



The Giant of Fear

by Jenifer Heath

Jessica came to Haven Acres in 2016, a very anxious and fearful 9 year old. Though she had the privilege of growing up in a wonderful, healthy, middle class family, **she was facing a giant** she could not seem to conquer... **FEAR!** She was afraid in group settings, anxious whenever she was presented with an unexpected change from her normal routine, and so paralyzed by the fear that it was keeping her from participating in every day fun activities like birthday parties and dance lessons. In fact, her mother reported that attending school had become an enormous challenge for Jessica. She spent much of her time in the counselor's office, afraid to go to class. According to the school counselor, out of 900 students, Jessica was one of four that dealt with this intense level of anxiety. Already seeing a child psychologist, taking medication to manage the debilitating illness, and experiencing the support of amazing family and friends, she just couldn't seem to make any real progress.

Jessica was referred to Haven Acres by her Uncle Terry, a faithful volunteer at the ranch. He was convinced that the **one-on-one mentorship program** could be beneficial in helping his niece move toward breakthrough.

I'll never forget Jessica's first day attending sessions at Haven Acres. She timidly walked up the driveway, holding tightly to her mother. Her Uncle Terry had arrived early and would help to facilitate introductions. I was assigned to be Jessica's mentor, and we were scheduled to work with a horse named Ruby. I had casually mentioned to Terry prior to



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“... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” – Romans 8:37

Jessica's arrival that since it was the first day of sessions and I was the Program Director, I would need to have a brief meeting with the parents to go over the handbook. That meant that Jessica could either stay with me for that boring meeting or she could go with my 14 year old daughter, Ashton, and begin working on her chore of cleaning the chicken coop. I noticed Terry tense up immediately. He shook his head as he looked at the ground. "I'm afraid that won't work," he said. "You see, we have been prepping her for weeks that she will have you as her mentor and Ruby as her horse. **She just cannot adapt to an unexpected change** of plans like that. She may just shut down."

A few minutes later, after meeting Jessica and her mother, I gave her the options, and Mom and Uncle Terry stood with eyes wide and jaws dropping as Jessica skipped off, smile on her face to clean the chicken coop with Ashton. That was the beginning of an amazing transformation that has taken place over the last 3 years.

The following year, Jessica started riding a little pony at Haven Acres named Trixie. Trixie had trust issues of her own to deal with since she had endured deplorable conditions and neglect for much of her life, leaving her blind in her left eye. As she and Jessica began working together, a relationship of love and trust blossomed into something beautiful. As much as she loved Trixie, every day at the ranch was a day for Jessica to face a new challenge or fear. Walking through the paddock of horses to get Trixie for her session, Jessica would often times become fearful and start to withdraw, frightened by the other horses, scared that she'd be stepped on or run over in the process. When it came time to ride, many times she would say, "I'm afraid to ride today." I would gently coax her, saying, "**I know you're afraid, but we can do this together, and you'll be so proud that you didn't let your fear control you.**" Each week, as she faced her fears at the ranch, she gained confidence that enabled her to succeed in other areas of her life.

I gave Jessica a magnetic picture of she and Trixie inscribed with the following Bible verse. "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**" Phil. 4:13 She hung that photo in her locker at school, a constant reminder that her strength and courage came from the Lord. Many days Jessica could be found wearing a Haven Acres t-shirt or sweatshirt to school to give her additional courage to face the day. She took the confidence she gained at Haven Acres everywhere she went.

One day, she was with family at the cabin, and she was fearful to jump off the dock into the lake. Everyone else was laughing and enjoying their time splashing and swimming around, but Jessica was paralyzed with fear once again in spite of really desiring to join the others. So, she summoned every ounce of tenacity she had, shouted, "**This one is for Trixie!**" and took the plunge into the lake.

In fourth grade, she took her new-found strength one giant step further. This once timid and fearful young lady who struggled to attend just an average day in the classroom, met with the principal of her school and asked to run a fundraiser for Haven Acres. For two years in a row, Jessica has been permitted to organize a pajama day at her elementary school and has raised nearly \$900 for Haven Acres, demonstrating more courage than most young people her age.

We are so very thankful for Jessica, thankful that she was willing to take the first step to come to Haven Acres, and **amazed by what God has done in her life** since her arrival at the ranch. We're blessed to have even a small part in her story of overcoming a giant that many people never conquer.

