



A Place of Healing By Juliann Felter

For as long as I can remember, I have suffered from extreme anxiety. My anxiety and other phobias made it hard to go to school and engage in social situations. Living with anxiety is **mentally, physically, and spiritually exhausting**. My mind was constantly filled with anxious thoughts and worries. Sleeping became my coping mechanism because it was the only way that my mind would quiet down and I could feel relief from the anxious thoughts.

To make matters worse, when I was 13, I was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa. I was constantly consumed with thoughts about my weight, appearance, exercise, and the caloric content of food. Throughout middle and high school, and two years of college, I was in and out of hospitals and treatment facilities. Looking back now, I wish I could have told my younger self that my **value and worth** did not depend on the number on the scale.

During my senior year in high school, I learned of Haven Acres and its work with young people that struggle with these types of issues. I have always had a love for horses, so I was excited to give it a try. Before my first session, I was extremely anxious, but by the end I could notice a decrease in my overall levels of anxiety. **Haven Acres became my safe space** where I could forget about all my worries at home. Haven Acres also became my motivation to follow my meal-plan. In order to ride each week, I had to maintain my weight by eating three meals and three snacks a day.



Haven Acres

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“You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.” – Isaiah 38:16b-17

The horse that I was paired with was Noah. Working with Noah **gave me confidence** and assertiveness. When I would talk to him, my worries would go away, and I felt no judgement. Grooming him and completing my assigned chores gave me a sense of purpose, taught me responsibility, and I learned how to take care of something other than myself. In addition to the connection I had with my horse, I also **made a connection** with my mentor, Katy. Each week we would talk about life, and I could feel the support and care from someone other than my parents or my therapist. We also had spiritual conversations about God working in my life, and we would discuss any prayer requests I had for the next week. After leaving Haven Acres each week I could feel the **Holy Spirit present in me**. Through Him, I felt at peace and knew that I was never alone.

When winter came and I turned 18, I was sad because I knew that I wouldn't be able to be in the program anymore. But I had a feeling, maybe a divine intervention, that if I would volunteer in any capacity at Haven Acres, **I would be fulfilled**. The following summer, I volunteered as a maverick. Even though I wasn't riding a horse every week, I still experienced a decrease in my anxiety when I would step foot on the property. I used my knowledge about horses and the skills that I had learned to help the mentors.

The next summer I branched out of my comfort zone and volunteered as a mentor. I also participated in the Spiritual Training and Biblical Leadership Enhancement (STABLE) program. One of the greatest outcomes of the STABLE program for me was spiritual growth. Through the STABLE program, I was able to learn how to spread the love of Christ and share the message of God's salvation with young kids. I also learned how to be more assertive. I practiced being assertive with the horses by making sure that they were doing what I wanted them to do, a skill I was able to apply to real life situations. It has **helped me stand up** for my point of view and express my feelings in a more effective way at school and work.

For the past two summers I have served as a mentor, and I have seen and experienced how God uses **Haven Acres as a sanctuary for healing**. Animals that are sick or undesirable find healing and shelter in a loving home at Haven Acres. Children who struggle with mental illness or physical disabilities experience happiness, joy, and supportive relationships through their participation in the mentorship program.

• Even though it's been 4 years since my arrival to Haven Acres, I still feel the same sense of tranquility each time I drive onto the property. Through my time at Haven Acres, I have created life-long friendships. Currently when encountering challenging times, these friendships continue to support me and give me the encouragement to continue to **lean on my faith**. My faith in God allows me to trust that He has my future all planned out for me. When anxious thoughts start to overcome my mind, I take a deep breath and know that **with God there is nothing that I cannot handle**. When the messages from my eating disorder become loud, I can remind myself that in God's eyes I am **fearfully and wonderfully made**.

God continues to work through Haven Acres to heal the broken, give confidence to the meek, spread the good news of salvation, and create loving relationships. Hopefully **my story will help others** find hope in the midst of their own challenges and difficulties.

