



True Freedom *By Jenifer Heath and Jinger Stene*

CRASH! The skittish, little bay filly slammed through the top rail of the pathetic wooden fence, landing in an unfenced pasture, in one last ditch effort to avoid being caught. Now how were we ever going to capture her?

This past week we were invited to take a few volunteers with us to gather a couple of horses that needed to be re-homed. We could not have predicted the work we had cut out for us. When

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

—John 8:38

we arrived, we looked out over a band of fillies running wild in a large pasture and contemplated how we would catch a couple of them and coax

them into the borrowed stock trailer we had. We were told that it was no use bringing halters or lead ropes because these horses were not broken, and the only way to get them into the trailer would be to separate them from the herd into a smaller catching pen. The plan was to back the trailer up to the gate and gently pressure them from behind, encouraging them to load onto the trailer. It sounded so easy, but deep inside I knew that we were in for a challenge.



With my stomach in knots, I said a little prayer asking for God's hand of protection over all of us.

While we had originally chosen to take the beautiful bay filly home with us, we began to question our judgment as we worked feverishly, struggling to maneuver as quickly as possible through 6 inches of crusty snow, attempting to lure her back into the catching pen before she ran into oncoming highway traffic. An hour later, lathered in sweat and utterly exhausted, she jumped the fence once again but this time back into the familiarity and safety of the herd. We decided she wasn't the one we should bring home. Thus we began the process of catching yet another uncatchable horse all over again. Once we had secured two less skittish, scruffy three-year-old chestnut fillies in the catching pen, we needed to convince these mares that the best scenario for them was to come with us. We knew that the horse trailer meant safety, security, love and nurturing. They, however, saw the trailer as a big, scary unknown, and stepping foot inside of it was the furthest thing from their minds.

Several hours later, we finally arrived home with the horses, safe and sound, all of us needing a good rest. They unloaded without incident and to our surprise settled down very quickly into their individual stalls, clearly enjoying the solace of not having to compete for hay or water. We decided to name the fillies Jubilee and Liberty. Jubilee means "a celebration." And, Liberty, of course, means "freedom."

True Freedom - continued



Liberty
Photo Credit: Holly Graffunder

Later that evening I found myself making the comparison of how much we are like these untamed horses. Earlier in the day when we looked over the group of mares, we noticed that many of them were pregnant due to indiscriminate breeding. Some had parasites and lice while others had injuries that had been left untreated. Suddenly it dawned on me that this is a depiction of us before we give our lives to Christ. Luke 19:10 says, "The Son of man has come to seek and to save the lost." We are lost, running around with no purpose, wanting to be in charge, and not even realizing that we have wounds that need bandaging. Whether or not we realize it, God is everything that we need. Romans 8:5 says, "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires." This is a **false freedom** that leads to death. Romans 8:6 goes on to say, "but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." These horses needed to be broken.

According to Dictionary.com, freedom can be defined as: The state of not being imprisoned or enslaved. We tend to think of freedom as the ability to do or say or behave however we want, but in fact, that ultimately leads to slavery. Because we all have a sinful nature, we have the tendency toward sin. That means that when left to our own desires, we tend to speak and act in ways that do not honor God but rather satisfy ourselves. In so doing, we end up hurting others, hurting ourselves, and ultimately creating a self-made prison cell. For example, I am "free" to eat whatever I choose. However, I do not typically crave and desire what is good for me. If I exercise absolute "freedom" and eat whatever I want, such as unlimited pasta, homemade bread, cookies, and pour an abundance of salt on everything, I will soon become a slave to my decisions. I will find myself overweight and unhealthy which will increase my risk for life-threatening illnesses such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. In addition, my energy level will decrease, and I'll eventually realize that "freedom" has caused me physical limitations that I did not have when I was "bound" to a healthy eating plan. In the long run, these decisions will not only affect myself but also my children and those that care about me. You see, the bottom line is that **true freedom** comes with boundaries and limitations, a breaking of our will.

I've heard people say that they don't want to become a Christian or turn their life over to God because Christianity has rules which will not allow them to live however they want (their perception of freedom), but in fact the opposite is true. According to Proverbs 14:12, "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death." God in His amazing, loving sovereignty knew how we could experience **true freedom**, and that's by choosing to live a life that brings Him glory. When we live according to His laws and follow His path, we avoid the pitfalls that ultimately enslave us and bring destruction to our lives and the lives of those around us.

When it's all said and done, our desire is for Jubilee and Liberty to experience **true freedom**... not the kind of freedom where they do whatever they want and are subsequently a danger to others, but the kind of freedom where they learn to respect, trust, and obey a loving leader. When this occurs, they will be able to build lasting and fulfilling relationships with people and have the opportunity to live out the purpose for which God created them.

The other horses at Haven Acres are already enjoying **true freedom**. Though they aren't allowed to run free and do whatever they want, they have the privilege of being groomed, loved on, and ridden. In addition, they receive impeccable medical care to ensure that they stay as healthy as possible. However, this all comes at a cost of letting someone else take control of their lives. Similarly, when we give up control of our destiny to God, we get to drink His living water, experience His peace that passes understanding, and enjoy eternal life with Him. Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." The choice is yours today. Will you submit your will to God and choose **true freedom**?

Musings of a Mentor *By Heidi Forsberg*



Photo Credit: Holly Graffunder

I fondly refer to the summer of 2017 as my “down, but not out summer,” my “well, that wasn’t how I expected things to go” season. I started my second year at the ranch willing and ready to mentor, but life threw other plans my way. I missed the first few weeks of sessions. I felt that I had failed, not just the Heaths, but also the girls I was supposed to mentor. Nevertheless, God knew there was a perfect moment for me to return to Haven Acres, and the perfect time it truly was. The day I came back was the day I met one of the newest members of the equine family, a horse lovingly referred to as Opie Dope; a racehorse that had been “counted out.”

As the weeks went on, I watched a horse be loved back to life by a very patient, very excited girl named Sasha. Sasha handled him with such grace, even when the racehorse in him was bucking to get out. She graciously handled him, praised him, and reminded him what a good boy he was, all the while reassuring him, “It’s all going to be ok.” She redefined his purpose.

I couldn’t help but feel like Opie and I were kindred hearts. I felt “counted out.” I had life knock me down, and the setbacks were causing me to refocus and reevaluate. There were many days that others didn’t know the struggle

and the pain I was in both mentally and physically, but it was as if Opie knew. He would nuzzle his big nose into the side of my face as if to say, “It’s all going to be ok.”

That summer, I saw the ranch and it’s mission of “healing hearts and homes through horses and the love of Jesus” come full circle. Sasha’s confidence blossomed, her smile radiated, lighting up the day. A horse found purpose, which seemed to add a new pep in his step. And I watched the Lord place me back at just the right time, with just the right girl, and just the right horse that at crucial moments made me realize it really is “all going to be ok.” Sasha was the push that Opie needed to see how great life could be. And for me, who knew the push would be a brown, stubborn, very large horse named Opie. I guess it’s true what they say, “the Lord does work in mysterious ways!”

A Parent’s Perspective *By Tina Graffunder*

When our son first started attending Haven Acres, he was leery of getting on a horse and riding. He didn’t so much fear getting on the horse; he feared getting on the horse and not doing things right. As a young man who was adopted, he has a deep sense of abandonment, and he often feels like a failure. He doesn’t want to do anything if he can’t do it perfectly.

Through the ongoing commitment of his mentor, he eventually felt safe enough to take a risk and ride Ruby. He could trust his mentor, and he learned he didn’t have to do everything perfectly. He had to take baby steps, but his mentor was patient and kept encouraging him until he felt safe. Our son’s mentor has been there for him on days when he didn’t want to listen to us. He has been an anchor for him on days when the storms of life were pulling him under.

It’s a blessing to have other stable, godly adults in our children’s lives to pour into them and love on them. Haven Acres has been a blessing to our family in a time marked with a lot of turmoil. For that we will be forever grateful.



Photo Credit: Jenifer Heath

Registration and Volunteering

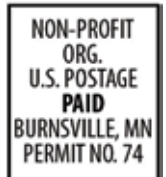
Registration for summer programming opens April 2nd! The first 50 families to call in after 9 am will reserve a spot in the summer mentorship program for their child(ren). To learn more about registration, and to fill out an application, please visit us at: <http://havenacresmn.org/registration/>.

Volunteers needed! A variety of different positions need to be filled, from photography to mentoring. We need volunteers from diverse ages, backgrounds, and abilities. Horse experience is not required. For more info and applications, visit: <http://havenacresmn.org/get-involved/>.



Haven Acres

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Looking for Sponsors!



Meet Jubilee and Liberty! This January, Haven Acres rescued two chestnut Quarter Horse/Arabian cross fillies. Nearly three and a half years old, they have never been handled before. They both have lice, worms, and have never had any hoof care. Jubilee has a teeny white star on her forehead and has the calmer personality of the two. Liberty has a white stripe down her face and has a more "sensitive" personality. We are working with them, and while they are still fearful, they are making great strides!

We are looking for people to sponsor these two special fillies!

A monthly horse sponsorship covers the horses' feed and medical costs as well as offering them a secure, peaceful, and loving family. Please consider joining us on this venture with our two newest members of the herd! For more info, visit: <http://havenacresmn.org/donate/>.