



From left: *Megan, Emma, Kaitlyn and Sus have worked for years to establish this level of trust with their partners.*

Honor the spirit of the horse

Sus Kellogg and friends at the San Juan County Fair

By Mike Macdonald • Photo by Claudia La Cava

Susanna “Sus” Kellogg, San Juan Island’s premier horse trainer, will give an equestrian demonstration at the fair arena Saturday, August 16 at 6 p.m. assisted by friends and colleagues.

What Sus practices and teaches is named Essential Horsemanship. To call her a trainer is a bit like calling Chuck Yeager a pilot or Albert Einstein a writer.

Spectators will see horses both ridden and at freedom perform what some might call tricks. Everything you see the horses do for their partners is unforced and done willingly and with enthusiasm.

There has been a revolution in horse training in the last 20 years. Like many revolutions, it marks a return to essential fundamentals. When man first gentled and rode horse, it was done with no tools besides a rope and a deep understanding of how horses related to and communicated with other horses.

Many tools and techniques still used today date from when the horse was a weapon of war. Saddles, metal bits, spurs, whips—all evolved to force a horse to charge into danger when every fiber in a horse’s being tells it to run from danger.

“Horses have been my teachers,” Sus said. “For too long, riders have accepted a certain level of fear, danger, and stress as normal. With increased respect for the horse, a safe, willing, natural partnership unimaginable to most people is possible.”

When you watch Sus canter or jump her big Thoroughbred gelding Drum without saddle, bridle, or reins, you may be impressed with her skill as a rider, but that’s not the main point.

Drum was once such a dangerous and misunderstood horse that people had to beat back his charges with a stick.

“Drum was going to have a horrid life. I felt for him because he was so confused,” Sus said. “Of course, I fell in love with him and he has become my greatest teacher.”

The other horse you will see her ride; the young, smart, rascally, athletic buckskin Mustang named Gitano Rio, dragged her all over the farm before Sus proved to him she was worthy of his respect. These are not trick ponies or broken down livery-stable nags, but big, challenging, complex animals—Sus’s equal partners in the Essential Horsemanship experience.

“It’s easy to see what a horse has to offer a person, but what can a person offer a horse? That is the greatest challenge, to offer horses something that is really meaningful to them, in their own eyes,” Sus said. “Beyond the basics of food, shelter, water, and physical safety, it’s what a person can offer a horse emotionally, mentally, and to their spirit as well, that allows the deeper connection to unfold. And to offer a horse anything of real value we have to first learn to listen to horses, and to begin to hear our own “inner horse”, that part of us that is both finely sensitive and inherently strong.”

Joining Sus at the San Juan County Fair demonstration will be Emma Billington, 20, with her Arabian Aamira, Kaitlyn Schreiber, 16, with Yahzi, a Mustang born in the Nevada desert, and Megan Goudie, 15, partnered with Shahan, an Arabian. All three have trained their own horses.

In July, Sus and the trio took their horses to the state fairgrounds at Puyallup to present a mini-clinic at a gathering called “Celebrate the Horse”. Clinicians, horse trainers, and breeders from all over the Northwest participated in the weekend event.

Organizers and the audience were extremely pleased with the San Juan Islanders’ presentation and invited Sus back next year. Several observers felt her demonstration was the class act of the show. Sus, perhaps the least competitive person you will ever meet, allowed that it “went well”.

An attendee sent Sus the following e-mail the day of their presentation:

Sus
I have to thank you from the deepest bottom of my heart for coming to the Puyallup Fair Grounds.

I knew that there was a way of linking with a horse in harmony. To be as one. Without being harsh or hard. Togetherness. I just couldn’t find anyone or see the results other than in my mind. My girlfriend and I were so touched we had tears the whole show.

Thank You. Thank You. Thank you.

It was beautiful to see. Cindie and Sky Bird.

Sometimes the distinctions various horse people draw between different training methods can resemble arguments over religion. Sus and her friends will offer a dramatic demonstration that respect and love for the horse nurtures the horse’s respect and cooperation. **ah**