

Nancy Cahill

Article & Photos by Marilyn Short



What can Nancy Cahill pack into a 2-day clinic? Almost more than you can retain, and she leaves you wanting to learn even more.

Ten Central Texas and 2 Arizona horsewomen jumped at the opportunity to learn from Cahill October 26 and 27 at Corgill's Happy Heart Ranch just outside of Pipe Creek, Texas. Owner, TJ Corgill and Trainer, Line Martin wanted to offer a clinic best suited for their boarders and clients, which consisted of primarily showmanship, western pleasure, western horsemanship and trail.

For those of you who know of Cahill, you know she was a perfect fit for that type of clinic. For those of you who don't know of Cahill, she's someone you should know about and learn from...no matter what your discipline.

Like so many horse lovers, Cahill was born horse crazy...everything revolved around horses. She collected Breyer horses and pretended she was a hunter/jumper gracefully jumping puddles. And doesn't it just figure; her family wasn't a horse family. Cahill started riding when she was in first grade when her mother drove her from Texas City to Houston every Saturday for riding lessons.

"That was our special time together," said Cahill, "and we didn't miss a Saturday for 4 years unless there was a holiday."

In 4th grade Hurricane Carla pretty much wiped out the coastal town...but a lone mare survived the hurricane in Texas City. This poor bag of bones became Cahill's first horse for a mere \$150, and that included a saddle...but to Cahill she was the most beautiful horse in the world.

When Cahill was in the 10th grade a man asked her to give riding lessons to his 2 daughters and she eventually trained one of his horses...her first customer.

Cahill went to college at Sam Houston State and then transferred to A&M hoping to get into vet school. In 1971 A&M wasn't accepting many women into the vet program, only 4 and undergrads weren't chosen for those 4 golden openings. By that time Cahill had decided she wanted to train horses, which was good since she took 11 horses in training with her to A&M.

During the first 15 years of training horses there weren't the opportunities for clinics, books, videos and DVDs as there is today. Cahill learned the hard way during those years...the more horses you work the more information you learn from those horses. Over the past 20 years Cahill has learned from so many of the greats...Al Dunning, John Hoyt, Dick Pieper, Todd Crawford and Dell Hendricks, the trainers that have done many things with horses. When Cahill saw a well trained horse, whether it was a good stop, perfect turn on the haunches...she sought out the trainers and asked questions.

"I would ask a lot of the trainers if I could come and ride with them," said Cahill, "and we'd pick each other's brains, it was a terrific learning experience."

Cahill runs a small 25-horse facility out of Madisonville, Texas, which is a lot of work for Cahill and her assistant of 6 years, Michelle Tidwell, as Cahill conducts approximately 10-12 clinics per year and is on the road showing.

So why would TJ Corgill seek out Cahill for a clinic? Cahill has coached the U.S. Team for the Youth Quarter Horse World Cup eight times, has trained multiple AQHA world and Congress Champions, was voted by her peers as the 1996 AQHA Professional Horsewoman of the Year, and also trained National High Point Champions including Winona Anhaizer and her own

daughter, Quincy Cahill. Cahill also has an impressive list of instructional videos and DVDs: Horsemanship I: Fundamentals of Excellence, Horsemanship II: Drills for Ultimate Control, Precision in Western Riding, Taking Your Obstacles Out of Trail and a 2-video package, Competitive Trail Training. Riders and trainers rate Nancy's videos as top notch. Go to www.movies.aol.com and type Nancy's name in the search box...5-starts as the average user rating on her videos!

The morning of the Cahill clinic at CHHR was windy and there was a definite chill in the air with riders shivering and horses in high spirits. Cahill opened her clinic with a general overview regarding the health and well being of horses and emphasized good farrier work, good dentistry, proper feeding and vet care, which can affect the horse's behavior and performance. Most clinic "beginnings" are a little dry with participants waiting to get into the meat issues of the clinic, Cahill was very clear with her words, adding humor and antidotes of her own past learning mistakes keeping the participants interest from word one.

"Nancy explained to us the reason "why" she's showing us how to perform a task is just as important as "how" to perform a task," said Corgill. "I've taken lessons from people, gone to clinics, gotten tips from trainers, etc., and most of them just show you how to do something, it's so much easier for me and my horse when I know why."

Cahill never gets on a participant's horse; her goal is for the rider to experience the way to make things happen with their horse. "It wouldn't do much good for me to get on a participant's horse," said Cahill, "I'd get a whole different response from the horse than the participant and that only causes confusion for both horse and rider. I want to teach the rider how to make it happen...and in 2-days I can make that happen for them."

During the 2-day clinic Cahill gave the riders went through six exercises to perform with their horses. The exercises were great for all experience levels, it didn't matter if they were seasoned exhibitors or just starting out.

The first exercise dealt with walking, trotting, loping perfect circles around something, be it a cone, a chair or something as small as a cup. This exercise is as much for the rider as the horse as the rider has to concentrate on body position, hands, legs...effective ways to get the horse to pay attention to the cues to make perfect circles.

"Nancy's exercises are easy to use and very effective," said Melissa Jesurun of Boerne, Texas, "and my riding position has improved."

Loping squares was the second exercise. Cahill emphasized rider body and hand positioning as well as shoulder positioning for the horse. If the horse's shoulder position is incorrect, he can't perform the exercise correctly.

The third exercise was to re-direct the horse. This exercise consisted of the rider sending the horse off across the arena at a walk, straight between the reins and legs. The rider then goes limp and doesn't give any cues whatsoever. If the horse veers off that straight line, Cahill directs the rider to quickly turn him a 1/4 turn in the opposite direction he veered. The rider then focuses on another object to walk towards and again going limp and if he veers, correct quickly with a 1/4 turn in the opposite direction.

"It's amazing how "light" this exercise makes a horse to a neck rein," said Corgill. "My horse became tuned in on my legs and reins when he figured out how much easier it was to walk straight ahead until I asked him to turn."

The fourth exercise is to stop and back the horse. This exercise starts out by riding the horse straight between reins and legs. Walk a few steps, say "whoa" and stretch your heels down – the horse should stop immediately...in a perfect world. If he doesn't, immediately pull him back

several steps using the reins and bumping his shoulders with the insides of your ankles. This process is repeated until the rider can say "whoa" and the horse stops and backs up on his own. Cahill's horses back completely off her "heels down" position, which makes it look pretty neat and easy in a trail class.

Getting the horse to follow his nose is the fifth exercise. Throw lots of cones, chairs, and obstacles in the arena and weave in and around by pulling the horse's nose into the circle, using the outside neck rein, and inside leg to keep his butt moving. Mostly importantly...don't use a set pattern. "Keep the horse listening and guessing," said Cahill, "it's amazing how light the horse will become to the neck rein."

Cahill believes that to make a reliable and steady horse for any discipline, the horse must guide on a light touch at a moments notice. The rider needs their horse to wait for the command and to go at the asked rate and direction.

The sixth and final exercise was the side pass. With this exercise it's helpful to always train going towards the barn...the very direction the horse wants to go in the first place. With horse's head towards the fence (if he wants to walk forward), or rear to the fence (if he wants to back up), use the outside leg and sit on the inside seat bone to set the direction of the horse.

"This is one of the areas where I learned so much," laughed Corgill. "I've been side passing horses all my life, but I've always used on the wrong seat bone! I always sat on the "pushing" seat bone and shoved with my leg and hip on that same side. It was absolutely amazing how straight Face became when I balanced him by using my outside leg to push him in the direction I wanted to go and then sat on the inside hipbone to hold him straight. Of course, I'm probably the only person who finds it so amazing because MOST people probably did it right to begin with!"

"Nancy knows when you and your horse can perform a maneuver and helps you with it until you've accomplished it," said Sharon Brewster of San Antonio, Texas. "Even when I thought the maneuver was impossible for Misty and I to accomplish, Nancy was patient and explained it so well I gained confidence in myself and in Misty."

"I definitely noticed changes in my mare the very next day," said Peggy Fry of San Antonio, Texas. "She was much easier to get along with. She was willing to wait for my request and much more responsive. She seemed happier now that I was being a leader instead of a passenger."

There are very few things Cahill can't accomplish with her training methods. She has worked through many problems with the horses she's had in training and the only horses she's sent home are those horses that are dangerous to themselves or to the rider.

Cahill's methods have been developed over many years of trial and error and even the most seasoned of trainers have a bad day. "If you haven't made a mistake," said Cahill, "then you haven't shown enough. I remember around 1983 I was riding Sonny Hot Jazz in a trail class. He was a wonderful all around horse and I rode him in trail and made the finals. I had back-to back trail classes and was trying to remember a new pattern, having practiced just a little the day before. I turned the wrong way in the box to win the class. I tell people I've started at the top and worked my way back!"

One of the most challenging horses Cahill has worked with was a huge and powerful 6-year-old Warmblood owned by Shane George of Magnolia, Texas. "That horse was so strong he could pull your arms out of your sockets," said Cahill. "He didn't have a light touch and it was difficult to keep him contained and in the right place for lead changes. We knew that getting a lead change on him was necessary. When he did learn, he was fabulous...selling for over half a million dollars. If he wouldn't have learned lead changes he wouldn't have been worth as much."

Cahill has fun training, showing and conducting clinics and feels very lucky to be able to teach and train people and horses that really want to excel with their horses. "It's a kick to watch a client who has struggled for years with a career and family and all of a sudden they step up and are successful at an Open show, make Top Ten or even win a World Title," says Cahill. "It makes the journey worthwhile."

Cahill's knowledge and experience is vast, it's hard to imagine what kind of goals she could have for herself in the future. "I always thought about flamingo guitar," laughs Cahill, "but since I don't know how to hold one..."

"I have a lot of goals," said Cahill, "I love to make something out of nothing. My goal is not always to make a horse a winner, but to make the horse a whole lot better and happier."

For more information about Nancy Cahill or her instructional videos you can write to Cahill Quarter Horses, P.O. Box 1057, Madisonville, TX 77864, call 936-348-5005 or visit: www.nancycahill.com.

For more pictures of the Cahill clinic, [click here](#)



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