

# "C" is for Tradition

(left to right) Konni, Raul, Cassandra & Nick

Written by Heather Orton

"Tradition" is one of those words that conjure up images of ageless honor and proven rituals. There are numerous cultures on this great planet of ours that hold dear to their hearts the value of traditions; the Irish, Native American Indians and

Andalusian. At that time the Internet was still in the future. Libraries were the only place we had to find out anything about the Iberian Peninsula in those

days. I read all about Spain and Portugal and decided that

I would probably like the food in Portugal better as I loved seafood. I had no favorite when it came to the horses each country raised and called their native breed. Both the Spanish Horse and the Lusitano were perfect in my mind. I couldn't get images out of my head of riding one of these magnificent animals the way their native country rode them. I wanted to fight bulls, I wanted to Piaffe and fly through the air like Pegasus.

It took until my early Twenties to begin to realize the dream. I didn't fight

bulls or piaffe - though it did feel like I was flying through the clouds. I finally got to ride an Andalusian in the desert of California and it was intoxicating. My first Andalusian was a filly who thought she was a

stud. She challenged everything that moved and seemed to breathe fire on my wish. She was marvelous. If she had not died at an early age she would have made a majestic little bullfighting horse (for my imagination). At that time I was living in San Diego, California and had little expectations of ever making it to Portugal to see the great bullfighters of the day. I did have access to Charros (not quite the same of course) and had a goal of making it down to Tijuana to go to the bull fighting arena to eventually see my glorious breed do what they were bred to do. I never made it to Tijuana, before moving to Pennsylvania. The dream never died though.

Last March I came back out to California to do press checks on



Marc, Cassandra & Nick preparing the horses for the event

the Italians all are cultures steeped deep with rituals and honor. The Iberian Peninsula is also home to two cultures flooded with tradition. I have a favorite CD that I play often, Reflections of Spain. Simply close your eyes and you can actually feel the warm sun of the Peninsula against your back as you imagine yourself standing on the patio of a great hacienda, looking out over fields ripe with grain, speckled by the broad backs of black bulls and white horses. No place on earth must have that exact feel.

I was bred and born in the United States. My family did not have much stock in traditions, being of many cultures and occupations. I first became aware of great traditions when studying the Native American Tribes, and then again when I discovered my first Andalusian. Like most kids, I'm sure, I could not get my hands on enough books on the focus of my newfound dream - to own an



Quiver, ridden by Vitor Ribeiro



Linda Keeble braiding Indio

ANDALUSIAN magazine and happened to get e-mail from a woman in Los Angeles who wanted to swap web site links with me. When I went to go check out her site, I discovered she was involved with a group of Portuguese people who bred and trained horses for the "sport" of Bloodless Bullfighting – found here in the United States. I quickly contacted Konni Magno of Rancho Cardoso, the woman who e-mailed me about swapping links, and asked her if there were any events coming into the area and when. I stated that I would love to do an article about this event as it happens in California, for ANDALUSIAN magazine. We quickly made arrangements and a couple weekends later my husband and I jumped in the car on our way to Artesia, California to finally see our first bull fight.

We arrived in the morning, at one of the training locations of Rancho Cardoso, where we met Konni and the Cardoso brothers, Marc and Raul. Also in attendance, to help with the days preparations and events were Cassandra Nicholson, the granddaughter of Jose Albino Fernandez, and her younger brother Nick. I also finally had the great pleasure to finally meet Linda Keeble, owner of Nico, a long term Lusitano aficionado. After introducing ourselves we were quickly introduced to the horses of the day. Indio is a 10-year-old black Lusitano stallion imported from Portugal and Quiver, is 7-year-old buckskin Lusitano stallion bred in Montana. We also met a very talented Bay Arab stallion, due to fight that afternoon as well as his stable-mate, a chestnut Quarter Horse. Everyone was bustling about getting all the horses dressed and ready for the afternoon event, but they were still so incredibly gracious to me during my 101 million questions. I learned that some colors of



ribbons are almost never used, due to their traditional meaning or a person's feelings towards a color. Black, for example is a color of mourning, so is rarely used. Yellow is not one of Vitor Ribeiro's (the Bullfighter) favorites, so everyone was very careful to leave that color in the box.



Vitor Ribeiro checking equipment on Indio. Indio was originally owned by Vitor

At one point I asked everyone a very general question. I wanted to know – what makes a good bullfighting horse. Linda answered that she felt a good animal was between 15.2-16 hands, and that conformation plays a huge part in whether or not the horse will be able to perform safely and successfully. She also mentioned that strength of heart; mind and body were critical. She agreed with everyone else that the Viegas/Andrade crossed horses were prized. Marc said that a bullfighting horse must have very flexible and powerful loins because they must be able to work off their hocks and

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hindquarters for long periods of time. He added that sensibility is essential – but that it could not be trained into a horse, rather it must be bred into him. A brain is bred for, not trained! He did say something I found very thought provoking. He

said that dressage is, of course, the foundation to any good horse, but that the horse must not be "too" trained in just dressage. Marc added that all their stallions are live covered when bred, "If the horse is properly trained, then it should



Our little space behind the wall of the arena.

never bother the horse to be ridden around mares. A proper stallion does not react to mares when under saddle".

I asked how often they work the horses and Cassandra answered that Marc trains every day. I then began asking Cassandra questions about the actual bullfight. I learned that it is not just one horse that faces the bull during the entire fight. The Saida is the first stage of the bullfight. During the Saida, the long darts are used, while riding the fastest horse (called the Saida horse). She says "Because in California we can not draw blood, we have to tire the bull through footwork rather than using banderilla's (the long darts placed between the bull's shoulders)." The second stage of the bullfight is called the Banderilla stage - this is when the smaller darts are used. In the United States a Velcro covered pad is glued to the shoulder area of the bull, and the darts are tipped with Velcro. She went on to say that "Horses in the United States typically have more stamina than horses in Portugal or other bullfighting countries, because they usually have to work harder and longer on a bull that stays fresh longer because it is not losing blood. Your most expensive horse is typically the Saida horse, because of his speed and stamina. After the bull has



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tired a tiny bit, the second horse faces the bull. This is a horse who shows more style, and fancier footwork."

The tradition of bullfighting started at the old festivals held by the royalty of the Iberian Peninsula. History tells us that the Queen used to hide loaves of bread in the folds of her gown and as she walked the street, greeting people, she would hand out the loaves of bread. A bull was always brought in and slaughtered to feed the masses during festival. The Forcados were used to protect the King and Queen from the bull. Today, the Forcados, a team composed of 8 men, are an integral part of the Portuguese bullfight. The act of the 8 men standing in front of the charging bull, then bring the bull to a full halt, symbolizes the traditional slaughter of the bull.

When I asked her why the Cardoso

brothers choose to do this she stated simply "it is the Portuguese culture". Aside from soccer, in Portugal the national sport is bullfighting. I asked if it was safe to say that Bullfighting is to the Portuguese what Baseball is to an American, and she agreed with the comparison.

In the United States, the fighters are paid more: 1, because they are not using their own horses and 2, because the bulls can not be blooded here, which makes it all that more dangerous. As in Portugal, the United States also makes use of a very special group of men, called Banderillos. These are men who are in the arena at the same time as the horseman; it is their job to pull the bull away from the horse & rider through fancy cape work and gesticulation. In Portugal the Bullfighter generally will have his own Banderillos.



These men are an integral part of the sport of bloodless bullfighting in California.

California breeders supply these fights with magnificent fighting bulls. The ranch supplying the Mexican Fighting Bulls on this day was Candido Costa – actually a very large Dairy Farm in Central California. Bulls are typically around three years of age when they enter the arena for the first time. One detail I found very surprising was to learn that

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only cows are tested, usually at the age of one year. Bulls are never tested! The very first time the bull faces a challenge is when he steps foot in the arena for the first time. During the Sorteio, held the morning of the fight, the bulls are actually selected for each Cavaleiro (rider).

Late afternoon we headed over to Artesia to attend the event. After grabbing a quick bite to eat, we arrived at the

facility and were astonished at the size of the quickly growing crowd, composed mostly of Portuguese Americans. There, standing in front of one of the horse trailers we got to meet the Cavaleiro who was to ride the Cordoso brothers horses that day, Vitor Ribeiro. Vitor, of Portugal, had flown over to

One of the 8 man teams of Forcados - attempting to stop the last bull of the day.



the United States just for this event. Once the horses were unloaded from the trailers and saddled, they were walked across the street to a large soccer field behind a school. There, on the field, Vitor got to know each of the horses by taking 20 or 30 minutes to ride each one and putting each horse through a series of warm-up exercises.

attention to Vitor.

We were soon notified that it was time to start the event and that if we wanted good seats we should go and find them quickly in the arena. As we were walking to the arena I happened to ask if there was any chance at all of my husband and I actually staying down on the ground floor, behind the bull barrier, in order to get better pictures. Much to my surprise Konni said yes and proceeded to show us down into the arena, where we quickly made ourselves somewhat comfortable behind the wall that acts as a buffer between the bull and the Banderillos

The backdrop to this quiet moment was a field crowded with people finishing up at a soccer



match. Kids would fly by on little motor bikes, and yet each horse worked quietly and with the utmost

when they duck out of the arena. We were so close, that at one point later in the evening - while I had my head down changing out a roll of film, I heard a

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heavy thunk and looked up and directly into the eyes of a bull looking down at me from only about 12 inches away. He had one horn partially through the opening and was just standing there staring at me. I almost reached out and patted him on the head, before reminding myself that

these are not the nice gentle Charlais I grew up around.

The event started off with a parade of all the Banderillos, the Forcados and then the two Cavaleiros for the evening, each mounted, in full dress garb, on one of

their many patiently waiting steeds. As the evening progressed I got an opportunity to very closely study the three Banderillos and most of the Forcados as they were all behind the wall with us, throughout each fight. The honor and respect in each of these men was remarkable! They were so quiet and decorous. Each one, in my mind, did things in front of those bulls, which were almost on the verge of madness. Yet, looking into their eyes, I could see each was quite normal and sane. When I had an opportunity, at the end of the evening, to speak with one of the Forcados, I learned just how traditional these men are. They don't do this out of some sort of displaced sociopathic need for adrenaline. They each choose to participate in this sport because it is in their blood, it is part of their heritage and is the tradition of their country. No matter that they are a full ocean and the length of the United States away from their home country, the desire to face the bulls for some seemed as necessary as the need to breathe air.

To say that the horses were brave is to state the obvious. To see Lusitanos doing what they have been bred to do for so many generations, was so far better than my imagination had ever led me to believe! They whirled and snorted and flagged their tails in the faces of the bulls. They danced and flew through they sky like a taunting Pegasus. The tiny hairs on my arms and the back of my neck were tingling at the sight of so much grace and athletic ability. Iberian horses truly are the horses of Royalty and little girl's dreams come true!

Oh, and yes, I did discover that I love Portuguese food!

We just don't have enough space in this magazine to share all the wonderful things we saw that night. If you would like to read more about this marvelous event, please see the full story on my web site at:  
[www.theandalusian.com](http://www.theandalusian.com)

We would like to extend our greatest thanks to Marc, Raul & Jose Cardoso as well as Candido Costa. More information can be found at their web site:  
[www.ranchcardoso.biz](http://www.ranchcardoso.biz)

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