

GRINS, GRIT & GRACE

Stories From Stable Days Youth Ranch

THIS LONELY RANCH

By Ben Lester

As the sun ducks below the treelined horizon, I dig my hands deeper into my coat pockets to ward off the evening chill. The trees dropped their foliage weeks ago and now all that remain are the barren branches protruding into the sky in all sorts of shapes and sizes, many appearing like the time-ravaged fingers of a delicate old lady, frail and imposing at the same time.

I have always loved the cold weather and welcome the onset of winter with a sense of joy and anticipation. With it come the festivities of the holidays and the many activities that keep things humming around the Ranch, and though I'm no kid, my heart feels especially warm with thoughts of celebrating the Christmas Season with our family and friends.

But this year is different. A lone white Honda SUV sits in the parking area usually occupied with a dozen or more vehicles.

The sheep and donkeys meander their way around the quiet confines of their corral, an area typically buzzing with kids doting on Ms. Penelope the one-eared sheep, asking how she ended up missing an ear. And our equine staff lazily munch on the final sprouts and clumps of grass before the snow covers the somber pastures, where in former years visitors to the Ranch would busily travel back and forth, haltering Henry for some groundwork in the arena or ushering Roxie back to the pasture after a ride. It's very quiet, and as my eyes scan the landscape, it feels lonely here.

I've heard it said by friends and colleagues, in quiet conversation and in bewilderment, that there has never been a time like this before. Yes, it's true that in my lifetime we've never encountered anything quite as insidious as COVID-19. People have tried frantically to hold on to as much of what is 'normal' as possible. We are creatures of routine, and routine is what helps us feel balanced and productive. But we don't

have that option right now, and we need to be aware of how it's impacting us. We need to be aware of how the children are being impacted.

Pulling up to the Buffalo Field gate (named after our dear friends who serve the Ranch all the way from Buffalo, NY) I place the Ranger in park and shut it off. It's totally dark now and the only light is emanating from the giant white orb in



Psalms 25:16 -

Turn to me and be gracious to me, For I am lonely and afflicted.

the Eastern sky of this late-October evening. I yank a bale of hay from the back of the UTV and cut the twine holding the grassy mix together, causing it to explode across the ground in front of the eager horses.

I realize that the horses don't care about the Presidential race, or what's happening in Portland, or the impact of recent tariffs imposed on imported steel. They're hungry and they're quick to let me know that I can keep the hay coming, thank you very much.

Looking at the geldings chomping away, I think about the fact that here at Stable Days our visitor's often express their appreciation for horses being able to listen and not judge. During our regular summer seasons, it's common for us to catch a glimpse of a mentor and kiddo sitting in the middle of a pasture just conversing with the herd. Then...

A sudden burst of laughter breaks the silence as Chief rips a 'big one', sending the duo into hysterical giggles.

One on one. It's a formula we implemented back in 2011 and it works. The time that our mentors get to spend with children



building true friendships based on trust, understanding, and Love is the building block that God seems to use most effectively to help us minister to our guests.

The second bale is served up, the orange twine is gathered, I secure the gate latch and give it an extra tug for good measure as I toss the twine in the bed of the Ranger to head back to barn.

It's getting colder. I lift my collar around my neck to keep the chilled air from piercing through me as I guide the UTV into it's parking spot in the hay barn.

I begin to think of Andrew, a 12 -year-old boy who has been coming to the Ranch since he was 7. I wonder how he's handling the changes happening around him. I grow concerned that he may not be processing this real well, and I realize that my brow is furled and I'm crying. I'm stopped in my tracks as a deep ache emerges from my core.

I realize, for the first time in months, that I am mourning the loss of fellowship, of laughter, of answering questions like, "Why does horse poop look like brown snowballs?"

The pandemic altered our programing from 5 to 3 days a week and from 85 kiddos to only 15 that we are able to serve. Our volunteer groups and field trips have all been canceled.

The kids and families that come to the Ranch are a gift. I am hopeful that soon, very soon, we can welcome them again, many for the first time, others for the ump-teenth' time. Then and only then will this Ranch be able to shed the loneliness and become what it is made for – a place of 'grins, grit, and grace' for them to enjoy.



HORSE SPONSORSHIPS

To sponsor Henry, our fall featured horse, or one of the other SDYR horses go to our website at <https://www.stabledays.org/join-the-herd.html> or mail your support to 17721 429th Avenue SW, East Grand Forks, MN 56721

CLOUDY PASS

By Caryl Lester

“No roads lead to Holden,” I know this to be true, I have been their many times. For as long as I can remember I’ve dreamt of someday trekking the Pacific Crest Trail to complete the pilgrimage on foot but all my arrivals to date, have begun with hours of dark overnight driving, a magical morning ferry ride meandering 16 miles up the enchanting Lake Chelan and sometimes, at least as I remember, a near death 11 mile climb in a questionable semi-retired school bus up the famous (or infamous) Wenatchee Forest Switchbacks.

The journey to Holden is always an adventure but the feeling upon arriving is difficult to put down in words. It’s a sense that goes beyond the surface to a personal place of discovery, an inward thrill of anticipation, an awakening of passion, and a deepening of the rhythms you feel at your very core.

Growing up is hard. So many people, both young and old, come from very pressing places. Places that for some had a rampant lack of kindness, few friends and even fewer encouraging words. Places of neglect, hurt, abusive and degrees of pain. Age has little to offer when one is longing for even a half a mad second of peace. A time to feel encouraged, loved, balanced and free.

“Everyone deserves a brave space, filled with love, kindness and support, to be who they are intended to be!”

I’ve heard these words and words like these many times. I have pondered this thought and soaked in its meaning allowing my thoughts to be driven by a warm and rising curiosity. What could be? What has been lost? What can I do? What is my role...my work? What do I owe and how can I serve those who could be influenced, or encouraged by me? How do I love those I don’t easily find love for?

For what now seems like only a moment there was a time when Chalet One was my house, and the village was my home. This was where I discovered my “brave space” where I learned to learn. Where I found the courage to explore. Where I ventured off, lost my way, found myself, where I failed, and where I had the strength to try again.



HOLDEN VILLAGE

CHELAN WASHINGTON

“A PLACE SET APART”

With a whole village at my side, I learned to pray and seek the face of God as I saw His divine nature reflected through the wild and raw wilderness. I pursued His love for me as I wandered paths that led me to waterfalls, meadows, lakes, mountain passes and scree fields.

The calm, the strength and the balance of God’s grace became my story, His new mercies became my every morning.

I could know God! And all that was required of me was to believe. And so I did! I am one He counts as precious, one of His dear ones that He will never overlook or misplace.

ROMANS 12:9A-10 -

Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them... Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

Many of my most cherished memories and most of my favorite childhood things were found during the times I spent at Holden. Two of them are Cloudy Pass.

Weighed down by 30 pounds of gear but feeling free as bird, my friends and I left the village behind. Passing the old miners ball field, the trail head sits just beyond the clearing. Here is where the forest thickens and during each hike without fail, here is where I would remember my deep need for trees.

Hours into the hike, the forest starts to thin; we skirt the waterfalls as we pass into the scree fields that drop us into the Hart Lake basin. Counting waterfalls as we pass, I unconsciously tip forward to find my point of balance. We stop for a brief break, some water and homemade granola. The goal is to overnight at the pass, so we push on towards Lyman Lake. The difficulty of the hike intensifies as the trail steps up towards the daunting incline. The landscape changes from forest to scrub and back again giving us all emotional breaks from the breathtaking views.

Looking through the expansive meadows we catch a glimpse of Middle Ridge. Just as the sun begins to set, we walk the last steps to Cloudy Pass, our base camp. We all hold our breath for a moment, in awe and wonder. The beauty and the wildness of this place will always speak to me, humble me. Leaning in to hear God's story, standing witness as the earth in all its glory gives recognition to the Creator. Tears of joy are shared in this moment of inspiration overcome by His loud whisper.

Moments later my pack is thrown, my tent is up, my boots unlaced, the fire started; it is time for tea!

Cloudy Pass is the perfect combination of mint, orange peel, and chamomile. This has been my favorite blend for as long as I can remember. Breathing in the delightful aroma I love to ponder the strange truth that tea somehow encourages reflections and the forming of big dreams.

In the village, as a student enrolled in Holden High, along with my seven classmates, I spent my days between the library, the dining hall, the wood shop, the pottery shop, the "Hike Haus" and the quaintest, straight-from-the-nineteen-twenties bowling alley. Always so much to do and so much to



**YOU CAN NEVER GET A CUP OF LEA LARGE ENOUGH
OR A BOOK LONG ENOUGH TO SUIT ME.**

-C.S. LEWIS



JOHN MUIR -

“Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity.”



learn. My place, my favorite spot, was fireside in the Koinonia Lodge. It was considered the heart of the Holden Village Learning Center.

Most of the village guests would hang out in there reading, weaving (Inkle looms were very popular that year!) visiting, and waiting to share their passions and experiences with anyone interested in listening. I met the most amazing folks. Authors, artists, researchers, lecturers. Some were there to teach in a more formal manner, others were on sabbatical but teaching was who they were and they just couldn't help themselves.

These are some of the people whom shaped my way of thinking and taught me to value the remarkable interconnectedness that comes with living in community.

I was growing up. But I believe I became me in the quiet times. When the lodge was still you could find me wearing one of my many favorite sweaters and sporting the warmest of wool socks. Shoes off and feet up with a hand-thrown pottery mug filled to the brim with Cloudy Pass tea, deeply engrossed in a copy of Wendell Berry's *Unsettling of America*, Josh McDowell's *More than a Carpenter* or CS Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*. The ideas I adopted from these readings are still ones that continue to define me.

It was not long before our time at Holden came to an end. With sad goodbyes and promises of letters and future visits we loaded up our gear and what seemed like a lifetime of memories and headed home. Down the switchbacks, down the lake, back in the car and back to our home.

Each time I journey back to Holden whether in person or in my mind, I am reminded of my unusual schooling and the

somewhat-odd personal baselines it created. I have been so blessed and I have such a deep heart felt sense of gratitude to have lived in a place where unkind criticisms, careless words and judgmental glances were rare, and truth, love, attention, kindness, empathy and support were plentiful. A place where brave spaces could be found.

God chose to use the forest and a small group of villagers to shape me, sharpen me, inspired me, and in recent years compelled me to awaken all that I discovered at Holden and apply it here, to the 60 acres I now call home.

It has been a great privilege to be able to share our home as the base camp for Stable Days. For the past 10 years, through thousands of one-on-one sessions and hundreds of field trips, we have been purposeful in helping the kiddos that visit our ranch find their brave spaces. Walking the trails, riding the horses, or floating downstream we are looking for inspiration and giving them room to connect, a place to contemplate what they hope for and the courage to dream not just big, but grand ideas for their future!

Stable Days, like Holden, is "A Place Set Apart". A place where kiddos, their families, ranch volunteers, and our mentors can all lean into our personal potentials, be stirred, challenged, tested, measured, or simply be found. A place where calm covers chaos, grace covers criticism, prayers can be spoken, hurts can be healed, laughter can be heard, and the adventure that is life can be explored.

If you're not already a part of Stable Days, we'd love to meet you, serve you or perhaps serve along side of you. The journey is brighter and the burdens are lighter when we walk it together.

GETTING INVOLVED- The youth mentoring programs at Stable Days are free of charge, allowing families to participate without financial concern. But while our program is free our costs are high. If you would like to join the team through giving please use the enclosed form or visit our website at www.stabledays.org

A HORSE AND HIS GIRL

By Hannah Dewey



Henry is a darling (horse) boy. And he takes care of a darling, but fiery, young girl. Some days, Henry is out in his pasture, hanging out with his horse homies when all of a sudden, a familiar burst of pinkish blonde hair and clothes too fancy for a ranch appear at the fence line. That is when Henry knows it's time to go to work.

Sometimes she tells him about an awful thing she had to endure that day: unwanted meals, cold air, waking up before she was ready, or jeans with seams. Sometimes she stares off into space with wet eyes and just pets his neck over and over.

Sometimes his girl is swearing; unpleasant but it's part of the job and Henry never repeats those words anyways.

You see, Henry's darling girl has autism. She also has lost some people who she loved very much. Sometimes her feelings get so big that the medicine doesn't help, the swing and fidgets don't help, the police don't help, and not even mom can help, so she gets loaded up in the car and brought out to the ranch so Henry can do his work.

Henry has almost magically smooth hair. And a hug sized neck. And ENORMOUS listening ears. And a good booty for shaking around when prancing and dancing are in order to cheer his girl up. He always meets her where she can get a burst of fresh air and a birds' eye view of the sky.

She likes to take Henry up to the arena sometimes for a quick groom, usually a few treats, and a whirl around the riding arena. With a mentor friend like Elizabeth's or Kayla's oversight, Henry makes a great partner in games like around the world or ring toss. Games sometimes makes his girl go from growls to giggles.

Henry does great work, and his girl is a healthier, happier darling after their sweet visits. Not all kids like Henry's girl get to have a horse, and boy oh boy is she glad to have him. She doesn't like feeling out of control and getting out to the ranch dirt feels more grounding than anything else she can do when she's upset.

Henry has a girl, and his girl has a horse, and God knew just what He was doing when He paired them up.



AUTHOR UNKNOWN-

SHE SILENTLY STEPPED OUT OF THE RACE THAT SHE NEVER WANTED TO BE IN,
FOUND HER OWN LANE AND PROCEEDED TO WIN.

MEET HENRY



Registered name: Zips County Star | **Breed:** Appaloosa
Gender: Gelding | **Color:** Liver, chestnut roan
DOB: 2003 | **Height:** 15.3 hands.

As the biggest softy on the ranch, Henry can be a bit on the sensitive side.

Henry, like his best friend Chief moved to the ranch in the spring on 2019 after being retired from the University of Minnesota's equine program.

He's a fun one to look at from his huge size to his amazing coat of many colors and one of his best attributes in his cute droopy lower lip that wags as he walks. Henry is a sensitive soul who tunes in deeply to his riders, leaving him open minded and quick to listen but easily offended if not ridden politely.

Henry loves attention and is especially drawn to the littlest of riders who appear even smaller than normal standing next to his huge frame. He has an impressive list of riders that all call him their special horse, and he gives them each the love and attention they need.

In his day he was a great jumper but now at SDYR he is living the life as a semi-retired but still very active 4-legged coach and counselor providing much needed love and respite to the Stable Days kiddos she serves.

To sponsor Henry go to <https://www.stabledays.org/join-the-herd.html>

Yes! I would like to give to Stable Days Youth Ranch .

Please use my donation for:

- Where it is needed most
 Youth mentoring sessions
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 The Share Garden

Payment method:

A check payable to Stable Days Youth Ranch or SDYR for \$_____

Send donations to: Stable Days, 17721 429th Ave SW, East Grand Forks, MN 56721

You can also make your donation at www.stabledays.org

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Send a gift acknowledgement (receipt) to:

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Monty Roberts-

"You must somehow understand that we as horsemen can do very little to teach the horse. What we can do is to create an environment in which he can learn."



17721 429th Avenue So. West
East Grand Forks, MN 56721
(701) 330-9952
www.stabledays.org



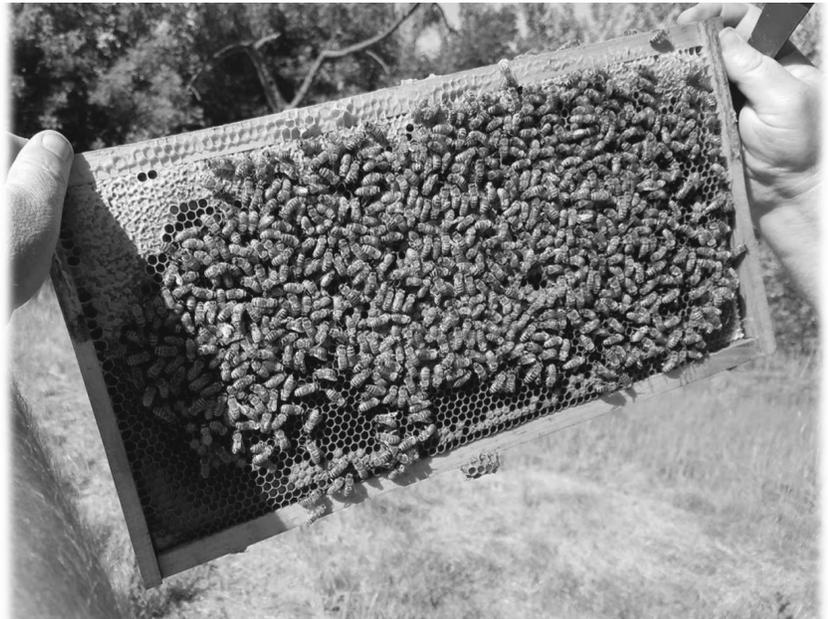
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\$8.00 for 1/2 pint

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Stable Days offers an inclusive program that allows ALL KIDS, ages 5 - 17, including those who are healthy, those considered disadvantaged or disabled, or those who are labeled at-risk to experience the many benefits of adventure and equine based mentoring. If you are interested in learning more about Stable Days contact us or visit our website at www.stabledays.org.

We would love the opportunity to serve you!

www.stabledays.org | info@stabledays.org | 701-330-9952



sdyr STABLE DAYS YOUTH RANCH

This pandemic that we all are facing has brought challenges to Stable Days in many ways including financial. We have many basic needs going into this winter, hay, feed, medications, funds for heat and water and more. It is our hope that you would consider sharing your love and support with us as we work to ensure this ranch is always open for any child, despite their circumstances. Giving them a place to come and find healing, new confidences and a sure hope for their future!

Tax Deductible gifts can be mailed to:

**Stable Days Youth Ranch
17721 429th Avenue SW
East Grand Forks, MN
56721**

Or online gifts can be

Grins, Grit, and Grace!

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