



# Just For Me

Written by a wonderful parent  
of a Haven Acres participant

Summers are both a wonderful and stressful time for moms. I love having my kids home, but then...my kids are home and with each other all day. Fights and squabbles break out endlessly each day, leaving me frantically **searching for fun activities** and outlets to help keep them occupied while I work from home.

Summer camps, vacations, and sports lessons can fill that time and all sound great if you have the income for it. But as a single mom, there isn't much money for "fun." This summer, though, was different. This time when my son, Carter, asked, "What will we do this summer?" I didn't have to swallow down disappointment, knowing there wouldn't be funds for much extra. This time, I was able to tell him words that **changed his entire summer**: "You're going to take horseback riding lessons!"

Let me back up a bit and tell you about Carter. Carter isn't just an ordinary 11-year-old boy. If you were to meet him, you would say that he is kind, mature, smart, and quiet. What you wouldn't see is that the last several years have been really rough for him. Parents divorcing, multiple moves, and a critically ill younger sister have made him quiet and watchful. It also resulted in him **feeling anxious and angry**, knowing that at any time, the bottom could fall out of his world. While I know heartache is a part of life, I grieved the loss of Carter's happiness and carefree innocence. I was also well-aware that he was forced to watch his sister receive endless attention from...everyone... as we navigated her illness. Gifts arrived in the mail for months from well-meaning friends and family, all addressed to my daughter. At school and church, people would come up to Carter, asking how his sister was doing, but they would often forget to ask how he was doing. My heart ached for him. I wished that he could have **something special**, something that was just his.

And this is where Haven Acres came in. When I heard about Haven Acres, I jumped at the chance to apply. I filled out the application, hoping that this would be the **answer to my prayers**.

When I got the email that Carter had been selected, I wept with joy. The moment we stepped out of the car the first week, my son's shoulders relaxed as he took in the **peaceful ranch**, placid horses, chickens, and even goats.

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**“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up;  
Do you not perceive it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness.  
I will create rivers in the desert.”** – Isaiah 43:19

He got to meet his mentor, who immediately put him at ease. When he and his mentor came around the corner after that first lesson, Carter settled into the car, and I saw something I had not seen in weeks.... His eyes were full of joy, and he was smiling.

“Mom,” he whispered to me that night, “did you know that **every horse at Haven Acres has a story?** They have all had hard stuff they have had to deal with.” His eyes shone as he sighed, “just like me.”

It wasn't just the horses that Carter was excited about. He very quickly clicked with his mentor, who taught him **skills beyond horsemanship**. Lucas was quick to praise and boost his abilities, and consequently, Carter started blossoming.

Each week, I eagerly looked forward to the moment the group would ride their **horses in the front arena** so I could watch my son's face beam as he learned skills on his horse. As soon as we started the drive home, he would tell me everything he had learned and experienced.

*“Mom, Lucas says I'm a natural on the horse!”*

*“Did you know that one of the horses is kind of nervous? Just like me!”*

*“I talked to one of the other kids at the table. She was really nice.”*

*“My horse is so awesome. I just know he likes me.”*

*“I'm the first one who learned how to saddle my horse! Lucas said I did it perfectly.”*

*“Mom, the lesson today talked about how God can use our brokenness.”*

Little by little, he lost the quiet, anxious shell and once again laughed like a carefree kid. He counted the days down until his next lesson and often said, “**Haven Acres is a place that is just for me.**” And it was true. This time, all eyes were on him, and he had a place where he was more than just his sister's big brother, and he could just be himself.

The summer flew, and by the end of it, the change in Carter was remarkable. He was self-assured, relaxed, and talkative. He was happy and joyful again. Instead of dreading and fearing his upcoming first year of middle school, **he was confidently excited.**

When Haven Acres gave our family the gift of a scholarship, they gave Carter skills that go far beyond a summer of horseback riding lessons. He walked away with confidence and hope that one day, maybe he, like the horses, could help someone else who is having a hard time. And as for me, I got the ultimate gift: **I got my son back.**



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