

"I believe Christ was born in a barn for a reason – in the company of nature we are immersed in the truth. Horses don't lie and neither do any of the animals in God's great kingdom. Thank God we have the horses to teach us how to listen."
Chris Irwin, "Dancing with Your Dark Horse"

Glory Trail

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Born in a Barn

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Waiting

Early morning at the ranch finds me sitting in front of the fire with a cup of coffee and my laptop reflecting on the past year at Returning Glory. With the activities at the ranch now generally limited to preparation for a winter filled with hungry horses and cats, frozen water tanks and cold mornings, 'tis the Season for reflection.

What a year of blessings and trials!!

Blessings in the form of many hearts being touched by the Love of the Father, with new friends being made with Woodland Elementary School in Lee's Summit, MO, the Orphan Justice Center of Grandview, MO, Crittenton Children's Home in Kansas City, MO and TLC of Olathe, Kansas. Blessings comprised of several young ladies being mentored by Roxanne as they seek to follow their hearts in areas related to spreading the love of Jesus via horse ministry. A tremendous blessing in the form of TJ, an extremely talented young man, filled with the Father's Heart, who is working, riding and training several of our horses. On-going blessings in the form of faithful "Pardners" and horse owners who volunteer and donate their time, talent and treasures in assisting and supporting Returning Glory as we serve others. A surprise blessing in the form of white horse named "Pi", a gentle giant who treats all riders alike, regardless of their size or abilities - a horse fit for a King.

Of course, the year was also filled with several challenges. The death of my grandmother in July provided a stark reminder of our human frailty and finiteness. The loss of a possible ministry connection with a local individual and family training seminar that went awry in the midst of significant issues related to the emotional and spiritual manipulation of hurting hearts. The loss of Gracie, our little red dun mare who touched so many hearts with her unconditional love, even in the midst of her own physical pain. An injured shoulder that seemed to take forever to heal. And lastly, an IRS audit that has conjured up all types of dark and sinister thoughts, including the future existence of Returning Glory.

In the midst of all these reflections, I find myself wondering how long will it be before Jesus returns to the earth and sets all things right. More importantly, I also find myself asking the Lord a big question – "Until You come, how do you want me to wait?"

As usual, the Lord has provided the answer to this question in several unique ways. Recollections of recent experiences at the ranch have given me some insight into this "waiting" thing. First and foremost, it will take patience and perseverance to wait. A young man with the TLC group gets the credit for teaching me this truth about waiting. Chad (not his real name) had selected Shiloh as the horse he wanted to work with – a nervous, somewhat insecure young man and a sensitive, always insecure horse – a real interesting combination indeed. To say that this relationship was challenging is an under-statement. At one point, because of Shiloh's lack of cooperation to Chad's requests during an "in hand" leading exercise, Chad abruptly walked out of the arena – he just quit. No explanations or reasons were given – Chad had just reached a point of frustration with the whole horse relationship thing. Frankly, I did not expect him back the following week, but to my great surprise and joy, Chad returned with the rest of the group. Discussion and counseling with the TLC staff over the past week had apparently convinced him to try again – with Shiloh. As the leading exercise was started – you guessed it – Shiloh did not cooperate. Chad's lack of confidence translated to an unwilling and confused horse and re-created the exact situation that had caused Chad to quit the previous week. However, instead of quitting, Chad took a deep breath and asked me to help him move Shiloh forward. Chad had learned an invaluable truth - that his "world" was filled with people and tools to help him get through some challenging issues and that building a relationship with his horse takes time and work. As the weeks progressed, the team of Chad and Shiloh improved, although there was always a hint of tension and insecurity in the air. During the last session, Chad wanted to ride Shiloh in saddle while being lead. Of course, that particular evening was windy and stormy, causing a somewhat sensitive horse to be even more sensitive as wind and rain created a "scary" environment in the arena. Even as Chad saddled Shiloh in preparation for their ride, Shiloh was animated and nervous, with this condition continuing all the way to the mounting steps. At that point, Chad was also quite concerned and was visibly shaking as he stood on the mounting block preparing to get into the saddle. Roxanne suggested to Chad that rather than ride Shiloh, he could choose a calmer horse for his ride. With a deep breath and a look of resolve, Chad calmly said ... "No, I'll stick with Shiloh".

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What a God moment!! I could barely remain standing in the presence of the Truth being realized and spoken by this young man – he was not a quitter-he was an over-comer. With that single statement, Chad got into the saddle, took a deep breath, and rode a horse for the first time in his seventeen-year life – and he and Shiloh did great!! After the ride was over, and a group sharing time was underway, we asked Chad what helped him succeed with Shiloh. With a cautious smile, he calmly responded that it was patience and perseverance, along with the help of experienced people, that allowed him to get through the challenging times with Shiloh. In fact, he proudly proclaimed that he was going back to high school because of this newfound confidence. Truth always trumps the lies of the enemy.

We had waited, prayed and wondered for nearly six weeks if Chad would be successful with Shiloh. We joyfully watched Chad overcome his fears and apprehensions by working with Shiloh, and it was patience and perseverance that ultimately provided the answer. And so it is with me, I must wait for the Lord to do His work, and ultimately His return, with patience and perseverance. Hebrews 12:1 encourages me to run with perseverance the race marked out for me. I must wait by believing all of God's promises even as Chad believed everything that I and the other Pardners suggested to him that would help him in his relationship with Shiloh. I must worship as I wait, even as we prayerfully waited with great anticipation to see God provide a way for Chad to be successful with Shiloh. I must be always joyful as I wait, even in the mist of challenges and obstacles, realizing and believing the Truth that the God of the universe delights in me and enjoys who I am – just as Chad was joyful as he rode Shiloh and saw a way through a previous life of frustration and disappointment.

Just as the world waited with anticipation for the birth of the Messiah, we now wait for the return of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Christmas carol "O Come, O Come Immanuel" is a song all about waiting – waiting for the Son of God to appear and save his people, to bind up broken hearts, and establish true peace and fellowship in the world. The song speaks to asking and waiting for wisdom from on High to teach us how to live in this world, to comfort us, and to turn our darkness into light. Isaiah 30:18 provides great encouragement because "...the Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him!" Titus 2:11-13 also gives me great hope as I wait – "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled lives in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!"

In the Christmas season of 2010, Roxanne and I invite you to joyfully wait for Him –

O Come, O Come Immanuel.

On His Trail ~

Gary and Roxanne Van Riessen

Mr. Buddy -

It was my "Thursday" session in the round pen with MrBuddy and Roxanne was working with me on techniques to continue building my relationship with this horse, with the eventual goal of him wanting to come to me. At the end of the hour we had accomplished some of the steps. Roxanne then asked me if I was "successful". Always feeling like these are trick questions, I was hesitant in answering. I thought for a moment, "well, he didn't come in to me but he did some of the things we worked on". She sent me home with homework, "before you come back next week, meditate on your definition of "success".

Next week arrived, with my thoughts on the meaning of "success" I went to the pasture to halter MrBuddy. Back in the round pen, Roxanne told me that today I would be working with MrBuddy alone while she observed from the viewing area. It is always a bit unnerving for me to have someone watch and critique my actions but I followed her instruction and trusted that God was leading. What happens when you leave a performance driven person alone with a performance driven horse? Well, that is where God wrote in the dirt and made Himself very real to me.

Roxanne had told me to "just spend time" with MrBuddy and do what I thought would help MrBuddy want to come in. Well, give this girl a playbook of rules and I'm going to follow them to the "T". But with no rules? Now what do I do? Reflecting back on my "Thursday" instruction, I began to initiate those actions, which were met with Roxanne asking me why I was choosing to do what I was doing (2 or 3 times). This set me on a course of frustration because I didn't understand what she wanted me to do (no rules!). Meanwhile MrBuddy is just running in circles like a robot. I threw up my white flag and stopped what I was doing. Roxanne met me in the dirt, we closed our eyes and prayed, reflecting on instances in my life that triggered this performance driven mentality. Not realizing the whole time I was standing surrendered in prayer, my submitted posture drew MrBuddy to me. I looked up, with MrBuddy's eyes looking right into mine. Not ever, at any point, in anything that I had tried to do in my own strength, could I draw MrBuddy to me. But now, there he was, eye-to-eye, in a very relaxed non-threatened posture, ears and tail relaxed and all 4 hooves squared up. I stood there in amazement as a tear rolled down my cheek. I quietly asked Roxanne, "what does he want me to do?" "Don't you understand, Julie, that's just it, he doesn't want you to do anything. God doesn't want you to do anything. When you took the pressure off of MrBuddy and yourself to perform that's when he/He met you!"

I tried to absorb as much of the peace as I could in that moment that was emanating off of both of our surrendered spirits and capture it in my mind and my heart. Even now I reflect on it when I lose my peace and try to operate in my own strength. The moment doesn't end there... I began to ramble on about the "stuff" going on in my life. Roxanne stopped me and asked me to look at where Mr. Buddy was. He had backed away and started running in circles again. He felt my performance tension again. Desperately wanting that peaceful "God" moment back, I tried to surrender and draw him back in, he came only half way back to me this time. In my times of struggle since that special "God" moment, I catch myself in my frustration and try to surrender my will and draw to God, because I know, in that moment, God will draw to me.

God met me that day in a very dramatic way. Feeling completely unthreatened, I looked deep into MrBuddy's waiting brown eyes and gazed upon the throne of God, experiencing my Father's peace and unconditional love - without works, without performance. A moment I'll not ever forget!

With much love and gratitude for the servant's hearts of Gary and Roxanne and "the herd" of Returning Glory,

~ Julie Schlobohm



RETURNING GLORY and JACK

From the very beginning, our son Jack has overcome a lot of odds, it was not a normal pregnancy by any means and he was born just over two months prematurely. Despite the resulting developmental delays, he has amazing gifts and Returning Glory has helped him strengthen those gifts.

Jack has a special affinity for the outdoors as well as tractors, landscaping and construction. He has a one track mind and he finds it difficult to focus on anything that does not involve the above. When he was in 5th grade, one of his teachers's referred him to Returning Glory as he was having some difficulty in school. From the very first day, Jack became just beside himself with joy. He loved everything about the ranch, especially the tractors! Gary and Roxanne worked with Jack as he chose a horse (he being the smallest child, he chose the largest horse), Pi and thus began a beautiful relationship. Jack was soon able to gain confidence as he was learning how to communicate with Pi. Jack also blossomed



under Gary's gentle coaching. Jack was able to receive continued instruction at the beginning of 6th grade and he is looking forward to riding lessons.

Jack cannot tell me how Pi has helped him with his math or his frustration levels (which we have noticed a difference).

But he can say that Pi has helped him with his music/drums. Jack says that through "posting", he is able to listen to Pi's rhythm and he can apply that to his music, listening for and matching the rhythm. Most of all, Jack will tell you that he feels at home at Returning Glory and "loves it there". He told me that he is "very thankful" that his teacher referred him as he can't imagine being without it. We are very thankful for Returning Glory as well and we look forward to them continuing to be an important part of Jack's life.