

# *For The Love Of Liberty*

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL LIBERTY HORSE ASSOCIATION



## *Welcome*

I always enjoy writing the *Welcome* address because it forces me to reflect on just how far the ILHA has come in three months and how far we have yet to go. The website is up and going, the first order of ILHA merchandise has been placed and we have had several conversations with different platforms that offer on-line competitions around the world to learn the dos and don'ts of doing the same.

Throughout the coming month we will be consulting with numerous trainers to gather feedback on the proposed competition patterns, evaluate the rules, and offer their recommendations. Once finished, we will release the patterns and rules to members first and then the public. All in hopes of getting the first ILHA Championship show on October 18-20 right.

In the meantime, as always, we want to thank each and every one of you for your membership, your endless enthusiasm, and your continued support. It is a great time to love Liberty!

Sincerely,  
Dr. Elizabeth James, Editor in Chief

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Crosses Disciplines

# ILHA FEATURED TRAINER

## *Ryan Rose*

Whether it's teaching clinics, doing demos, training horses, or helping others achieve their goals, Ryan Rose has established a strong reputation, a loyal following, and the admiration of many throughout the equine industry. His growing popularity can be attributed to many things, but no doubt his advanced Liberty training has played a strong role. However, the journey from where he started to where he is today wasn't always easy.

Rose began riding at 12 years old and shortly thereafter the desire to become a better horseman eclipsed the desire to become just a better rider. After one particularly challenging day in the arena, Rose remembered a book he had been gifted as a child, "The Horse Whisper" by Nicholas Evans. The more he read the more Rose became fascinated with the idea of horses and people being able to connect without ropes or constraints. From that point on, Rose started working his horses in a round pen, teaching them to come and change directions completely at Liberty.

When asked how he learned how to train Liberty horses, Rose explains, "I learned liberty work through endless trial and error and spending a lot of time with horses at liberty. I also watched just about every liberty training video I could find!"

It wasn't until he finished his high school years of bareback bronc riding in rodeo and participating in 4-H that Rose was able to dedicate himself entirely to Liberty. He worked under a few different trainers to gain valuable experience and to add new methods to his horsemanship toolbox. During that time he amassed a large amount of knowledge from his own work and incorporating the training techniques of others.

When asked about his favorite thing about Liberty horses, Rose's answer comes easily, "I love the feeling when a horse connects to someone and puts effort into their idea without using any force. I also really enjoy the overall challenge of training at liberty and seeing what is possible when we set it up right."



**"I learned liberty work through endless trial and error and spending a lot of time with horse at liberty."**

Anyone who has watched Rose will tell you that he is a true example of a horseman believing in his horses and in turn them believing in him.

Currently, one of Rose's main horses is a 4-year-old Quarter Horse mare named Safe. Safe accompanies him to Liberty demonstrations and he describes her as a super athletic cow-horse who is very sensitive.

"She is one of the nicest horses I have ever ridden," says Rose, "and I am super excited to see how far I can take her with all this! She also has spectacular ranch versatility and excels with bridle-less riding."

When asked about his greatest Liberty accomplishment so far, Rose says, "my greatest accomplishment with training at Liberty is teaching a horse to perform walk, trot, canter circles, lead changes, and slide stops while riding another horse directly beside the liberty horse."

Rose describes his Liberty training philosophy as pretty simple.

"I try to work from where the horse is at and understand what they are thinking and feeling. I'm always striving to do less, communicate with smaller cues and give the horse more responsibility in everything."

Recently, Rose has dedicated even more focus on Liberty training and creating new ways to play with horses at Liberty. Not only does he love sharing his work with others through demonstrations, but he is also eager to do so through the ILHA.

"I am very excited about the International Liberty Horse Association and it giving me a place to display my horses' Liberty skills in a competitive arena," he said.

It goes without saying, of course, that fans of Rose are equally excited to get to watch him and his team in the show pen.



**Want to follow Rose's progress? Be sure to check out his website [www.rosehorsemanship.com](http://www.rosehorsemanship.com) and you can also follow him on Instagram and Facebook at @rosehorsemanship.**

# WHAT NOW?

By Dan James



One of the most common questions I get from people after they have accomplished getting their horse to circle around them at Liberty is, “what now?”. Of course there are a lot of options of what to do with a horse who is learning to work at Liberty. But the best method I know to progress a horse through the early stages of Liberty work, and strengthen their foundation at the same time, is to teach them to find the balance point between draw and drive.

In Liberty, draw refers to being able to bring a horse back in or closer to you in a tight circle and drive describes the ability to send the horse out and away from you in a large circle. The balance point between the two happens when a horse learns to work around you without running off and leaving but also without pushing into or over top of you. This type of control can only be accomplished through training, consistency, and patience.

In the same way that most ridden horses tend to have more ‘whoa’ or more ‘go’, most Liberty horses tend to either have a lot of drive and teaching them to stay connected takes work or they have a lot of draw and getting them to move out with the same level of connection can be challenging.

So how should someone go about working on this? Through varying their angles and body posture.

## *Angles*

The first time I gained an in depth appreciation about angles as they relate to horse training was when I was learning colt starting techniques from my mate Chris Cox. Chris really opened my eyes to many things like transferring the same angle at which you hold your hands when working a horse on the ground with a lead rope to when your are working them under saddle with a rein. He emphasized the importance of keeping consistent angles how doing so makes it easier for horses to learn.

Likewise, understanding angles is crucial when training Liberty horses. Not only does the variation (or lack thereof) of a person's angles when working a horse at Liberty directly influence the horse's body position, every horse also responds differently to different angles. Everything from the angle of your hands, elbows, shoulders, and whips if you use them, effects the curve of a horse's neck, uprightness of their shoulders, softness through their ribcage and engagement of their hind end. The best way to teach a horse to have draw, drive, and an equal balance between the two is to vary your angles and watch how they affect the horse. Find what angles push a horse out and which ones draw them in. Learning how each horse responds to subtle changes between the two is a great way to transition from having a 'one trick pony' (one that simply circles around you at Liberty) to one that has learned to control their speed, distance, and location.

### *Body Posture*

Anyone one who has worked a horse at Liberty has learned the just how sensitive horses are to body posture. Eye contact, stature and stance all greatly influence a horse's speed, body position, and whether they are more anxious or relaxed. Simply vary where you look at a horse with your eyes - at their eyes, neck, body, or feet - and see how it influences them. Similarly subtle changes in whether you are square to a horse (your belly button faces their shoulder) while they work or whether you are in front of or behind them (belly button faces their neck or hind end) will impact not only how fast they move but also how calmly they do so. The relationship between how a horse works at Liberty and body posture is strong and the better you understand it the better you will be able to communicate with your horse.

The first time a horse chooses to work with you at Liberty is always exciting. The possibilities of where to go from there and what to do next are endless. But no matter what direction you go there's no doubt that angles and body posture will play a significant role.



Learn more about Dan James at [www.doubledanhorsemanship.com](http://www.doubledanhorsemanship.com)  
or follow Double Dan Horsemanship on Facebook and Instagram.

# THE LOST APPRECIATION FOR GROUNDWORK

By Caitlin J.  
Grimes



I started riding horses at the ripe young age of 4 ½ years and my horse girl gang consisted of Moms in their 40's. My mom and I started taking riding lessons at the same time so I assume that is how I ended up with the "Mom Group." But I did not care, I was just happy to be with horses. Through these mutual Mom equestrian friends is how we discovered Diane Difonzo, who would kick start my life as a horse woman.

When I first began riding lessons with Diane, we started each lesson from the ground, no matter what horse or discipline I rode that day. I was cross trained in both Western and English, building knowledge and skill for both. Despite disciplines, Diane wanted me to understand the horse and their intentions before climbing into the saddle. She taught me to study the horse and feel what the horse was feeling. This seemed boring and a bit "woo-woo" to me as a nearly 5-year-old, but I quickly realized that my first impression was wrong. Diane was not only training me to be a better rider, but to be a better horsewoman. Diane taught me to always put the horse first no matter the circumstances.

Fast forward 6 years, I joined a hunter/jumper show team. The girls were more suited to my age and we all rode at the same barn, but I was the only student of Diane's. It didn't take long for me to notice that there was something these girls seldom did.... groundwork.

I would walk my leased quarter horse, Chester, around the outside of the arena both directions on foot before mounting. I was called "weird" for this routine. Before jumping, I would let Chester look at the fences so he would feel comfortable. I was taunted as being "weak and scared". I just considered it practical and safety minded.

The only groundwork I ever saw my fellow teammates use was a pre-ride lunging session. The girls would gallop their horses in a tight circle on a lunge line before mounting. There would be no walking or even trotting on the lunge line - only canter work. There were no verbal cues given, only the crack of the whip. I was confused. I had been taught to ask first, not demand. But my teammates squawked at me, "Caiti, you're so old school."

In my experience, I have found that most young equestrians today do not appreciate the value of groundwork. The excuses are endless- it's boring, it won't help my training, it takes too much time. But they are just that- excuses. For me I have found that groundwork assists in all areas of riding and for every discipline. Especially in building balance, respect, and trust.

### *Balance*

Humans and horses alike have better balance on the ground. When you are in saddle, you and your horse have the added complication of balancing each other. Communicating first from the ground allows your horse to pay full attention to you. Every rider knows if either partner, human or horse, gets off balance, it can throw a huge wrench into training. The beautiful thing about groundwork is that it helps eliminate this variable for the horse! If a horse can learn to balance itself during ground work sessions then it will be better able to carry itself balanced with a rider.

### *Respect*

Horses do not have the mental capacity to understand right versus wrong, but they do have the ability to learn rules. A horse who is pushy while being led to the barn can learn that this behavior is not allowed if the behavior is corrected daily and with continued groundwork. Likewise, a horse walking away while the rider attempts to mount should be a big no-no. Again, with continued groundwork, this behavior can be converted to a horse that stands quietly while his/her rider mounts. In my opinion, establishing a respectful relationship first on the ground will allow space for exponential growth when in the saddle.

### *Trust*

When you are on the ground, your horse can see the entire range of your body language. Your horse can learn that if you are confident while walking near a scary tree, he can also be confident because there's nothing to fear. Horses are extremely visual creatures. To see you, is to trust you- and that's straight from the horse's mouth...I mean eyes!



I did not take the time to walk Chester around the arena to see each fence because I needed to “get my steps in” for my fitness tracker, I walked him around to show that I respected him and his curiosities. Chester could see how relaxed I was when approaching a bright yellow flower box, so he knew he would be just fine. Chester understood there was nothing to be afraid of and that he could trust me. This trust translated into smooth rides on the flat, over fences, and on trail rides.

As I enter my Junior Year of College and look back on those years with Chester, I’m proud that my 10-year-old-self had more patience than most young-adult equestrians do today. Frankly, even I was more patient with my groundwork at the age of 10 than I am today. I know better and actually miss the groundwork routines I created back then. But one thing I know for sure is that in my horsemanship journey learning proper groundwork has definitely paid off. Chester was the King of Cross-rails and we moved up quickly to 2’. We have ribbons upon ribbons to show for our efforts. Hunter on the Flat. Hunter over Cross Rails. Hunter Hack. Trail Class. Western Pleasure. The event didn’t matter; we were a team to be reckoned with because, unlike our teammates who didn’t do any groundwork, our bond was built on trust.

How did we establish a bond? Well, groundwork of course! Next month I will share some of the specific exercises that worked for us.



Caitlin Grimes is currently a Junior majoring in Equine Business at the University of Louisville.



# SHARE YOUR STORY

Want to share your Liberty story, photos, tips, or advice?

Do you have a Liberty trainer you would like to see featured in

*For The Love Of Liberty?*

Visit the ILHA website and go to the ALL ABOUT YOU page to  
nominate someone or submit content.

[www.libertyhorseassociation.com](http://www.libertyhorseassociation.com)

