

# Meet Karen Musson

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I started riding as a child in France, where much importance was assigned to light, steady hands that held precise meaning and a fluid, yet secure seat – indeed this was put to the test as we galloped bareback along the firebreakers in the forest of Maisons Laffitte! I was awarded my *Premier Degré* (with Fédération Française de Sports Equestres) at age 11, and started event-riding my 12.1hh Welsh pony, Roana. Riding in the breed performance championships at Fontainebleau, and at the Salon du Cheval in Paris were also highlights.



This start in horses was a perfect foundation for the competitive eventing I then enjoyed in the UK on my dynamite Irish mare, forever close to my heart, Storm Bay.

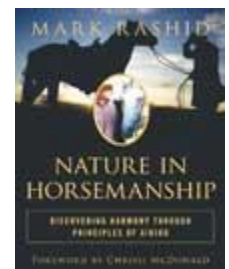


It also proved to contribute in unexpected ways down the road.

In 1994, I came to Columbus, OH, home of the Equine Affaire. I happened upon demonstrations of Natural Horsemanship, and was captivated in particular by working with horses at liberty. I plunged in and learned all I could about NH over the next several years. I connected most with the masterful insights of Mark Rashid. I find lasting value in notions he highlights such as "Openings" that the horse will be inclined to seek and follow, and his application of the principles of Aikido to release brace, rather than empower it - described best in his book "*Nature in Horsemanship*".



But I was missing something. I had reached a wall with my tall, red Holsteiner, Chase. True to form, he was (and is) my guidance system for horsemanship and a life coach like no other! After a hard, lengthy search, and an unlikely series of events, we were at the Equine Affaire in the Colliseum, with Leslie Desmond, co-author of Bill Dorrance's "*True Horsemanship Through Feel*", known as 'Bill's Book', in an opportunity that would change everything.

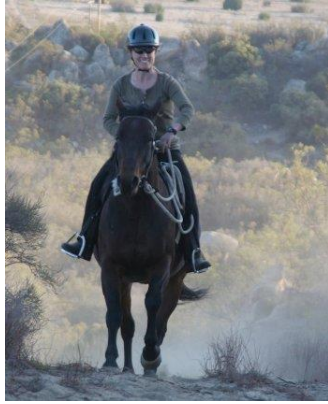


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**Chase was crystal clear: this was the missing link.**

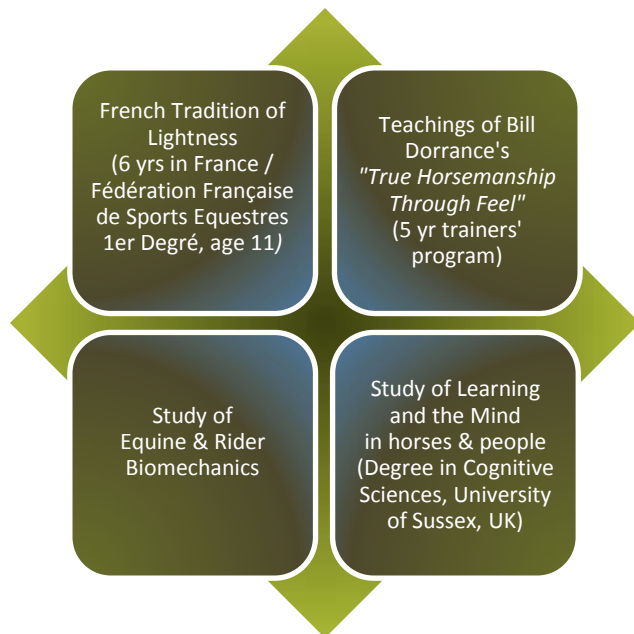
Leslie invited me to ride in a week long trainers' clinic in California later that year - an opportunity I took, with much gratitude. In fact, I chose to "immerse" for the next four years, riding in trainers' clinics across the U.S, hosting others for my students, and traveling to Sweden for private coaching.



Leslie's teachings about how to truly get with the feel of a horse are compelling. She apprenticed with Bill at his ranch for four years, while co-authoring the book. For me, Leslie brought 'Bill's Book' to life like never before, as well as my own awareness of those "smaller things" in a horse that are right there... when we learn to see. That last part is perhaps the greatest gift of all - to truly "see" the horse is to tune into our ultimate teachers of this art.



When I "came up for air", the words in 'Bill's Book' held far more depth and dimension - and I was ready to 'dig in' to another layer. A page jumped in front of me. Right at the start Bill credits the old masters of the French Cavalry as an influence in his work, since the 1950s: "*The way [Beudant] explained things, there was no doubt in my mind about what a person needed to do to get these little things working for them and their horse.*"



This led me to re-visit and re-ignite my early foundation that shares the same roots in *Le Cadre Noir*. Bill's approach had resonated with me deeply and with such clarity, no doubt this had been a factor. This time I went right to the old masters' original writings. What a treat - both in the way this revived some old lessons with new meaning, and also for the deep appreciation I did not have as a child, for French being such a language of Feel! How grateful I am now to have naturally acquired the language at a young age, along with its nuances, to enjoy these works more fully. As Bill wrote, "The Real Masters Understood Feel".

The common ground between the two perspectives is as fascinating to me as the connections I make about how Bill adjusted to support his approach of Feel & Release and primary goal of leaving the horse's genuine, natural, exquisite lightness intact - in a connection through feel.

**Feel and Lightness go hand in hand, and to me, augment every moment spent with a horse.** What a fascinating path, and one I continue to explore.