



ACHAIUS RANCH NEWS

“The Ranch Saved My Life!”

by Elisha McCulloh

All I knew about Grace (not her real name) when she first came to the ranch was that she had been labeled an “at risk” youth. It wasn’t until later that I learned what she was truly struggling with beneath her sparkling exterior. I liked her right away. It’s sort of impossible not to. Her self- confident, friendly nature draws people in. Good eye contact, firm handshake, great smile. She seems genuinely glad to meet you.

Perhaps even more than people, Grace clearly loves animals. She enthusiastically asks questions about horsemanship, lavishing affection on each horse, dog, cat, and even chickens. She pours herself into every aspect of the ranch from chores to riding, showing delightful creativity and playfulness. She spends as much time here as possible and like many who come here, I’m sure she would move right in if that was an option.

Parents, teachers and mentors have sometimes told me that an at-risk or “difficult” child that they bring for sessions behaves very differently here than in most, if not all, other settings. They see parts of the child that surprise and delight them, and this is always interesting to hear. I wonder if they are somehow able to feel closest to their true selves here? I’ve read books and articles that explain what I’ve learned

through experience: horses have a unique way of interacting with people, an ability to bring healing, personal growth, positive change. And just spending time in nature, combined with the welcoming, safe, loving environment we work hard to maintain at the ranch: these things are perhaps some of the ingredients that allow people to be their true selves here. I do hope so anyway; we don’t often know, since we only see most of them in this context.

I didn’t know much about how Grace expressed herself away from the ranch. But eventually I learned that the Grace I came to know here was not the person she had become



in her everyday life. However, my experience of her turned out to be the true Grace after all.

Over time and in her own way, Grace revealed layer upon layer of the trauma she had endured in her young life, as she struggled to make sense of and cope with it all. A broken family. The tragic death of a beloved family member. Financial hardship. Verbal and sexual abuse* she had suffered at the hands of others she should have been able to rely upon. Ensuing depression.

The things Grace had endured are sadly not uncommon. We know that many people that come here have hidden wounds and struggles, big and small.

In fact, because we live in a fallen world, every person has wounds and struggles. Most of the time we don't know specifics. Most of the time they don't talk about it. We never pry.

What we do together with the children in our youth program is focus primarily on horsemanship, which entails building relationships – with the horses, each other, with ourselves, and indirectly with God. We build leadership, personal empowerment, competence, self-confidence. It is an opportunity for growth: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. It's all happening as a by-product of time spent together with horses. Generally, session leaders only get a glimpse of the positive effects of this process, through a radiant smile, possibly an expression of thanks after a session, sometimes even a surprising comment like “this was the best day of my life!”

Grace, though, surprised me one day by saying, “The ranch saved my life!” When asked for clarification, she had a hard time putting into words just what she meant but clearly her statement was both literal and figurative. Most dramatically, coming here had pulled her out of a deep (potentially suicidal) depression*.

Grace is by nature a very confident person. Her undaunted courage and infectious outgoing nature in her early years prompted others to admire her and see her as a leader. But because she had not been taken seriously when she told a trusted adult about the abuse she suffered, she had lost her equilibrium. As

often happens to the victim, she experienced blame and shame, instead of much needed support. She came to doubt herself, lose her confidence, her exuberance, her joy. Her life had begun to unravel. At the ranch, however, she found unconditional love and was not made to feel “wrong,” despite any imperfections. She gained self-confidence through learning all kinds of skills, grew closer to her Creator through building relationships with his creatures (human and animal), and reveled in the sheer joy of time spent at the ranch.

When Grace said “the ranch saved my life,” she meant

that she had lost sight of herself and gone down a destructive path of darkness and despair, and found her way back because of her experiences at the ranch. She also freely acknowledged that it was actually God that had saved her life; he did it through Achaius Ranch. Deeply moved by her story and broken-hearted by her pain, I rejoice with her for the healing God is doing in her life! Her story continues to



unfold; please pray that God will continue his healing work.

It is such an honor and privilege to serve God's children in this ministry! And as I said to Grace (and truly meant it), even if she were the only person that God ever reached through this place, she would definitely be worth it all! Would God have sacrificed his only begotten son to save just one of his children? I can actually believe he would do that; his love for each and every one of us is that great. And my feelings for this one young person are a tiny reflection of that kind of love. Of course I hope and pray that all of our efforts here will have a positive impact on many, but even if it were just for one person, it would all be worth it. His Grace would be sufficient.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9.)

**We at the ranch are aware of and prepared to follow proper procedures for reporting suspected abuse of a minor, risk for suicide, etc. It was unnecessary to include any details of that aspect of this story.*

Family Events

We held two special family events this year: a Season Kickoff on May 9 and a Family Fun Night on August 12. For the first time ever, these events both included natural horsemanship demonstrations, which were very popular despite the pouring rain! We hope to host similar events in 2017, including demos by Tiffany Rowe and/or others. Be sure to watch for announcements on Facebook and on our website!

Horses

Eli and Faith, our two blind miniature horses, are clearly at peace in their new quarters. They are more comfortable now as well, after having their chronically sore, damaged eyes removed in March. Purdue University large animal hospital generously did these surgeries at half price, and in response to a special appeal, we received donations that covered the rest, including after-care! Thank you all so much for your kindness and support!



Session Leaders & Volunteers

In addition to our returning trio of session leaders (Alice, Emily and Jenny), we were delighted that Layla Weir joined our team this year. We were able to serve more youth by



having four sessions occur at a time instead of just two or three as in past years. The place was hopping!

The Boys & Girls Club, Wabash Valley Alliance, and Indiana Connections Academy were again able to bring groups, and with four session leaders, each child got a turn for one-on-one time with a horse. Volunteer Sarah Keese (along with daughter Esther) spent time

with the kids waiting their turns, introducing them to the ranch and horses and leading games at our Welcome Center/playground area. This worked out super well and we're so thankful for help from such wonderful, dedicated volunteers!

We also enjoyed help from a couple of junior volunteers (who have been session participants in previous years). These young people came to help out on a daily basis for a couple of weeks each. We have more and more session kids eagerly awaiting the day when they're old enough to apply to be junior volunteers (and eventually, adult volunteers)!

Wabash College and Youth as Resources each brought students to the ranch for work days. We love these groups of enthusiastic young helpers!



A Servant's Heart

Last year we wrote in our newsletter and blog post about how much our staff and youth program have benefitted from our dear friend and teacher, 3-Star Parelli Instructor, Tiffany Rowe. Perhaps you remember how we shared that “she is both professionally and personally committed to helping people succeed in ministries such as ours. She clearly has a heart for it, as well as the skills!” We also talked about her “servant’s heart.”

Well a lot of things have happened with Tiffany’s heart since we wrote those words. She has

graciously given us permission to share part of her journey.

Until August, we were completely unaware that Tiffany had been born with a hole in her heart, which

doctors have been monitoring her entire life. Furthermore, she suffers from an auto-immune disorder, which, unbeknownst to us, over the past year had been brutally attacking her body in general and her heart in particular, further damaging it. By the time she shared this struggle with us, she had been on complete rest, was constantly exhausted and in pain. Further tests revealed that she had a second hole in her heart and was actually suffering from congestive heart failure. She was waiting to hear from a surgeon about whether she



needed open heart surgery (with limited chance of significant improvement).

It’s hard to express our dismay at this news!

We understood that her condition was life-threatening and we could actually lose her at any moment. But losing Tiffany was unthinkable! Not just for us, of course, and not just for her many students, friends, and extended family. She and her husband, Herbie, have five young children. One has autism and depends a great deal on his mom to help him navigate the world as only she is able. Two are teen girls that Tiffany and Herbie raised for several years while enduring a roller-coaster of struggles, finally resulting in their adoption

this past spring. These kids need their mom. Herbie needs his wife. Lord, have mercy! We prayed. I do not know why and

how God chooses to step into time and space to immediately, miraculously heal some and not others. I do believe that miracles occur but generally, “big” miracles are things that seem distant and rare. (Side note: I’m learning that there are a lot more miracles happening in modern times than I had realized, as I read *The Insanity of God*, by Nik Ripken, which we heard about through Tiffany and Herbie. I definitely recommend this book!)

Anyway, a few days after sharing her devastating news, Tiffany called to tell me that she had just spoken with her heart surgeon. He was completely baffled, looking at her recent

cardio MRI. Despite all previous scans and tests, which clearly showed her damaged heart, this last test showed a completely healthy heart! Even the hole that had been present from birth was gone! There was no explanation for this, other than a miracle!

Tiffany still has an auto-immune disorder, which she must be vigilant to manage through a strict diet and lifestyle. God has not chosen to heal her of that at this point. But the damage done to her heart, that wonderful “servant’s heart” of hers, God has chosen to heal. His reasons are his own. Our response is to be extremely thankful! And beyond thankfulness, Tiffany’s response has been to take seriously the scripture verse: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required” (Luke 12:48, NASB). One specific way that she is taking action on that admonition is to focus her professional energy on a renewed commitment to support Achaius Ranch and similar ministries. She and her family believe that this kind of work is important and they show it through their actions. Supporting ministries is one of the many ways in which the Rowes – Tiffany’s entire family – generously give of themselves in service to others. What a testimony! We are blessed and very grateful for all they do for Achaius Ranch. We hope you will keep the Rowe family in your prayers.

Youth Program

This year, our youth program served more than 110 children and their families through individual and group sessions! With a fourth leader on staff, we were able to provide more sessions per child than ever before. Youth that came for multiple sessions averaged six per person, up from 3-4 in past years, and more youth (42) came for multiple sessions than in 2015 (29). Of course we don’t know what future seasons will hold, but we are thrilled to have been able to serve so many youth so far!



Property Improvements

In 2016, we added onto and improved our pole barn. We now have a small indoor arena, in which we can work and play with horses under shelter. No more session cancellations due to rain! This project also included additions of much-needed storage space and two large horse stalls. Currently we are housing two of our elderly retired horses in these comfy quarters. A generous \$17,000 grant from the Montgomery County Community Foundation helped to make this project possible. **Thank you, MCCF!**



We are also excited about the addition of a new barn and pasture for our miniature horses, Faith and Eli! In this picture, you can also see a new restroom for our guests!



Session Sponsorship Program

In order to continue serving so many people through our youth program, we need to bring more financial partners on board. The cost for our session leaders this year totaled nearly \$12,000.00. The Women's Legacy Fund (WLF) blessed us with a \$6,000 grant, but this is not something we can expect to continue receiving from them year after year. We hope not to have to scale back on our services due to lack of funding. Therefore we are seeking support through our Session Sponsorship Program.

In 2016 we provided 328 sessions. The cost worked out to be about \$36 per session. This includes training the session leader, paying them to lead the sessions, prep the horse, perform duties afterward, etc. (It does *not* include other costs to the ranch for our youth program, such as insurance, equipment, or horse care, which are significant.) We are working to decrease our costs (reducing the costs of training by rehiring experienced

session leaders and bringing leaders on board in future that are already trained and/or able to donate their time, etc.). We are asking for your help to donate and/or link us to potential donors. Maybe you, your employer, or someone you know would be interested in sponsoring a session, or one child for six sessions, etc. Perhaps you are part of a group of potential donors that you could arrange for us to come and speak with. Or maybe you have other helpful ideas we might consider for funding. Please let us know.

For complete info on how you or your business/organization can sponsor sessions, please visit achaiusranch.org.

Sponsor a Horse

For each horse at Achaius Ranch, it costs approximately \$150 per month to pay for food, farrier, vet, dentist, and other basic needs. (Miniatures cost around half as much.) We invite you to consider our sponsorship program to help with these costs. For complete info on how you can participate, and what you can gain from this program, please visit achaiusranch.org, or contact elisha@achaiusranch.org for details.

Other ways to help:

- ★ As always, in addition to (or instead of) participating in one of our sponsorship programs, general donations to the ranch are vital to this ministry and greatly appreciated! If you would like to help financially, please send a check, payable to Achaius Ranch, to 4592 E 750 S, Ladoga, IN 47954. You can also make one-time or repeating donations via PayPal. (See achaiusranch.org for details.)
- ★ If you are interested in being a part of the work we do at Achaius Ranch, please

check out the volunteer info on our website.

- ★ We hope you will keep the ranch in your prayers!
- ★ Please remember us when shopping on Amazon through their AmazonSmile program!



- ★ Buy our merchandise! We have mugs, tee shirts, hoodies and other items available in our Welcome Center. Please see our website or contact Elisha for details.



THE FOLLOWING QUOTES WERE GLEANED FROM A SURVEY CONDUCTED AT THE END OF THE 2016 SEASON AND REPRESENT THE ANONYMOUS THOUGHTS OF SESSION PARTICIPANTS, PARENTS, MENTORS, ETC.

“I am a mentor and my mentee absolutely loved the experience. We made some great memories and I saw her in a different light. She normally has problems with impulse control and behavior, but she was almost like a different person when working with the staff and horses.”



“Achaius Ranch has a powerful impact not only on the session children, but also on the horses and the staff. As one of the session leaders at the ranch, some of the most happy and empowering moments of my life are when I am able to help a child or horse heal and grow. I love seeing the joy on a child’s face and I have been told that a child had the best day of their life with me on multiple occasions. Achaius Ranch is a place where people are able to be natural and to find joy in the most wholesome way. All children should have this opportunity. Many don't have that at home or at school, Achaius is able to provide the Christ centered environment, where children can love, heal, and grow.”



“Taking time to focus on the needs of others helps me appreciate the world around me more, helps me relax, and helps build my own confidence. God comes to us in silence. Listening to the horses for feedback silences my mind to receive and working with others keeps me focused on the present.”



“Exercise and challenges are both given to us at Achaius. Physical activity, as well as a sense of accomplishment/competence improve physical and mental well-being. Being in the Christian environment at Achaius improves my spiritual well-being and makes me feel safe and comfortable opening up.”

“My daughter is so happy to be at the ranch, while she loves to ride she does not have to be riding to be happy. She can be mucking the stalls or brushing the ponies she just loves animals and the peace that she feels at the ranch.”



“The ranch has greatly impacted my daughter’s life, and I hope once my son is of age, he will be involved as well. The owners and workers put so much care and work in to the horses. Their passion comes through in helping with the young kids that benefit from it! I honestly can not say enough amazing things about the ranch, the people who work there, and the program. It has been a huge blessing in our lives!”

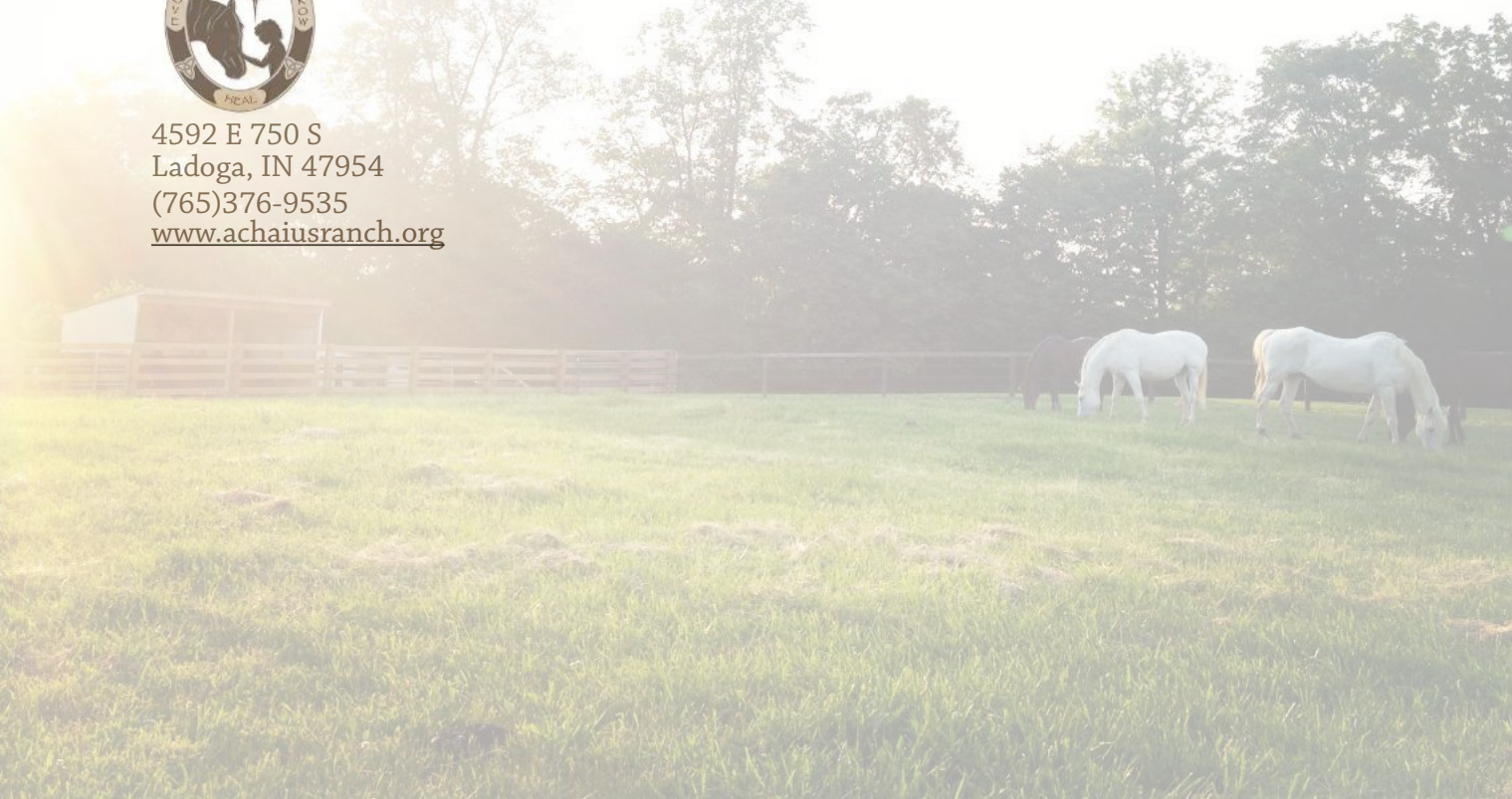


“Achaius Ranch was a wonderful resource this summer. I am a mentor to a student with severe behavioral issues, and I saw a completely different side to her. The one-on-one attention from staff and time with the horses really brought out the best in her. She was attentive, calm, respectful, and took control in a responsible way- all things that are normally very difficult for her on a day to day basis. When we first got there, she didn't even want to get out of the car because of her extreme anxiety. They waited for her patiently and when she did join the group they were so kind and let her work through everything at her own pace.”





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Achaius Ranch exists to nurture healing and growth through the interaction of people with horses in a Christ-centered environment.

Achaius Ranch is a 501(c)(3) corporation.



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