



Participant Comments

Eponaquest Equine Facilitated Learning

Leaves and Lizards Volcano Cabin Retreat, Costa Rica

Some snapshots: a few choice phrases (taken from longer testimonials) to give you an idea....read on for more detailed reviews....

*“Unforgettable” “Life-changing” “Powerful” “Unique” “Incredible” “Restorative”
“Phenomenal”*

“The setting, horses and people made me feel stronger, calmer and better about myself.”

“My horse taught me that I was the one holding myself back. I was standing in my own way. The experience opened that door to me. I will be forever changed by it.”

“What was unexpected was the bonding with the horses and eventually managing the relationship with the horse. I found myself talking to my horse, but not out loud.”

“I felt strong, accomplished and confident in the environment. It was not until my return that I realized I could and should parlay that into my everyday life, and I’m still trying to put my finger on how I can word that. I guess if I had to try and sum it up it would be that I walked away thinking that in a busy corporate environment, Epona may just have equipped me with the skills to be strong and confident but with empathy and compassion, traits which sometimes in that field are considered weaknesses.”

“The experience brought me closer to myself, so much closer to myself.”

“Day by day the Epona exercises and my horse helped me to discover things about myself that I never knew or had forgotten. When I got home, I made some very positive changes.”

“What an opportunity and what an enriching, empowering and life-changing experience. The whole group (a diverse mix, many with little or no horse experience) felt the same.”

“These animals are so sacred and special they are like truth serum. They have this incredible ability to reveal the very things in ourselves that we hide from and push down.”

“I am going to be honest. Your retreat is the best thing I ever participated in...The guides do a fabulous job at creating a hands-on activity-filled workshop that promotes personal growth and the gaining of valuable life wisdom, while balancing down time for rest, play, exploration and rejuvenation.”

“I feel so empowered to make choices with what I have learnt here this week.”

Some of our Testimonials...

“In a lifetime of experiences, some stand out far beyond others. Moments that change mind, body and soul. The seven days of this learning experience has become, for me, the best of the best, but that is an understatement. As a horseman of many years, my expectation was to learn about horses and have an entertaining time in a new environment. The environment for me, at Leaves and Lizards retreat, is far more than anything I expected. Beautiful yes, spectacularly beautiful. From the facilities and cabins which all face the Arenal volcano and have a full view, to the incredible rainforest and thousands of varieties of plants, to the beautiful flowers everywhere, beautiful birds....I must single out the hummingbirds, so many everywhere. But for me I came for the horses, not knowing the horses were inviting me. I will be eternally grateful to the wonderful equine partners at the retreat. From the choosing to the final parting moments, they taught me so much.

I was chosen by Beauty, whom I was to learn is the sentient mare quite often referred to by others who have experienced her nurturing energy. She also had a foal by the name of Lluvia running at her feet, who okayed the choosing! Soon her lessons began and I got lost in my predator instincts that I thought I had long forgotten. Enter Espartaco, another of the magnificent teachers. When I transitioned from predator to partner in my session with Espartaco, it was like a transfer of energy hit me and he said “Finally you get it!” My hands tingled and I felt emotionally drained and at the same time exhilarated and totally aware of my transition.

I feel that there are multiple passages in life. From child to adult and then from adult to the next passage, that now includes me for name. All of my previous experiences have led me to now. Guided and directed me to this quest, with these beings, in this place – Costa Rica, Leaves and Lizards retreat.

The thing I enjoyed most about this experience was my growth and the growth of those around me, Beauty, Lluvia and the her, all of my new friends. When I get home, it will be important to me to apply my non-predatory learning to my family and horses. A daunting task but one certain to make things much better for everyone.”

Dan Rexroad, Retired military contractor, U.S. (October 2017)

“I had all kinds of thoughts in my head and a list of things about me that I wanted to work on at this workshop. The horse got to the most raw emotions and experiences in my life that have been blocking me to be my true self. All those other things on my list will either fall into place now, if not vanish altogether. What an amazing gift. I feel whole and complete. I feel I am taking home more confidence in my usual uncomfortable situations.

This was transformational!”

Carol Lowry, Food Scientist, U.S. (October 2017)

“Can I say this experience exceeded my expectations? Well, I'd read about these types of programs and the wonder of what the quiet and yet forcible spirit of the horse could do to heal and help the human soul, but in my head I believed it was too good to be true. I should have trusted my heart because it is true. You cannot fathom the healing and spiritual growth of this program until you experience it here.

My favourite part was the first join-up experience, it was magical, and then the growth of communication with the horse. I will use this experience in my day-to-day life to examine my emotional reaction to a situation to ensure my physical reaction comes from my authentic self.

I'm not even gone and I can't wait to come back!”

Roxanne Gerry, Military Contract Negotiator, U.S. (June 2017)

“I came knowing what my core conflicts were. But leave understanding the root reasons they exist and have been given the tools to help me stay connected, to stay centred and true to myself. Learning to recognise my needs before they become a never-ending hamster wheel, by either stopping helping or asking for help.

I gained a real strength of self. I will take this back home and remember to Stop!! And breathe. And listen to my heart, not so much head.

A conscious, awakening experience.”

Patricia Nuckols, Business Owner, U.S. (June 2017)

“As a non-horse person, it was so impactful to interact with these beautiful animals. There is no experience like being chosen by your horse and learning what they see in us. If humans could be as sensitive as these beautiful animals the world would be a better place. Having a horse listen and feel your energy and respond is an experience I can't even explain in words. I am going to miss their interaction. I was really surprised to find out how enjoyable it is to ride and communicate with my horse using different energy to get the desired response to a challenge.

I recommend this workshop to anyone looking to get more in touch with your emotions and to learn how to do more, while exerting less energy. I most enjoyed being chosen by my horse and learning what she saw in me. It made me feel very special and I learnt so much about myself from her energy.

Now I will be conscious of the energy I give out, as well as other people's energy, and use that to make my interactions more positive and less exhausting.

Awesome!”

Lisa Kerns, Software Specialist, U.S. (June 2017)

“What I got out of my experience is more connection with myself, my horse and others and realising that I can be upset without being mean. Everyone can benefit from this by learning how to listen and feel. The secret for me is letting go of my fears to be free.

For me it's about awareness and I think as long as I am aware of my authentic self, I will keep growing into the person I want to be.

Overall my experience was amazing.”

Anonymous (June 2017)

“Astonishing. Exhilarating. Revealing. Transformational. All words that accurately describe my experience in the Eponicity workshop. In our every day lives, we hope to learn about ourselves in bits and pieces. We try to grow in small ways hoping they'll add up, eventually, to something bigger, something meaningful. But imagine doing all this in one week.

Enter Eponicity. I arrived afraid - what if I couldn't keep up with the “horsey stuff”? I hadn't ridden since I was 12 when I was told I was awkward and untalented. What if I held the group back or worse...

Eponicity isn't about riding or being horsey. It's about the beauty of animals – and the magnificent relationship between horses and humans. In fact, only one member of our group could ride. One member had never even sat on a horse. It didn't matter. We were there to be with our horses and with ourselves.

What is the process? It's hard to describe because it's an evolution, different for each person. It starts with sitting blind-folded in a circle and waiting for a horse – your horse – to choose you. From there a friendship evolves through exercises, rides, coaching, and social experiences. Your horse lovingly gives you what you need and, in turn, requires that you shed what you do not. Today, I describe myself as arriving in Costa Rica a garden snake and shedding so many skins, I left as a python.

It's not just the horses. It's also the people – the brilliant trio of Danielle MacKinnon, Debbie Legg, and Sally Nilsson. They are more than a team, rather a seamless interweave of talents able to work with each of us to tease out our raw, beautiful humanness and, from there, dip our toes into the pool of our authentic selves.

I am home now, a different person. No one around me can quite name it. Some say I'm gentler, others prefer 'more directed' or 'better grounded'. The words don't matter because the truth is I'm more me. And becoming me is a never-ending process that I'm honored to have begun with Eponicity at Leaves and Lizards.”

Julie Davidson, CEO, U.S. (May 2017)

“Eponicity is magical....joy-filled...soul stirring....life affirming...it will change you.

How can I put into words an experience that is beyond what words can convey? This is the challenge before me in speaking and writing about my Eponicity experience in Costa Rica. Working with the horses in this intimate and personal way transported me to another way of being and experiencing life. I felt lifted above my normal way of processing life and I was able to experience the joy, peace and love that is present in the NOW of any given moment. The horses are experts at gently guiding you to live in the present moment and to experience your feelings and emotions without judgment.

This process stimulated in me a deep remembering of the truth of who I AM...a truth beyond all labels and limitations. By the end of the week, I could see myself in the way the horses saw me....as a strong capable person who can handle whatever life brings. One of the most important lessons the horses taught me is to be authentic and honest about whatever I am feeling. The horses had a superb way of demonstrating to us all why the approach of denying our feelings doesn't work. They made it clear in every encounter, that authenticity can really be the gateway to freedom and fearless living! As I return home, I will carry with me the lessons and learning from the horses, the people I met and the magic of Costa Rica."

Jenny McPeak-Jozwiak, Animal Communicator, U.S. (May 2017)

"Short summary of what I got out of my experience:

I came into the retreat not really knowing what to expect. Having read and/or heard accounts from people who have been at L&L for a retreat and exclaimed it to be "life changing" was daunting to me. I like my life! The thought of having a life changing experience was scary to me. Luckily, those thoughts went away once we got started on the actual "work". I'm someone who reads A LOT about making changes, becoming more mindful, improving yourself, you name it. All with good intention, but reading something in a book or magazine and wanting it is one thing - you need to know HOW to make it happen to understand and change. To me, that is where the horses came in. After going through the process of being chosen by my horse, it seemed that he knew just what it was that I needed to work on. And in very real & tangible ways, he was able to show me how to change. That being said, the facilitators (Debbie, Sally, Danielle) was really what created the space in which I was able to feel safe enough to allow myself to be vulnerable and share my "stuff". I can't say enough how meaningful it was to have facilitators with the compassion, understanding, energy and knowledge to help pull all the pieces of me out and then guide me on putting myself back together. The combination of the horse and human facilitators is, I believe, what made my experience so essential to conquering the real lasting change I have been seeking for so long.

I did enjoy all of it - what I enjoyed most (maybe not in the moment, but looking back at it definitely) was the sense of accomplishment when I was pushed (gently nudged) to do something uncomfortable. The facilitators' (collectively Debbie, Sallie, Danielle) ability to know just how much to push was so helpful.

I believe the things I learned about myself have changed me on a very deep level, and they changed the way I look at myself and how I am living my life. I have a new belief in myself and who I am that can't help but alter the way I live my day to day life now.

Life-altering! :)”

Kathy Rumsey, U.S. (April 2017)

“The Horse and Soul retreat was such a profound experience for me that I am not sure I can do justice to it in this review. I have had little experience working with horses but I was really drawn to attending this workshop and I am so happy I did. I immediately bonded with my horse, JR, and the communication I was able to have with him throughout the week was so much more than I thought was possible. I was able to see the old issues that really were blocking me from moving forward the way I wanted to in my life. The work I did with JR, Danielle (MacKinnon), Debbie and Sally was life changing. I know I would not have been able to see things so clearly with out the help and support of both the 2 legged and 4 legged instructors. Seeing the immediate feedback from my horse was unbelievable! The atmosphere of this workshop was very supportive, including the other participants. Since returning home I already have used what I have learned. I did not see that not being fully open was blocking different places in my life. I have made an effort to be more open and it changes my approach to almost everything. I cannot think of anything that could have made it any better.

If you feel drawn to it please sign up...you will amazed at your experience.”

Ginger Hendry, U.S. (April 2017)

“This was unlike anything I’ve ever experienced before. It was pure soul work every day, and the safest, most supportive environment. I learned so much about horses and about myself. The journey I went on this week will stay with me for ever and has allowed me to be me – and really discover what that means. The love, support and guidance that we received from Debbie, Sally and Danielle was invaluable.

Leaves And Lizards is an incredibly beautiful setting for incredibly beautiful soul work with horses.

My favourite part was the relationship I developed with my horse, Mr Big. It was so profound and meaningful. Also being with such an amazing, supportive group of people. The lessons I’ve learned will help me have the confidence and the self-love to create the life I want.

It was phenomenal, unforgettable and life altering!”

Julie Ulrich, Intuitive, U.S. (April 2017)

“This wonderful experience expanded my understanding and belief in the capacity of how horses help us heal, grow and evolve as human beings. The best part was the knowledge, heart and authenticity of how Debbie, Sally and Danielle (MacKinnon) showed up with each day to give their very heart and soul to each of us. I now recognize more than ever, that my horse requires and deserves to have a voice/choice in our relationship and

how we work together. If I awaken my heart and mind fully to my horse, the expansion of my soul is truly endless...

A soul expanding experience!"

Joyce Maudslien, Nursery Owner, U.S. (April 2017)

Family Workshop, 3 March 2017

"I had no idea what to expect from Eponicity or whether it would be for our family, but I was open to new and different experiences and knew that family time is always good. But wow! What we got blew my mind.

As instructors and emotional coaches you are fabulous. To use some of the concepts you taught – you moved fluidly through the herd roles as needed to manage my kids and our family beautifully. I was amazed how each of my children could step into the arena on their own and work through their unique and precise areas of growth. It truly almost felt like it was magic, but rather it was just deep intuition from Debbie, Sally and mostly the horses.

With no horse background, I feel like we grew so much in our understanding of horse behaviour and personalities. For myself it reflected my challenge in balancing my assertiveness with my desire for collaboration. As a business owner and strong assertive woman, I have at times struggled in growing up and feeling self-conscious as if I was coming on too strong. I was happy to work through this balance of herd roles of dominant, leader, nurturer with Cosmo (my horse), to get to my place of "joy" and "being". Working with feelings all day, and so often being in my head with with them, I can feel uneasy with whether I can recognise and be aware of my more intuitive, guttural side.

It was a joyful, full, release to be on the learner side and emotionally experience all that my family was getting to experience. The gratitude was overwhelming. For my sensitive, restless and at times anxious 7-year-old, it was so empowering for him to see that *he* was capable of leadership and a bond with this massive beauty. For my spirited and passionate 10-year-old, she faced knowing how to use and balance the wonderful gift of her palpable energy. And for my introverted, underspoken, big-hearted 14-year-old, he was able to work through finding his voice and his assertiveness in a way that felt authentic to him. Then for my husband, there were clearly valuable issues around his own self-identity that he worked through.

Power is a wonderful thing when it is in proper balance. That is what Eponicity showed so beautifully. Thank you so very much."

Kristin Valenus, family of 5, US (March 2017)

"I received and enjoyed a myriad of gifts and blessings during this indelible experience, including the ability to be and feel without the continuous shackles of self-judgement and self-punishment. The environment that was created was such that even for individuals like me who can be fiercely private and tend to fall within the

introspective spectrum, there was no pressure to say, do or act in a pre-determined, 'acceptable' way. Each one of us was free to express our unique individualities without any stigma or fear to be ridiculed. In my



opinion, this is one of the main reasons for which your program works as well as it does. Sally and Debbie (and, to varying degrees, the rest of the staff) care for each person enough to allow them the freedom to participate as they feel comfortable in the activities that are offered. Furthermore, the fact that Sally and Debbie were willing to be vulnerable with us and alongside us gave us permission not to attach the tag of shame whenever we wore our hearts in our sleeves; again, this another important reason the participants and Sally and Debbie, as facilitators, were able to form a community or mini-herd of humans.

Additionally, I was challenged to, among other things, face my insecurities and self-contradictions in a constructive way. For example, during the exercise in which my companion horse JR and I were going to spend sometime one on one and he decided, not once but twice within a very short span of time, that his food and being around other horses was far more preferable and enjoyable than my company while I very much wanted to have this experiential and intimate time with him. Instead of this dynamic being an immediate trigger for feeling hurt and rejected, which would have been my immediate, habitual reaction, I instead saw it as an opportunity and symbolism to honor another being's time and space without resentment or feelings of inadequacy. JR did what he needed at the time and took care of himself and I ended up doing the same.

It was indisputably a worthwhile experience. I had the space and suitable conditions to reflect and gain invaluable insights about my life and my conditioned self.

This an unique experience that should be experienced at least once and that will not be regretted."

Judith, Biologist, U.S. (January 2017)

"Truly life-changing and restorative. You held the space with such skill and compassion that it really allowed me to show up in all of my imperfections. Honestly I don't know if that's a place where I've ever allowed myself to occupy."

Trish Lemske, Life Coach, U.S. (January 2017)

"Among the many, many insights and gifts I received during this week, I think my biggest gift was that I was able to get in touch with vulnerability. Before this workshop, I thought of vulnerability as feeling insecure, weak, helpless. And even if I wanted to get in touch with it, it felt impossible to me, I had a very strong armour and couldn't lower my guard. But what I experienced with JR, my horse for the week, was quite the opposite of what I expected: I felt powerful and fragile at the same time.

It was like I discovering a new source of power and energy within me, that completely changed my perspective on how to achieve my goals and how to interact with others.

Another great insight for me was how powerful listening can be. I used to think that I was bad at helping people through a rough time because I never knew how to fix their problem or even how to listen to it. I didn't understand what they were expecting of me, I was always trying to find solutions but they would reject them. Then, I would lose patience and think they didn't want my help.

But during this workshop, I learnt what it meant to hold space for one another. How to support the others without fixing them or intervening, just by being there, being present, loving and compassionate, which was a very great insight for me. Being on both ends (supporting the others and being supported), I could feel how important it was for each other personal development.

I felt supported and loved unconditionally, by the horses, by Debbie and Sally, by the group, which really allowed me to enter a new level of understanding myself. Thanks to that unconditional support and presence, I was able to dig deeper into what was going on for me at that time. I was encountering blocks in my professional life, and JR reflected each and every one of my blocks, helping me to find solutions within me to get passed them, and showing me my internal force. This work opened a lot of doors for me to explore, and gave me so many practical tools to help me. I've been using those tools ever since the workshop, and it makes my life so much better. Now, even through rough patches, I feel equipped to deal with every situation. And when I'm not, I accept it, and allow whatever needs to come up to be there and sit with me.

That's another wonderful gift from this week, I learnt a great deal about emotions : how to identify them, how to listen to them, how to accept them, how to understand their message.

Sometimes, I used to think of myself as a robot, because I thought I was unable to "feel" emotions, even less identify them if they would show up. So I would unconsciously bury them very deep, and eventually they would take over me. In the end, this led me to experience panic attacks, being burnt out, exhausted or depressed. But I still had no idea why, and I felt more and more scared but also intrigued about HOW to feel emotions. I really wanted to be able to listen to them, I knew they had a message, I just didn't know their language, so even when they were yelling, I couldn't understand what they were shouting.

Thanks to that workshop, I received so many wonderful information about emotions, and I felt in a safe place to experience them too. Because horses have this beautiful ability to make the emotions come up, always for your own good. They reflect who you are, whether you want to see it or not, because that's how they see you.

I have been with horses for as long as I can remember, and I always knew that with them, I would allow myself to be vulnerable, to cry, to feel sad, to feel happy. But something was still missing, because I couldn't understand it. Emotions would either hide within or burst out of me in a tornado, leaving me exhausted and disoriented, but never feeling better as my brain couldn't process any of it. And this missing piece was brought to me by Debbie and Sally, and the Eponaquest work. JR, my horse, would bring up the emotion or the obstacle without any judgement, and Debbie and Sally's support would help me dig in and be aware of what was going on. The fact that we worked in a group was also amazing because each one of the participants would bring a very interesting insight, and I felt really helped and supported by everyone.

I got out of this week feeling happy, relieved, excited, relaxed and most of all blessed.

Thank you JR for your loving and enveloping presence by my side during this week. Thank you for pushing me out of my comfort zone so subtly, and for helping me find my true power. Thank you Debbie and Sally for your incredible support and faith in me, you gave me the courage to dive deep and accept myself on a whole new level by your amazing facilitating skills and your compassion. Thank you to all the participants for their open mind and for sharing their beautiful stories, for accepting to be vulnerable and for inspiring me to follow that path too.”

Leila Audrey Pages, Documentary Maker, France (December 2016)

“The experience was entirely wonderful and is really integrating / sinking in now I have come back - I realised that, when I was writing my vision for the year ahead, I am feeling empowered and positive!

Horses are incredible beings with souls and the power to connect with humans in a way I didn't know possible.

Discovering the ability to feel energy and to start to listen to my body was incredible. I learnt to realise it's ok to be vulnerable and now have first hand experience of what that feels like. It was such a gift to feel unconditional love and support from my horse, Espartaco, while he also challenged me within my boundaries. He gave me first hand experience of what good energy feels like and how it feels to stick up for myself and increase, not decrease connection as a result.

Realising the distinction between fear and vulnerability and shame and guilt was huge for me. I now feel like I have the ability to recognise the different range of emotions and what they feel like. Learning to really feel and process emotions and that it's ok to feel was such a breakthrough.

I finally understand that the tight anxious feeling I get in my chest comes from incongruence in me or others.

I feel so empowered to make choices with what I have learnt here this week. I have found the courage to live wholeheartedly embracing vulnerability, trusting myself and in the process of being present and living life with hope openness and compassion. I have learnt that self love is key.

Overall it was a wonderful, enlightening experience with incredible facilitators. I felt total love and connection with my horse Espartaco, who is still in my heart and I miss him. I hope to return to continue on my journey.”

Asia, Corporate Attorney, England (December 2016)

“Equine facilitated learning and the medicine wheel is a perfect combination for profound and meaningful self work. The guides from Leaves and Lizards and Rites of Passage do a fabulous job at creating a hands-on activity-filled workshop that promotes personal growth and the gaining of valuable life wisdom, while balancing down time for rest, play, exploration and rejuvenation. The massages, accommodations and meals are equally delicious and I found myself looking forward to them each day, yet not wanting the workshop sessions to end. I felt cared for, seen and heard - and that's how well they treat their horses too! You will deeply connect with these divine creatures, with the Costa Rican jungle, and with the guides and other

participants. I highly recommend this event and it is most definitely money well spent. And now there's even a pool - bonus!"

Paula Blundell, Organizer, Canada (June 2016)

"I am going to be honest. Your retreat is the best thing I ever participated in...

Also, I am aware of a new inner space of my perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and definitely the dreams. They help reveal the truth of my life as it is while sensing the truth in my life and connection to others beyond my imagination. And yes, I am able to picture new solutions in my life with imagination."

Caryl Farley, Nurse, U.S. (June 2016)

"I'm so grateful for the experience I had at Leaves and Lizards. It was truly a life changing experience that I couldn't have anticipated.

Being surrounded by such love from all the horses and animals on the farm, waking up to a stunning view of the volcano, eating delicious organic meals, being in the middle of the jungle and working with such amazing facilitators (Debbie, Sally, Dashielle and Mike) was healing on so many levels.

Each day I worked with my horse was like peeling off layers of the onion. My whole life I had been afraid of horses. When I was a kid I was kicked off my horse and it really scared me. But with guidance and support I was able to embrace my fear and feel my feeling rather than running from them (something I've been doing for a long time).

On the very first day, we were blindfolded and they brought the horses in to choose us. The guides informed us that the right horse would choose us, that we could trust that whatever horse was drawn to us, had something to teach us and that we could grow from them. Sitting in the dark, next to a huge creature (that I didn't trust) required me to have trust (to just be willing to sit there and believe what the guides were telling me). I considered this experience a breakthrough in itself.

The horse who chose me was named "Beauty" and she is absolutely stunning. Through various exercises and spending time together she taught me that I needed to speak up, to be more assertive in my life and to stop letting people take advantage of me. She demanded that I use my power to communicate and if I didn't.....she would rather just eat grass. She did this a lot. She ate grass all the time and at first I took it really personally. I felt that she must be so bored with me. One day when her and I sat alone in the barn (and after what felt like hours of watching her eat) I suddenly realized that people are going to do what they do and that it has nothing to do with me. Also, that if I wanted a different result or for something to change, that it wasn't going to happen by just thinking about it. I decided I need to do something different, go out of my comfort zone and for me that meant putting on Beauty's mouth harness (she has a special one she has to wear because she escapes all the time. This made me laugh because I think she's a bit of a rebel and I can relate to that). I was so scared

she might bite me or run away if I tried to get too close to her but I chose to do it anyway. It took a couple tries but then she just let me do it! And while this may not sound like a victory to anyone but myself...it was! I had created a new level of intimacy with her and was so proud of myself. We walked peacefully back to the pasture together that night and I felt a new sense of freedom.

I also learned so much from watching other people on the retreat work with their horses. These animals are so sacred and special they are like truth serum. They have this incredible ability to reveal the very things in ourselves that we hide from and push down. These horses meet us with such grace in the midst of our darkness and support us in revealing the truth of who we are....an abundance of love and joy. I guess you could say that the horses were like medicine, working on us in ways that we might not even be aware of.

However, without Sally and Debbie none of this would have been possible. I don't think these women really get how amazing they are. I couldn't have even gotten close to these animals without their guidance. They were both so gentle yet stern and really stood for me to be courageous when I wanted to run. There were no back doors on this retreat. I had to be present...all the time and deal with whatever came up...but I didn't have to do it alone. Having Sally and Debbie there to help explain the kind of work we were doing and watching them interact with the horses and witnessing their great love for these animals was just such a tremendous thing to experience.

Dashielle and Mike who were also guides on the trip incorporated the practice of the medicine wheel which really helped provide a beautiful container for all the work we did. It gave me a safe space to process my experiences and allowed me to use the elements in nature as information for growth. Everyone had to come together and work as a team and while it wasn't always easy, the bumps along the way turned out to be a perfect part of the journey. I came away from this experience with a new appreciation for the things that scare me. I was reminded to step into my own power and to listen to my emotions as useful information and trust that my intuition will guide me.

My overall experience of this workshop if I could choose three words would be sacred, exhilarating and unforgettable!"

Cassie Fireman, Singer, U.S. (June 2016)

"I discovered new things about myself and this workshop had a big, positive impact on me. I had no idea what to expect and was not so comfortable talking about feelings but I felt part of such an authentic community and now I better understand how to use emotions information, have learned to use my intuition and I felt such a connection with my horse. I will make changes in my life following the workshop, especially noticing when I am being myself and being authentic. I would definitely recommend this to friends and family!

Truly extraordinary!"

Lucien Smits, Finance Director, Switzerland (May 2016)

“Profound!”

Brian, Owner of IT business & Inventor, U.S. (February 2016)

“I have been to 2 workshops already before and I always feel part of an authentic community here. I learned more again this time - and it was fun! I would say to others thinking of coming: Let go of agenda, expectations and even intention. Be open to living a new and different life!”

Jean, Psychiatric nurse, U.S. (February 2016)

“Transformative!

I will use this in my day-to-day life to notice what herd role I am playing and adjust as needed. To live more in the moment. To acknowledge gratitude.”

Michelle, Magazine owner, U.S. (February 2016)

“It is completely disarming to witness how contact with horses opens up people; it often unfolds what is carefully tucked away inside or ignored by themselves, releasing emotions or ideas they were unaware were influencing their lives.”

Ute, Doctor, Germany. (February 2016)

“The workshop and all activities were seamless. I know what goes on in the background to make this happen and you are doing an amazing job of hosting your guests. Sally, awesome job with the Master Herder!

I will carry my horse in my heart with the wisdom he shared. Thank you for all you have given me this week. Words truly can't express the gratitude I feel for the invitation to join you. I needed this more than I can share. I am leaving feeling an empowered sense of myself! With love, joy and gratitude.”

Sherry, Therapist with art and horses, U.S. (February 2016)

“Time with horses opens me up, exposing new facets of my being which the traditional counseling/therapy takes much longer to do.”

Kristine, Website designer, U.S. (February 2016)

“I consider myself experienced with horses and attended with reservations regarding this learning experience. No matter your previous experience, riding style or goals with horses, this workshop will open your eyes and heart to ideas and tools to use in any situation or discipline. Exhilarating!”

Terri, Director, U.S. (February 2016)

“Don’t expect anything – just feel it and let it go... I felt great fear before, during and after the workshop. I learnt to trust myself, I am able to do it even with my young horse! Tango is just a beautiful horse, sensitive and with a big heart, very kindly and grounded – if you trust yourself - and him - he will go until the end of the world with you. Wonderful!”

Nina, Coach, France (February 2016)

“The words I choose to describe this experience are: beautiful, revealing, growth, supportive!

Being a novice with horses, this experience was amazing. The understanding of the facilitators and the understanding of my horse was beyond any expectations. The learning revealed about myself will help me move forward with more confidence and joy, it will help in all my relationships.

It is fun, interesting, motivating and safe. The beauty of this land added greatly to the magic. The setting is one of the most beautiful in the world.”

Francesca, Yoga instructor, Costa Rica (February 2016)

“The combination of horsemanship and personal growth makes this experience unique and authentic. It helped me to truly understand the way of things in nature and how that can help us. I learned to stay in the moment. Someone doing one of these retreats can expect to feel change, involvement, enlightenment, tired! It truly was thought-provoking and interesting. The biggest impact for me was seeing my approach to life through the roles of horse herd behavior.”

Mark, Engineer, U.S. (February 2016)

“I connected my internal and external self in order to connect to other people and other creatures. I have learned to be my own leader and to nurture more, rather than trying to pressure myself. I found Joy with Dorado (my horse)!”

Yuko, Fashion Director, U.S. (February 2016)

“If you want to enjoy beautiful nature and have fun while you learn about yourself and how to ride horses more comfortable at the same time, this program is for you!

“The horses at the retreat are treated so well – bitless bridles, no shoes, highly respected – yet are treated like horses all at the same time.

I had an injury (unrelated to my horse) and when I greeted my horse he nudged his face up and down exactly where I was pained. This horse, Cosmo, took such care of me – such care that I’ve never experienced. It was so nice to escape the winter, so nice to have a change of scenery, so nice to have meals and beds made for me – but the essence was all about the horse.

The experience brought me closer to myself, so much closer to myself.”

(Anon, 2015)

“Day by day the Epona exercises and my horse helped me to discover things about myself that I never knew or had forgotten. When I got home, I made some very positive changes. I started making plans to follow my dreams. Ambitions that I had always thought were too far off, too difficult to reach. My horse taught me that I was the one holding myself back. I was standing in my own way. This experience opened that door to me. I will be forever changed by it.”

(Anon, 2015)

“Words cannot do justice to my experience, but I will try.

I live in a corporate world, in the city, where it is incredibly hard to keep your head in touch with your heart. That reconnection is what the Epona experience enables, plus so much more.

Authenticity is hard to find; I found it here with the horses. Trust, mutual respect, understanding, support and connection follow such authenticity. Fun and laughter do too of course! What a huge relief and weight off my shoulders to be in this authentic environment and to be free to be me. And accepted just the way I am. That is truly a rare gift and I wish everyone had the chance to experience it.

The understanding, unconditional love and support she gave me throughout the whole workshop was the most moving experience of my life - all the more so as it was freely and willingly given, with no expectation of anything in return.

My horse, Beauty, taught me some tough life lessons: to stand in my own power (in fact to be aware of where and what my power and life force is in the first place), to maintain boundaries, to know when I am being true to myself.....

I have done many personal development, team building and leadership exercises in a corporate or business school setting and can honestly say that nothing is a patch on this. Talk about fast-track to self-awareness, clarity and truth! Authenticity is hard to find; I found it here with the horses.

Working with the horses in the group dynamic was a fascinating mirror to how I show up in other life situations.

Horses really do give you what you need, rather than what you think you want. This is their most powerful lesson as so often we focus on what we think we want and ignore what we actually really need to grow. So we end up just surviving, rather than thriving. That was a big lesson for me

All I can say is what an opportunity and what an enriching, empowering and life-changing experience. The whole group (a diverse mix, many with little or no horse experience) felt the same.



If you are at all interested in learning, positive growth, action and solutions, to feel that you are moving forward, to find clarity and identify things swiftly, to expose and examine your real truth and how you show up in the world, all in an authentic, non-threatening, supportive and quite literally heart-warming place then this experience is a must for you.

Authenticity is hard to find, I found it here.”

Sally, Corporate Attorney, England, (May 2015)

“I have been giving a lot of thought to your request for our feedback or summary you might call it, of our Epona experience and how, upon our return, it related to a corporate setting. Firstly I won't speak for Lauren, but would like to let you know that she subconsciously took the bull by the horns when she returned, and elevated herself into a much happier role at work, managing a project that has given her great exposure and accolades. It's a work in progress, but she has started to rise to a place of respect amongst her peers and directors, and is less concerned about what people think, but more of her own accomplishments and results. Here's my perspective of how it pertains to my daily existence, as not an employee of Adidas directly, but as essentially a self employed vendor of Adidas and as an ex Nike employee of 5 years.

I'm going to ramble, so get your coffee..... As you well know when we entered into the Epona workshop, we were not coming into it in any other way than a part of our Honeymoon, and to boot in Costa Rica; so about as far away from a corporate setting as possible. Add into this a lack of expectation, other than a relaxing authentic Costa Rican experience, no knowledge of Epona or what the workshop would ultimately mean to us, and it probably starts to become one of your more interesting case studies.

ser-en-dip-i-tous adjective: "occurring or discovered by chance in a happy or beneficial way"

What was initially difficult for me upon my return, was identifying how the setting, the horses and the people had made me feel stronger, calmer and better about myself. I felt like I had been medicated by the experience. In actuality, I had been diagnosed with high blood pressure for about a year prior to the workshop, reaching an all time high of 155/102 2 weeks before our departure. I had an appointment when we got back to finally resign myself to the fact that after some weight loss and diet change, there was not a blood pressure decrease, and that I was reluctantly going to have to resort to medication to get it down. 5 days after we got back it was 112/82.



"Only when we are no longer afraid do we begin to live" Dorothy Thompson (1893-1961)

Having no experience at all with horses, I found it oddly calming to be around them and with people that were trained professionals, pretty much right from the get go. As unpredictable as horses might be, or at least that's the perception from the novice point of view, I felt safe. Usually it is in my nature to take control of the situation. Here I was so out of my element that I couldn't take control, so letting go was what I needed to do. At least I thought I couldn't take control. Having ridden motorcycles for 20+ years, I tend to have good balance, a respect for power and speed, and good body positioning. This all came into play in the week, but what was unexpected was the bonding with the horses and eventually managing the relationship with the horse. There was something bigger at work here; maybe a spiritual something, beyond science but not religious either.

I found myself talking to my horse, but not out loud. Eventually, I found myself, under the guidance of the instructors, in a kind of a "parent-child" sort of a relationship, trying to work the mutual respect aspect into the situation, but with firmness. Over the next five days with the horses, it translated into a "don't sweat the small stuff" and a calmness. I felt strong, accomplished and confident in the environment. It was not until my return that I realized I could and should parlay that into my everyday life, and I'm still trying to put my finger on how I can word that. What I haven't even mentioned was the group sessions and learning we experienced, that promoted openness. Tearing the walls down and sharing seemed to evoke a sense of relief, and listening to others, a sense of compassion. I guess if I had to try and sum it up it would be that I walked away thinking that in a busy corporate environment, Epona may just have equipped me with the skills to be strong and confident but with empathy and compassion, traits which sometimes in that field are considered weaknesses.

Aside from Epona in itself, Leaves and Lizards remains a very profound experience in our hearts, and I continue to read the rave reviews on trip advisor. I think you guys and Shelley will continue to touch hearts and minds around the globe and it just doesn't get any better than that. Well done and thanks for the experience."

Mark and Lauran, Corporate Executives, U.S. (2015)

"I studied with E. Katherine Kerr back in the 80s. Katherine was a very empowering teacher, and not just for acting. Katherine would often encourage us to follow the roads life put before us, whether it looked as if they were leading us to our desires or not. Katherine would explain to us young actors that to be your best actor is often dependent in great part on living a full and varied life. And Katherine's words helped me to make the transition out of acting at the time; a transition that was crucial for me to make. So, when the recent opportunity to travel to Costa Rica for eleven days to participate in a very special Equestrian Workshop arose, it took me a New York Minute to say yes. Sometimes we don't know how we're going to do something, but we know we gotta do it. So I did it.

The horses at the retreat are treated so well – bitless bridles, no shoes, highly respected – yet are treated like horses all at the same time. We, as riders, did not choose our horse for the workshop - our horses chose us. Envision workshop participants sitting in a circle, face out, blindfolded as horses were led into the paddock two by two; some horses would take a walk around and leave; some horses would take a few walks around, ponder and choose; some horses would go directly to a participant and choose. That's likely all the detail I need to give you to explain the magic of the experience.



The days only grew more purposeful and real as they passed. I learned to ride for the first time, swam bareback in the river on my horse, giggled when he would trot unasked, and laughed uproariously when he would break into a faster pace – also unasked. I had an injury (unrelated to my horse) and the day after when I greeted my horse he nudged his face up and down exactly where I was pained. This horse, Cosmo, took such care of me – such care that I've never experienced. It was so nice to escape the winter, so nice to have a change of scenery, so nice to have meals and beds made for me – but the essence was all about the horse.

I am now an experienced and quite capable beginning equestrian and horse whisperer. And I am on the search for local-ish horses who are cared for as I am used to so I can continue my equestrian life. Why is this my "acting" story of the month? The experience brought me closer to myself, so much closer to myself. Knowing myself is what helps me in trying to bring full characters to full life. And bringing full characters to full life is my job, not to mention my essence."

Sheiligh W., Physician & Actress, U.S. (2015)

“I decided to attend the Eat Pray Ride Retreat at Leaves and Lizards on a whim. I came alone, with no real expectations. I guess I was following my intuition. My life was at a sort of stand still. My work was boring, I felt like I needed to find out what made me tick again, a purpose, a focus. After I made the decision, paid my deposit a sense of relief came over me, it was like I was finally taking a step in the right direction, taking action instead of reacting all the time.

When I arrived at Leaves and Lizards and saw my cabin, the view, the surroundings were all so surreal! I felt like I was on another planet. We were introduced to the other participants, our horses – our comrades on this journey. Day by day the Epona exercises and my horse helped me to discover things about myself that I never knew or had forgotten.

The last day, I cried saying goodbye to my horse. I did not want to leave; however, I felt like I was ready and armed with the tools I needed to move forward. Shelley and Debbie were wonderful teachers, I will always be grateful to them for facilitating this experience. When I got home, I made some very positive changes. I started making plans to follow my dreams. Ambitions that I had always thought were too far off too difficult to reach. But they are not. Now I can see them in my reach. The things that were impossible are no longer impossible. My horse taught me that I was the one holding myself back. I was standing in my own way. The experience opened that door to me. I will be forever changed by it.”



Susan W., Veterinarian, U.S. (2014)

“I am a holistic healer who recently brought a group of patients to Leaves and Lizards this spring. It was a magical experience for everyone in our group on many levels. The degree of deep healing and consciousness expanding work was exponential. There was not one person who did not grow in a hugely transformational way and from what I could tell since that trip many lives have changed for the better. Both Debbie and Shelley and of course the horses were superb facilitators. They have a deep and supportive understanding of how to help each one of us face and release the persistent blocks in our respective lives.

The horses at Leaves and Lizards are extraordinary beings, extremely perceptive, sentient and willing to be of service to their “human” partners. All of us felt supported, physically, emotionally and mentally and certainly spiritually. To be directly in contact with nature, in such a beautiful environment with gorgeous accommodations and wonderful food, it just doesn’t get any better. The massage staff is excellent and if you have ever wondered what it is like to be massaged daily or near daily this is the way to find out! It was beautiful to watch everyone being restored to their very “best and highest” self. By the way, this was my second trip, as the first was so deeply restorative that I wanted to bring some of my own patients over to experience this new and important way of healing. I think everyone could benefit from this kind of work at least twice a year!”

Joanne Anita May, DOM LAC DHm, U.S. (2014)

FAMILY TESTIMONIALS

“I had no idea what to expect from Eponicity or whether it would be for our family, but I was open to new and different experiences and knew that family time is always good. But wow! What we got blew my mind.

As instructors and emotional coaches you are fabulous. To use some of the concepts you taught – you moved fluidly through the herd roles as needed to manage my kids and our family beautifully. I was amazed how each of my children could step into the arena on their own and work through their unique and precise areas of growth. It truly almost felt like it was magic, but rather it was just deep intuition from Debbie, Sally and mostly the horses.

With no horse background, I feel like we grew so much in our understanding of horse behaviour and personalities. For myself it reflected my challenge in balancing my assertiveness with my desire for collaboration. As a business owner and strong assertive woman, I have at times struggled in growing up and feeling self-conscious as if I was coming on too strong. I was happy to work through this balance of herd roles of dominant, leader, nurturer with Cosmo (my horse), to get to my place of “joy” and “being”. Working with feelings all day, and so often being in my head with with them, I can feel uneasy with whether I can recognise and be aware of my more intuitive, guttural side.

It was a joyful, full, release to be on the learner side and emotionally experience all that my family was getting to experience. The gratitude was overwhelming. For my sensitive, restless and at times anxious 7-year-old, it was so empowering for him to see that *he* was capable of leadership and a bond with this massive beauty. For my spirited and passionate 10-year-old, she faced knowing how to use and balance the wonderful gift of her palpable energy. And for my introverted, underspoken, big-hearted 14-year-old, he was able to work through finding his voice and his assertiveness in a way that felt authentic to him. Then for my husband, there were clearly valuable issues around his own self-identity that he worked through.

Power is a wonderful thing when it is in proper balance. That is what Eponicity showed so beautifully. Thank you so very much.”

Valerus, family of 5, US (March 2017)

Quotes from 2017 Family workshops:

CV, Psychologist; “ ...I was amazed how each of my children could step into the arena on their own and work through their unique and precise areas of growth. It truly almost felt like it was magic, but rather it was just deep intuition from Debbie, Sally and mostly the horses!”

QS, 6 year old: “...my horse know when I was scared, I felt like he comforted me, then he helped me see that I am strong, and I wasn't scared anymore!”

SA, 10 year old; "...I am being bullied in school, and Titan taught me how to stand my ground without becoming a bully too. I felt good understanding how to be dominant in a good way."

EV, 12 year old;..."I saw my family in a different way, it was nice to do the activity together we grew closer, I know more about myself now....I learned how to understand when to back off, when I come on too strong."

KR, Psychologist; "...What amazed me is how the horses mirrored or pulled out dynamics that I see in my children, wife, and myself, and what they pulled out is exactly what each of us needed to see. How does a horse do that??!!!. Nature, and these wonderful horses, helped me step into a greater awareness of myself and my family..."
