

LORI'S FEAR

By: Brett Graves

It was the beginning of another “group” day at the ranch. Although a bit on the warm side, God had given us a beautiful sun shiny day. As with a typical day at the ranch, the day had begun by feeding and otherwise tending to the horses and doing the various and asundry chores associated with operating the facility. Just tending to the gardening and flower beds on the property can take up some hours in a morning, and, on “group” day, it’s become customary to have all the chores completed prior to the group’s arrival – mainly because this summer we have tried to streamline the program so that not as many volunteers are required on those days. You will find more on that subject in a later newsletter.

On “group” day we invite program directors from area youth organizations to bring up to six youth to the ranch to spend time riding, doing crafts and just enjoying a day of country life. This year our group visitors have enjoyed a one-on-one experience in the crafts area as well as in the riding arena. Our “one-on-one” experiences have been a tremendous blessing not only to the visitors, but to our volunteers, as well. Some days are extraordinary in the sense that not only do we experience blessings from an individual stand point, but on a “God’s family” level, as well. Today would be one of those days.

Our group for this day came from Big Brothers Big Sisters. Since it is at least a thirty minute drive to the ranch for most of our visitor groups, the level of excitement and anticipation grows during their trip. By the time they reach us, that level has grown to a near fever pitch so that when the vehicle doors open, I liken it to more of an explosion of activity as the youth tumble out. This day was no different with exception of one young girl. We’ll call her Lori for this story.

Like the others, Lori’s eyes danced and her smile was wide as she made her way to the greeting table, but there was a reservation about her. After introductions all around, she made it plain to me that although she was excited to ride a horse for the first time, she was “a little scared” at the same time. I assured her that it was okay to be apprehensive and that I had a horse picked out just for her.

“Just for me?” she asked in wonderment, as her eyes became as big as saucers and her smile the size of a dinner plate!

“Just for you!” I reassured her.

For the next several minutes, and throughout the day, she told whoever was in earshot “Mr. Brett has a horse picked out just for me!”

After the group was shown around and had received the ranch safety talk, they were split into two groups. For the morning session, one group would ride horses and the other would spend time doing crafts/games. After lunch they would switch activities. Lori jumped on the chance to do crafts/games – I believe she was working on her courage.

Due to the nature of the horse riding sessions, we try to keep the arena area clear so that only the visitors riding at their allotted time and their ride leaders are the only people the horses come in contact with. We have a rule that others can come only as close as a picnic table that has been set up some distance from the arena. This is the area where the sponsors generally hang out and observe. We like to have a volunteer assigned specifically to this area who can answer any questions the sponsors may have and for “visitor intervention” incase one tries to wiggle through the invisible “no go zone.” That volunteer is usually in

charge of photography and other minor responsibilities. This season, Ivy assumed the role. She was fantastic and found lots of “Kodak” moments for us all to enjoy and made friends of the sponsors, as well.

That day, Ivy would be challenged! Lori finished her craft in record time and made her way out of the crafts area to the picnic table. From there she began shouting words of encouragement to all the riders! And, such words they were! “Great job”, “that horse really likes you”, “you look really good up there”, “I’m so proud of you” were just some of her enlightening expressions. The next thing we knew, she was at the arena wall – as each rider passed by her, words of encouragement and compliments just flowed out non-stop! Thankfully it was very near the end of the first group’s ride, so Ivy gently led her back to the table so that the riders could leave the arena.

During lunch Lori’s apprehension showed through as her questions kept coming at me. With each question I assured her that I would be with her every step of the way. She then began to compliment me, Ivy, the volunteers and the ranch in general. She told us how much she was enjoying her time with us, the lunch that had been prepared, and the craft she had completed. What a blessing to hear her words of encouragement!

I try to be in constant connection with God throughout the times I spend with the youth. That day I was asking him what it was that I was supposed to provide this child and would I recognize it when the time came? I certainly didn’t want to let Him down. I know that it could be something as simple as a word of encouragement, a hug or even a smile that will show a child that someone is listening and cares. Lori was different, though, I couldn’t help but wonder what God’s leading would be for her.

After lunch we split into our groups again, with Lori following close to me. As I covered horse safety and directions her eager ear hung onto every word. As I told each youth which horse had been assigned to them, Lori gave a little squeal when she learned she would be riding Jenny. Jenny was donated to us over a year ago, but made her debut this riding season. She’s a sweet Quarter/Icelandic Pony mix whose gentle demeanor is perfect for a beginner. I allowed Lori to help me lead Jenny from the field to the arena. We saddled her, with Lori talking soothingly to her the entire time. She was letting Jenny know that if she would take care of her, Lori would let her have the reign and that she would love on her as much as she could. She was clearly nervous about riding!

The time came to lead Jenny into the arena. She pulled alongside the steps that we have built that provides for a safer and easier mount. At first Lori stood at the bottom of the stairs, not moving. I told her she could come on up the stairs and get into position to mount. She took the first step & froze! Again I encouraged her to get into position. She took the next step & just stood there! What on earth was I going to do? I imagined her toes curled over the step holding her feet firm, preventing her from going any further. And then, in a small, frantic voice I heard “Mr. Brett, please come stand beside me!” I told her that I was holding onto Jenny and couldn’t come to her side right at that moment, but there were two volunteers standing on either side of her. All she had to do was reach out and take their hands. After more encouragement from me and the volunteers, she stepped up to the top and prepared to mount. By this time, Lori was in tears. Jenny had never experienced this much commotion, but to my surprise and amazement, patiently stood firm. Did I mention that during the course of the morning, the day had grown warmer, so that by this time the temperature was in the nineties? Lori’s weeping was mixed with perspiration. Perspiration that wasn’t all from the heat of the day – I realized that she was petrified! So, the fear factor had also set in!

I continuously reassured her that she had made a huge accomplishment by getting to the top step and if she felt the need, she could turn around and come back down the steps. But Lori was determined and so our

encouragement to mount continued. And then she threw her leg about half way over the saddle. Once, twice, repeatedly she would begin to throw her leg over the saddle only to abort the move. Finally, she gave one last try and with a giant sigh of relief from the volunteers holding onto her hands, she sat down. As I moved into position to help plant her feet into the stirrups, I noticed that the blood had drained from the volunteer's hands from Lori gripping them so hard. As I passed in front of Jenny, her huge brown eyes seemed to be saying "Don't worry, I have it under control!"

Okay, we were ready, so with much trepidation and Lori still weeping, I prepared to move forward – with her still clinging desperately to the volunteer's hands!

"Please Lord, give us all courage" I silently prayed. I took a deep breath, took a step and Jenny followed. The volunteers and I kept encouraging Lori with each orchestrated step we took. Moving as one unit, Lori slowly swayed from side to side as we advanced forward. After perhaps fifteen steps Lori called out "I'm riding, I'm riding! Take my picture so I can get off now!" Her tears had stopped and Ivy snapped her picture capturing her with a huge smile.

We circled around and lead Jenny back to the side of the steps. I can say it took only a fraction of the time for Lori to dismount as it took for her to mount! Lori had hugs for all of us and kept thanking us for letting her ride our horse. "Did you see me, I rode a horse!" She had seen victory – she had conquered her fear!

I had been so focused on Lori that I hadn't noticed that the rest of the youth and volunteers were crowded up to the arena wall – clapping, cheering and jumping up and down! They were all returning the love and encouragement that Lori had been giving all of us that day! As I looked around, I thought "Lord, this is awesome! This is the way our walk with You should be. Always willing to face our fears knowing that You are there to help hold us up as You lead us in your will.

How many times do we get so busy doing that we can't say for sure what God is saying to us. This day was a reminder that it's not about me, but rather it's about following the direction God has for me. I was reminded that we have to be constantly lifting each other up. This whole day I was waiting and looking for something that I was supposed to do apart from the others, when all He wanted from me was to join the others in cheering this little girl on. And in that, we were all blessed. God is so good!

1 Follow God's example in everything you do, because you are His dear children. 2 live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave Himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to Him.

Ephesians 5:1-2 Tyndale