

My Ogden Blessing

Every year at this time, Ogden, Utah becomes host to therapists and horse professionals from all over the world who come together to share knowledge and the latest goings on in the field of equine assisted psychotherapy at the invitation of the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association. Having been a member of the association since 2000, I always look forward to seeing old friends and talking about our work. But one thing has never changed – people everywhere recognize that when someone dies, children and adult family members often need a little help getting through the tough years that follow, and they believe that horses can help with the healing process.

Ideas about just how horses can help therapists come in many shapes and sizes. Some people take a very metaphysical approach to human interaction with horses and see them as possessing virtually supernatural powers. Others see them as animals that tend to bring out latent human qualities that become easier for us to see when we interact with them. Some people seem to just come to the conference to pass judgment on the horsemanship practices of others. But all in all, the air was filled with enthusiasm about how we can all do our work better when we include horses in it.

Over the past few years, Horses Healing Grief has been at the center of my equine assisted therapy discussions when I attend the conference. People share their stories of how they use the activities in their practices, ask questions about things I have done in the past, and generally try to learn how to work more effectively with the bereaved. Others just stop by to share a story from their own grief journeys, hoping to find a compassionate, understanding ear. I treasure those times most, knowing that healing is taking place right then and there.

But this year, I was given a very timely blessing from a woman whose face and name I don't even remember. She purchased the book one evening and began to read before she went to bed. She could hardly contain her excitement the next day as she made her way back to my exhibit table. I listened for what great new revelations had dawned on her about how children grieve, how she will be adjusting her approach to therapy to include acknowledging and supporting grief in a better way, or that the book had been a new source of motivation. But that is not what I heard. Instead, I heard her say that she had been brought to tears when she read my tribute to my parents. She had been touched by how I described my parents' influence on my life and work.

What I noticed about her accolade was that she really didn't know what kind of leader or follower or worker I had become. Rather, she sensed something of the kind of son I seemed to be as she read my words. I don't know any other way to describe that conversation except to say that she returned a blessing to me.

My parents blessed me with whatever gifts they could muster from their simple lives. I once thought they wanted me to achieve high and mighty things, but by the end of their lives, I realized that they only hoped for me to know love, health, peace, and integrity in my life, and hoped that my life would touch the lives of others. We may have been poor when it comes to money, but in the blessing department, we were quite wealthy.

March is a special memory month for me, and March 19 is a special day. On that day, I uttered "Happy birthday, Mom." It was the anniversary of the beginning of my mother's life, and on that day, I remembered how important her life was, and is.

My parents began to shape me into the man I have become. They fed my love of horses that took me to Ogden, Utah, and modeled the kind of caring and helping that would be the envy of

the people assembled there. In my book, all I tried to say when acknowledging my parents was that I was blessed to have had them, and one woman's tears proved to me that it shows. As you remember your loved ones who have died, count the blessings that come back to you because of them. And thank them. Thanks, Mom.