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FROM TRAFALGAR SQUARE BOOKS

MELINDA FOLSE Introduction by Clinton Anderson



The  
Smart  
Woman's  
Guide to

# MIDLIFE HORSES

FIND MEANING, MAGIC AND MASTERY  
IN THE SECOND HALF OF LIFE





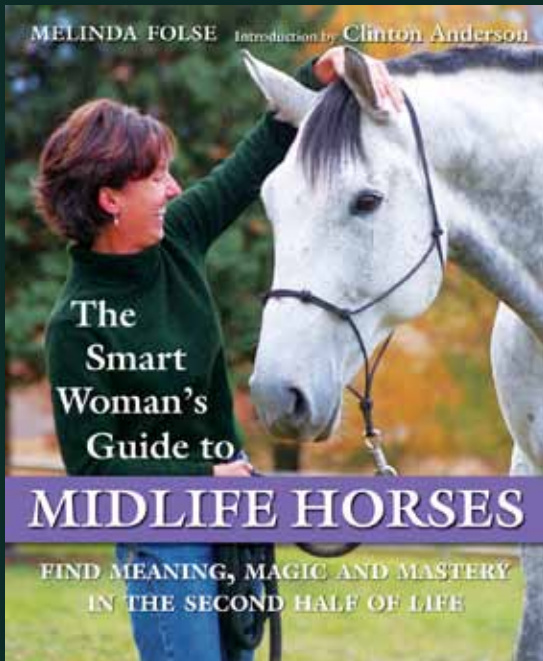
# ABOUT THE BOOK

## Are You on the Verge of **MIDLIFE HORSES**?

**Why Millions of Midlife Women Are Getting (Back) in the Saddle...and How You Can, Too!**

Just as the stereotypical icon of male midlife crisis is often a shiny new sports car, many females in midlife are now claiming a shiny new “mustang” of their own.

In fact, The American Horse Council Foundation estimates there are 9.2 million horses in the United States, 75 percent of which are owned by women over the age of forty. These are the women who grew up before Title IX, before young girls had real venues for exploring and expressing their strength, independence, and mastery.



These were the girls who once chose Breyers over Barbies, preferring to play with plastic horses instead of plastic dolls. Then they grew up. Their dreams of horses, and all horses once represented, were shelved along with those now-collectible Breyers.

Today, after two, three, or four decades taking care of others, with the kids out of the house (and sometimes the husband, too), today's forty- and fifty-something woman suddenly finds herself with the time, money, and health to be all she used to hope to be. Exhilarated by this new freedom to focus on her own priorities, she decides to get back in the saddle—or perhaps to finally get in it for the first time. She Googles “horses for sale” online, signs up for lessons, goes for a trail ride, or takes a friend up on a longstanding offer to “Come ride with me sometime.”

Then reality rears its wrinkled head.

By midlife, her center of balance may have shifted a bit, her muscle tone may have faded, and the well-honed apprehension, courtesy of years of “Be careful, now!” mothering may have replaced her youthful sense of invincibility. She also may have discovered a few new insecurities midlife horsemanship can create—physical, emotional, and financial quandaries she never before considered. This uncertainty may be compounded by the well-intentioned comments of friends and family members—“What if you get hurt?” and “You know, old bones take longer to heal,” and “Are you sure you can afford all this?”

If, however, she somehow manages to turn these doubts into determination—and climbs into the saddle to discover the spell only close communion with a horse can cast—she'll be the first to tell you there's nothing else in the world like it. And she'll do whatever it takes to make it work, because for the first time in a long time, her soul feels whole.

*The Smart Woman's Guide to Midlife Horses* is the book women have been searching for, but haven't yet found. Offering horses as both metaphor and solution to the natural malaise that often arises within us just about the time we blow out that “midlife” birthday candle, this is the book that will help midlife women ask (and answer), “What about *my* dreams?” and “Is it *my* turn yet?” and “If not now, *when*?” and best of all, “If now, *how*?”



# WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

“**THE SMART WOMAN’S GUIDE TO MIDLIFE HORSES** provides a great resource, not only for getting started, or re-started with horses, but also for what to do and how to navigate the struggles that can be such a part of this unique learning curve. Every person, every horse and every situation is different, and *The Smart Woman’s Guide to Midlife Horses* not only acquaints women with the issues horses may bring into their lives, but it also gives them a solid idea of how to find their own answers. We all have a fairy tale ideal of what owning and riding horses should be like. This book puts a realistic context around connecting with a horse to help midlife women make their dreams come true.”

—DENISE BARROWS, Horse Trainer and Founder of Practical Equine Solutions

“After working with her on my most recent book, *Lessons Well Learned*, I can tell you that that not only is this a subject very close to Melinda[Folse]’s heart personally, but it also taps into her professional passion for presenting solid, usable information in a very readable way.”

—CLINTON ANDERSON, Horse Trainer and Clinician, and Founder of Downunder Horsemanship®

“I love it! [Folse] has a great sense of humor and flowing style.”

—JULIETTE GETTY, PHD, Founder of Getty Equine Nutrition, LLC, and author of *Feed Your Horse Like a Horse*



# SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

## How do you know when you're on the verge of Midlife Horses?

In chapter 1, “Are You a ‘Woman of a ‘Certain Age?’” author Melinda Folsie draws simultaneously from Martha Beck (*Finding Your Own North Star*, Crown Publishers, 2001) and Dante (*Divine Comedy*) to express what so many of us feel when we reach this time of life: “...right in the middle of my life, I realized I wasn't where I wanted to be...and I don't know how I ended up so off course.” She then goes on to explain: *In the course of the soul-searching that followed, and in the time it took to develop this book, I hit upon several insights and observations that make Dante's historic observation seem normal, relevant, and in an odd way, hopeful rather than tragic...the perfect impetus for making the most of this pivotal time and developing a strategy for recapturing the essential being you were at 15, and remaining true to her dreams as you enter the second half of your life.*

## Why is there such a powerful connection between horses and women, especially at midlife?

In chapter 2, “Why Horses? Why Now?” you'll find answers to this question from experts who've studied this subject in depth: “A lot of women, especially at this time of life, have lost touch with who they are on the inside,” says Deborah McCormick, PhD, co-author of **Horse Sense and the Human Heart** (HCI, 1997) and **Horses and the Mystical Path** (New World Library, 2006)...*She theorizes that many women feel drawn to horses at midlife because the very nature of horses demands that we locate [what she calls our] “inner lead mare” and summon a full arsenal of self-preservation skills, as well, which also may have gotten lost in the midlife shuffle.*

## What can a middle-aged woman get from a horse that she can't get anywhere else?

The author shares a story, also in chapter 2, that illustrates what we might have lost by midlife (or perhaps just never found), and how horses can help us get it back: *I took a deep breath and gathered up my “inner whatever,” and staring intently at [the horse's] front shoulder, I walked as forcefully as I knew how toward the mare. She didn't budge. She didn't even look my way. If she thought of it, I think she would have yawned. Everyone laughed.* Folsie then shares Dr. McCormick's reflections on the exercise: *Rebuilding this inner strength gives you the opportunity to create impact...the power from within to move the world in a non-local way. This is not about aggression, but about inner authority—knowing for certain who you are and what you want and accepting nothing less.*

# SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS



If your life and schedule is already ridiculously full, how can you possibly make room for something as large as a horse?

In chapter 3, “Take the Reins,” Folsie shares some gathered wisdom from decision-making authorities, time management experts, efficiency gurus, and productivity wizards to help readers find a way to wedge a horse-sized slice of bliss into their already over packed lives: *It can be done, but it takes some mental restructuring and flexibility, a new set of rules, and what experts call “self-management.”*

How do you know which horse, which activities, what kind of stuff is right for your Midlife Horse experience?

In chapter 5, “Find Your Happy Trail,” Folsie takes her readers on a tour of possibilities for the midlife horse adventure, with brief descriptions of events and activities to present a “lay of the land,” a few stories from those who “found their thrill,” and a smattering of resources to help readers home in on the pursuits most likely to make their heart sing as nothing else can: *Determining what you want to do with horses is a complicated equation. It depends entirely on what you bring to the table: your skills (or lack of), your preconceptions, your fantasies, what calms you down, what gets your blood pumping (and which of those feelings you’re looking to have)...Whether all you want to do is a few jogs around the arena or pasture, practice basic reining-styled maneuvers, hit the trails on the weekends, following the clinic circuit to keep increasing your training skills and abilities, or try your hand at any number of equine sporting endeavors, there is an amazing amount of opportunity out there at all levels...The challenge, it appears, is to determine what interests you, set your course for gaining the skills and knowledge you need (aligned, of course, with your financial, time, and access resources), and go for it.*



# SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

How can getting in shape for Midlife Horses help you in other areas of your life?

In chapter 4, “Leg Up!” Folsie explores the physical component to midlife horsemanship—the part (let’s just go ahead and say it) that has most midlife women wondering if they can really do this thing: *So not only do we have to be strong enough to control the horse and provide good solid leadership with clear effective cues and direction, we have to be flexible and relaxed enough to move with the horse and to stay out of his way as he tries to do whatever we’re asking him to do. On top of that, we have to have enough endurance to stay effective during long or challenging rides, then have enough left over to untack and cool out the horse, tote water buckets, muck stalls, and move around bales of hay. Starting to get the picture?...In a nutshell you need a consistent and balanced training program that addresses the special needs of riding a horse: strength, flexibility, balance, stamina, alignment, and body awareness.*

How can the midlife horse experience change a person’s future? What different course can we chart for our golden years with a horse as guide and mentor for healing past hurts?

Experts tend to agree that horses possess an innate ability to resonate with human emotions—the horse simply “reads” and “mirrors back to you” your own feelings and emotional state. And often, if not always, it is within this connection that physical, mental, or emotional healing occurs. For many women on the midlife horse trail, this healing (or facilitating it for others) is such a powerful experience it changes the course of their life and charts a new future: *Stories [of amazing results] abound in the annals of equine-assisted activities and therapies documentation. Stories so miraculous they are almost unbelievable, unless you’re there every day to witness it yourself...“This mirroring,” explains Linda Kohanov in **Riding between the Worlds** (New World Library 2007), “is devoid of ambition or ulterior motive and allows riding to become an adventure in self-discovery more honest than many purely human works of art.”*



# SELECT PHOTOS

## “FINDING MEANING, MAGIC AND MASTERY”

*All photos by David Smoot and available in full color.*

