.” I could truly be a fear-free rider.

I didn’t know how it would be possible for her to help me, especially because she lives on the West Coast and I live on the East Coast, but I thought, “What the heck! Let’s give it a try.” I had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

What resulted from our relationship has been nothing short of life-altering. After researching and confirming the science behind the techniques Laura suggested, I ended up following her advice. I wrote pages of journal entries and cried lots of tears. I did visualization exercises while riding my “Virtual Darcy,” an exercise ball, and I rode the real Darcy while learning to ask good questions about what was happening to cause my anxiety.

After less than one year, I cantered three steps down the barn’s driveway without fear. Then, I fulfilled my dream of cantering a few steps in a pasture, but this was just the beginning of my journey to cantering

fear free. These first canters happened in a completely natural way because they grew out of the work I had done all year. I had become fear free and I didn’t even realize it. And I did it all through email and a few phone conversations with Laura.

Fortunately for me, Laura also came all the way across the country to help me take my fear-free riding to the next level. We also began our work on this book, which evolved out of the need we saw in the horse community and the lack of in-depth material to help fearful riders. During our week together, I got to experience Laura’s techniques in person. I had so many “lightbulb” moments, I probably could have powered the lights at Turner Field. By the time Laura left, I hooked up my trailer, loaded Darcy from five feet away, drove to a local trail-riding facility, and had my first canter at a new place with no fences and no fear.

After experiencing the freedom, magic, and joy of riding fear free, I wanted to share those feelings with others, and because I am a writer, editor, and publisher, a book was my first thought. Since most of what I accomplished came through the written word, I felt that others too could benefit from a book that details Laura’s techniques. Although this book also includes the sound, traditional advice that fearful riders often receive, Laura’s techniques transcend these basics and offer a path for those who are willing and ready to change and become truly fear free.



Laura and Jennifer at Camp Daley 2010.

For more information and support as you continue riding fear free,
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