

Man who talks to horses to perform in Omaha

By TIM KARSTENS
Staff Reporter

Writing a best-selling book and selling out shows often takes more than talent, hard work or luck. For Monty Roberts, it takes a certain horse sense.

Roberts, an internationally renowned horse trainer and author of "The Man Who Listens to Horses," created a unique training method he calls "Join-Up." In the Join-Up method, Roberts claims he tames wild horses by simply speaking and

listening to them.

As improbable as it seems, it is possible, Roberts said. And if seeing is believing, then thousands of people have been made to believe during a United States tour. For Roberts, the tour is not a publicity obligation but a labor of love.

"It's not always a fun thing. It's work, and sometimes I would just rather be with my horses," Roberts said of his grueling schedule. "But I love doing what I do now."

It is a love that was born of a difficult childhood in Depression-era California. Raised by an abusive father, Roberts swore he would break

the chain and become a different man. Through his love of animals, Roberts became an accomplished rodeo cowboy and trainer who once worked with James Dean.

It was also through this love of animals that he first learned to communicate with horses. The first time he realized the horses were responding to him, he was stunned and ecstatic.

"That first time I stood awestruck, with no one else around," Roberts said. "There is no subsiding in that feeling."

After recovering from the initial shock, Roberts said he realized the

concept was simple: cultivate trust and the animal will be willing to learn.

He said the horses respond to a simple vocabulary. And like humans, the horses are not only willing to learn but want to learn.

"It's a subtle language," Roberts said of the mode of communication between man and horse. "But it's the same need to learn."

Roberts is not the only one who realized that horses need — and can — learn. Among admirers and clients are the Queen of England and the Prince of Dubai. For the Queen, with whom Roberts has become close

friends, the transformation of her horses has meant so much.

"I think during a difficult time in her life, it has been a bright spot," Roberts said.

According to Roberts, this happiness can be achieved by anyone willing to listen and learn as the horses do.

"I think the horses have been trying to tell us something," he said. "To teach us to listen all along."

Roberts will perform July 25 at Ak-sar-ben Coliseum in Omaha. Tickets are \$25 or \$75 for V.I.P. seating. For ticket information, call 888-826-6689.

Guards convicted of rape, murder of nuns paroled

SAN VICENTE, El Salvador (AP) — Two former national guardsmen convicted in the rapes and murders of three American nuns have been paroled from prison, complicating efforts to investigate allegations that the murders were ordered by high-ranking officers.

A five-man squad kidnapped, raped and killed Roman Catholic nuns Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel and Maura Clark and layworker Jean Donovan on Dec. 2, 1980. A third member could be released today.

The two guardsmen were released Tuesday under a new law intended to ease prison overcrowding. Each had served 17 years of a 30-year prison sentence.

The two other former guardsmen convicted in the case did not qualify for release because one previously had been convicted on weapons charges and the other had participated in a prison disturbance.

The crimes caused outrage in the United States, which strongly supported the Salvadoran government during the 1980-1992 civil war. The women apparently were killed because military-backed death squads suspected them of sympathizing with leftist guerrillas.

"The families of the churchwomen have felt that the government of El Salvador should certainly not have released these men before closely questioning them on the matter of higher orders: Who ordered this crime and who covered it up," said William Ford, Ita Ford's brother, in a telephone interview from his home in Upper Montclair, N.J.

The Clinton administration and the State Department previously had criticized the plan to parole the guardsmen, a process that has been delayed by appeals from prosecutors.

Sgt. Luis Colindres — who commanded the guard squad — walked out of a prison in San Vicente, about 40 miles southeast of San Salvador.

"I have always worked in accordance with the law," Colindres told reporters at the prison gates, breaking a 14-year silence on his conviction. He refused to back up claims by other members of the squad that they

received orders from "higher ups" to murder the four women.

The New York-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights reported earlier this year that one of the convicted guardsmen quoted Colindres as telling the squad: "Don't be worried. This is an order that comes from higher levels, and nothing is going to happen to us."

A 1993 U.N. commission report determined that the director of the national guard at the time of the slayings, Col. Eugenio Vides Casanova, and Defense Minister Jose Guillermo Garcia, had tried to hide the killings. It also concluded that Vides Casanova knew that the guardsmen had killed the women on the orders of superiors.

The victims' families and supporters were angered earlier this year when they learned that both former officials were living in the United States.

William Ford said both men "should certainly be called to testify under oath in front of Congress about what they know about the orders to murder the women and the subsequent coverup."

Vides Casanova has denied those accusations, saying "my conscience would never be able to rest if I knew their orders to kill came from above."

In June, the Salvadoran government said it could not reopen the probe into the slayings despite evidence that those who orchestrated the killings were never punished.

Chief Prosecutor Manuel Cordova said the 10-year statute of limitations on murder had expired, so "technically it is not possible to reopen the case, independent of the evidence, complaints or information that has been received."

The guardsmen were sentenced to 30 years in prison in May 1984 and have been jailed since 1981. They were to be given credit for time served before their convictions and, together with other credits, have served about two-thirds of their total sentences.

The national guard was disbanded after a 1992 peace agreement ended the country's civil war, which killed an estimated 75,000 people.

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