

Afternoons with Audrey

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Lady Audrey Townley, 93 years young, made it out to spectate at one of my clinics in Dumfries, Scotland in April of 2010. She grasped my work instantly and saw it as the 'missing piece' of her jigsaw. We struck up a friendship and I have since spent many afternoons with Audrey drinking tea, eating cake and sharing our stories.



Audrey was one of the earliest members of the British Horse Society and was involved with the organisation before World War II when it was called the Institute of the Horse. As soon as was practically possible after the war, the British Horse Society was formed and Audrey got her BHS I in 1947. She went all the way to the top and received her Fellowship in 1954, one of only 20 in



the UK at that time.

Audrey already ran her own riding school before World War II but after the war was over she re-opened in a different location and started her well known Borwick Riding School near Lancaster. This was a residential school for BHS Instructors and professional competitive riders.

At the time of her exams, the BHS still used the Army Handbook of Horsemanship. Audrey was always 'at odds' with convention and found the BHS ways 'too rigid' and 'not conducive to civilian riding'. During her time running Borwick Riding School, she trained with Captain Eddie Goldman, formerly of the Swiss Army, whom she credits with bringing 'classical standards' and dressage to the UK. Between her dissatisfaction with 'the system' and her new understanding of classical riding, Audrey developed her own style of teaching. Her residential courses were far reaching and she aimed to not only to improve her students' riding but also to 'equip her students for life', teaching them extra-circular courses on voice coaching, physical education and cooking. Audrey also took this holistic approach to the Pony Club. In addition to her Pony Club camps, she ran courses for Pony Club Instructors with the aim of improving standards in children. Her school was hugely successful and produced many top level riders.



Some of her students are still International dressage judges.

In the late 1960's through series of serendipitous events, Audrey gave up her riding school and moved to Dumfries, Scotland. She agreed to become the first BHS National Coach for Scotland and undertook a 'trial tour' across Scotland. It was on this journey across the length and breadth of Scotland that she realised she had come so far along her own teaching journey that her methods were now incompatible with the BHS. She declined the job as National Coach and parted ways with the BHS.

From her private yard in Dumfries, Audrey became a freelance Instructor and it was during this time that she started to become very interested in the psychology of learning, teaching and education in general. She had long ago recognised the futility in 'shouting louder' at her pupils when they were not improving and started to explore different techniques. In 1984 and at age 65, Audrey went on an 'Inner Game' course run by John Whitmore, which she says 'changed everything'.

Audrey applied 'Inner Game' methods to teaching riding with incredible results. It gave her the tools she was looking for that took away the need to 'Instruct'. Instead of telling her pupils what to do, Audrey found ways to have her students find out for themselves. One of the biggest breakthroughs for her personally was finding a way to have the student 'stop trying' for in 'stopping trying' she found that her students released tension in their bodies and found increased self awareness i.e. increased

awareness of what their bodies were actually doing. Horses immediately responded to this 'not trying' and became more relaxed and 'on the bit'.



To Audrey, the results were nothing short of miraculous. She could not believe the changes in the way the horses were going as a direct result of this changed method of teaching. She found her students were gaining more confidence in their abilities and were exceeding their expectations of themselves in a very short time. Every time in every lesson she found that horses would relax and come 'onto the bit' and be free from tension and therefore able to move without restriction.

Audrey spent the rest of her working life exploring and developing 'Inner Game' techniques for riding. In the late 80's she had the chance to teach a complete beginner on a rather 'spirited' horse. Within the 45 minute lesson the complete beginner had the horse going soft and quietly and 'on the bit'. The owner of horse and the beginner student concluded that Audrey must write a book and they strongly urged her to do so.



At the time Audrey thought that an impossible task but a series of chance meetings brought together an agent, editor, photographer and illustrator and in 1990, through what Audrey calls 'an act of God' she had her first book published titled 'The Natural Rider'. She went on to follow that book with her second title 'The Natural Horse' in 1993. The books were translated into 2 languages and sold worldwide.

Audrey is a living treasure and blazed a trail for teachers like myself who offer a different way to ride and learn. It is an honour to know her and I am deeply grateful to have met her.