



The Roundup



OFFICERS

President: Marjorie Porter Secretary: Jenny Powers
Vice President: Terry Stecyk Treasurer: Judy Riley

DIRECTORS

Lori Bridwell Carmela Lizzo
Mike Oster Mo Wachman

To contact the board email info@rvha.us

Editor: Lisa Goettsche

Mission Statement: The Rio Verde Horsemen's Association is dedicated to protecting all horse properties, large and small facilities alike, and preserving horse privileges along with our rural lifestyle. The Association is committed to uniting our horse community in working toward these goals. Membership is open to all, horse owners and non-horse owners alike, who support our purpose. We are not a Homeowners Association; we do not restrict, regulate or police.



President's Message

by Marjorie Porter

Spring is nearly upon us and with it comes fresh spring wildflowers, fresh air and beautiful sunshine. Your RVHA Board of Directors is busy developing fresh ideas and new events to offer our members. We invited you to provide us with suggestions and recommendations for future social and educational events. Some of you took the time to submit excellent ideas. We are still interested in your input. Please send your suggestions to marjorie@rvha.us.

In the first few months of the new year your board has also accomplished among other things the following: the bylaws committee consisting of RVHA members Barbara Elliott and Marlene Kinsella drafted revisions to the bylaws which will be presented shortly to the membership; planned upcoming activities including a dinner/dance and yard sale; conducted two roadside cleanups one of which was sponsored by real estate agent and member Bonnie Burke and the other by Scottsdale Livestock; made donations to some of our local charities; re-established the Area Awareness Committee; and inserted the 2016 year-end financial report on the website. Other projects are in the works and we will keep you advised of their progress.

Once again I want to thank the members of the Board of Directors for their continuing hard work and dedication to this fine organization. The association can be assured that the board will continue to work diligently on your behalf.

Membership

by Mo Wachman

Here we are in 2017 with two months already ticked off the calendar. Today our membership is at 428 members. Since December we have added 30 NEW members to our count. Our **Lifetime** membership total is 35.

With membership, other than receiving and reading all our interesting and worthwhile emails, there's usually a discount to attend our social events and those special classes we offer. This would include classes like the snake-avoidance training we're arranging right now. Plus, members can get free hay delivery from Karsten's Ace Hardware with a minimum order of \$350 and your RVHA membership card.

A BIG welcome to the following people who have become members since our last newsletter.

Tom & Ann Anderson
Chad Andrews & Pristine Summer
Anna Barab
Lynne & Arthur Borof
Laura Heinstein

Bruce Reek
Jennifer & Paul Tobie
Bruce & Cindy Vahjen
Martin & Kathi Vidal
Charley & Sherry Winter

Remember to let us know of any changes to your mailing address and your email address.



Table of Contents

President's Message	Page 1
Membership	Page 1
Congratulations to Terry & Jenny	Page 2
Area Awareness Committee	Page 2
A Note from the Treasurer	Page 3
What Goes Up Must Come Down	Page 3
Keep Wildlife Wild	Page 6
Horses Help Kids at Camp Kangaroo	Page 7
Dogtor T, the Pet Vet	Page 8
Toxins	Page 8
Poisoning of an Owl	Page 9
The Gift of Friends & Community	Page 10
Having a Horse in Your Life	Page 10

Congratulations!!!



Congratulations to Jenny Powers and Terry Stecyk, your RVHA Secretary and Vice President. Both will be recognized at an upcoming dinner for their contributions to the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy as stewards in our neighboring Preserve. Jenny has not only logged in many patrol hours in the Preserve but has recruited and mentored 4 new equestrian stewards. Terry has logged in a milestone of 1,000 hours over her years as a steward as well as mentoring new equestrian stewards.

The Conservancy needs you! Do you hike, mountain bike or ride in the Preserve? Please consider becoming a steward and log in those hours. Each hour you volunteer helps the Conservancy continue to keep those trails in great condition as well as provide educational programs for the young and more mature of us.

Preserve stewards recorded a total of 58,749 hours for the 2016 calendar year. Currently there are 180 miles of trails to patrol with more trails coming soon. Not interested in patrolling trails? How about using your time and talents in research studies or assisting in the nature guide programs? Rather than use your time as a Walmart greeter in your retirement years, you can serve as a trailhead host sharing information about the Preserve. Share your IT skills or help maintain trails damaged by heavy rain and erosion. The possibilities are endless!

For more information, call 480-998-7971 or visit www.mcdowellsonoran.org/



RVHA Board Announces Area Awareness Committee

Responses to our Members Survey included strong interest for more information on local issues and potential developments.

Accordingly, your board authorized in January formation of the new Area Awareness Committee. This committee will seek to be informed about activities that may result in changes that could impact us.

Our areas of interest will be:

Within the Rio Verde Foothills Area

Examples include: water issues, roads, utilities, aircraft

Public Lands/Open Spaces surrounding us

Examples include: Tonto National Forest, McDowell Sonoran Preserve

Peripheral/Private/Public Developments

Examples include: Trilogy, Scottsdale National Golf Club, Desert Discovery Center

Are you interested in getting more involved with the work of RVHA? This is your chance!

Please consider joining us on the committee by being our source of information on one or more issues. The board members have already signed-on to be responsible for some of the larger items, and we now welcome the support of others who would like to be involved.

If this sounds like something you would be interested in, please contact either:

Marjorie Porter, President—marjorie@rvha.us

Mike Oster, Area Awareness Committee Chairman—mcoaster@desertinet.com

A Note from the Treasurer: Judy Riley

I am pleased to announce that the RVHA will be making charitable donations to the local charities listed below. We were able to generate these charitable contributions from our silent auctions at our dinner dances and advertising revenues. The Board of Directors are gratified that our association can make such a positive contribution to our community.

Selected Charities:

Verde Cares, Inc
Arizona Equine Rescue
Reigning Grace Ranch
Southwest Wildlife Conservation & Rehabilitation Center
McDowell Sonoran Conservancy
Four Peaks Animal Rescue
Foothills Food Bank



What Goes Up, Must Come Down

by Terry Stecyk

Many people see inflated balloons as a safe decoration or use them to mark the turn for a party or open house. Some use massive balloon releases to celebrate the memory of a beloved friend or family member, perhaps even to celebrate a wedding or an anniversary. Those big, fancy Mylar balloons often are sent with messages of love and birthday greetings. Despite the innocence and beauty of these balloons, once they come back down to the ground or get hung up in a tree, they can have unintended dangerous consequences for birds and other wildlife.

Balloons that make their way back to earth or water pose a risk to wildlife due to their probability of becoming ingested due to their shiny, attractive color. The bird or animal can choke or starve to death because the balloon is not digestible. Their ribbons and tassels form the perfect trap for animals to become entangled.

Perhaps consider an alternative such as blowing soap bubbles or releasing trained doves into the air. Use streamers to decorate or make tissue pom-poms. If you must use balloons, please dispose of them safely. Pop or cut them to completely deflate the balloon, cut off the strings and tuck everything within a trash bag or trash container.



Save the Date RVHA Garage Sale

When: Saturday, April 22nd
Time: 9 AM to Noon
Where: Rural Metro Fire Station
located at 16309 E. Rio Verde Drive
Cost: \$10 for Members - \$15 for Non-members
Set up: 8 AM to 9 AM

To reserve a space, contact at Carmelalizzo@gmail.com

PLEASE NOTE: You will need to provide your own tables.

Hope to see you all there -- lots of treasures to be found.

HAPPY EARTH DAY!



APRIL 22nd

WELCOME SPRING DINNER DANCE



DATE: Saturday, March 18, 2017
PLACE: Rural Metro Fire Station
ADDRESS: 16309 E. Rio Verde Drive
TIME: 6:00pm until 9:00pm
ADMISSION: Members: \$20 Guests: \$25
MUSIC BY: "Down Home Arizona"



MENU

Chips & Salsa
Fresh Veggies w/dip
Caesar Salad
Tamales
Tacos
Chimichangas
Rice
Beans
Dessert

Bring your dancin' boots

RVHA WILL SUPPLY, SODAS, WATER AND ICE.

* *BYOB (Bring your own bottle)*

To pay online go to: <http://rvha-az.com/calendar.htm>

**** **RSVP Required by EVERYONE******

To RSVP and/or any questions, contact

Carmela at Carmela@camelbackadventures.com 480.227.0568

or Marjorie Porter at Marjorie@rvha.us 480.471.3051



FOUR PEAKS ANIMAL RESCUE



BENEFITTING ALL THE CRITTERS AT THE RESCUE WAITING FOR THEIR FOREVER HOMES.

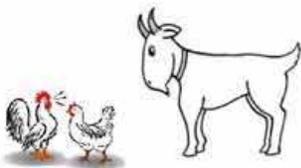
When: Friday March 24th and Sat March 25th

Time: 7 am- 1 pm

Where: 4051 E Dynamite Blvd. Cave Creek

We NEED VOLUNTEERS to help set up and sell.

We also NEED YOUR STUFF. If you have a “treasure” for us, please bring to the rescue or call 480-471-3520.



“Help us, help them!”



Keep Wildlife Wild **Ten Reasons Why You Shouldn't Feed the Wildlife**

by Carmela Lizzo

- 1. Providing an artificial food source causes adults to produce large families, which the natural food supply can't support.** Overpopulation can lead to starvation and epidemics of disease, some of which are dangerous to humans. Feeding will artificially concentrate wildlife, increase animal-to-animal contact and further spread disease and parasites from species to species.



- 2. Animals have specialized diets and can die from the wrong foods.** If a baby animal receives the wrong diet, even for a day or two, it can permanently damage developing bone and muscle. The wrong food can cause disease, mouth injuries, throat obstructions and death.



- 3. It is illegal to feed wildlife.** In 2006, Maricopa County passed a "no feeding wildlife law," with the exception of birds and squirrels. There are several cases of residents being cited, in particular, a woman who was feeding dog food to javelinas. Nine of them were euthanized because they became habituated and aggressive.

- 4. Feeding causes wild animals to lose their natural fear of humans.** Tamed wild animals can become an easy target, or the bold advances of a tamed wild animal can be misinterpreted as an "attack." Wildlife needs to depend on their own ability to find and utilize their own food source.

- 5. Feeding changes behavior, often with catastrophic results.** Feeding can cause death by preventing a species from migrating. It can also cause harmful interaction between species that usually don't compete for food.

- 6. You risk injury when you do not keep a respectful distance from wild animals.** Wildlife can misinterpret your actions. They may not know where the food stops and your fingers begin. Once again, animals lose when people complain of being bitten or "attacked."

- 7. Feeding small wild animals can have unintended consequences, such as attracting rodents or larger predators.** There are also certain animals that should never be fed because they can become a nuisance or even a threat to human safety, such as bears, bobcats, coyotes and javelinas. These animals, when fed, become comfortable with humans and may become aggressive. If this happens, the animal must be removed at a substantial expense and with dire consequences for the animal. Aggressive animals are often killed or relocated, and relocation results in low survival rates. You can do these animals a favor by going out of your way to make them uncomfortable. If they keep their natural fear of people, they are less likely to become a nuisance, and live a longer life.

- 8. Feeding wildlife puts your neighbors, their pets and their livestock at risk.** Wildlife does not understand fences or boundaries.

- 9. Providing food in residential areas (with the exception of birdseed feeders) often leads to property damage and unwelcome "houseguests."** Sometimes people feed wildlife inadvertently when they leave pet food dishes outside or do not secure garbage.



10. Feeding wildlife exposes them to harassment and/or attacks from our pets. The pets usually lose. In all cases, wildlife and people are affected.

REMEMBER, WE MOVED INTO THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD, WE NEED TO RESPECT THE WIIIDLIFE, NOT FEED THEM!

Horses Help Kids with Grief and Loss at Camp Kangaroo

by Karen Gray, Certified Professional Coach

Miniature horses rejuvenated the spirits of grieving children at the Camp Kangaroo event recently held over Presidents' Day weekend at Paradise Valley High School in Phoenix. Sponsored by Seasons Hospice Foundation, the 3-day camp provided a safe environment for youth ages 5-17 to work through their grief after losing a close family member.

Envision Therapeutic Horsemanship provided the equine therapeutic activities component of the camp on Sunday, February 19th. Miniature horses trained in therapeutic groundwork activities worked with the children with the assistance of professionals and trained volunteers. Forty-one kids, divided into age groups, connected with the horses throughout the day and enjoyed a variety of activities with the minis.



Three corrals, provided by Envision and set up by their staff and volunteers, were assembled in the school gymnasium after the rainy weather precluded having the horse activities take place outside. One mini and 2-3 children were in each corral, in addition to a facilitator, horse leader and support person.

As a facilitator in one of the corrals and guiding the activities of the horse and children, I saw first-hand the horse's transformative powers in brightening the spirits of these precious children just minutes after they were escorted into the corral. The smiles on their faces and expressions of awe when interacting with the minis, were priceless. Some kids had never seen miniature horses before. The children's demeanors of fear, anxiety, sadness and hopelessness were miraculously transformed into peace and joy through the natural and magical properties of healing that horses provide. It was truly amazing.

Some of the activities that the kids enjoyed were brushing, braiding and grooming the horses, walking the minis on halters and lead ropes, and even painting very artistic expressions on the horses. The minis loved the attention!

After the equine event, a mother shared how her daughter was at first very anxious and nervous to interact with the miniature horse; yet after just minutes of being with the affectionate mini (appropriately named Kisses), her daughter's fear and anxiety turned to a sense of safety and joy while grooming and then painting the horse. This child courageously mustered strength and courage to move through her insecurity and participate in an activity well outside of her comfort zone. Her mother described how her daughter's courage in taking part in the event will help her process and move more easily through other difficult emotions associated with the recent loss of her family member.



Research has shown that equine therapeutic activities are effective in helping children to process their grief. Children who have participated in equine therapeutic activities show an increase in overall communication, self-confidence and self-esteem. After equine therapeutic activities, children find it easier to talk about their loved ones who have passed. These benefits promote long-term healing after a loss. In my work as an Equine-Assisted Coach, I am fortunate to see how remarkable horses can be in lifting the human spirit and mending one's emotional wounds. No matter what the source of trauma, horses can be extremely therapeutic in helping us heal.

It was a blessing to have been a part of Camp Kangaroo and to see the children experience happiness after having suffered tragedy at such an early age. It was an extremely moving experience and one that I will remember forever.



Dogtor T, the Pet Vet by Melissa Thompson, DVM, CVC

Nothing says spring in the desert like seeing all the cactus bloom, listening to the birds sing, watching the little lizards scurry, the toads catch flies and, oh yeah, finding the first western diamondback of the season. I know a lot of you have had your dogs snake trained, but accidents can still happen. I have been asked many questions about the “rattlesnake” vaccine. How does it work, will I still need to see a vet, the list goes on.

In short, the vaccine stimulates the body to make antibodies against the venom should your dog get bitten. This, in turn, allows the body to fight off the venom faster and may reduce the amount of antivenin that might be given. Although the hard-scientific data is minimal, many veterinarians in areas where they see 300-plus bites a year feel the pets that get bitten and have had the vaccine fare much better than those without. The swelling and other side effects from the bite are reduced as compared to their unvaccinated counterparts. It is still necessary for your pet to see a vet if they are bitten even if they have been vaccinated. The vaccine does not protect against coral snake, Mojave Rattlesnakes and a few others. It also does not protect your pet from infections that can be caused from the snake bite.



The downside to the vaccine is that it needs to be given frequently. For the best protection, your pet should be vaccinated BEFORE the start of snake season. The vaccination series includes 2 vaccines given 30 days apart. This will provide protection for about 6 months. If your pet is in an area that has snakes around for longer periods, the company recommends boosting every 3-4 months. Otherwise, vaccinate once a year after the initial 2 vaccines. For more information about the vaccine visit the vaccine company’s website at www.redrockbiologics.com. If you are interested in getting your pet vaccinated, contact your local veterinarian.



Let’s get back to those toads for a minute. Those strange creatures that sit out on the patio catching bugs can be quite entertaining to watch, but can be downright lethal to your pets. *Bufo alvarius*, also known as the Sonoran Toad or Colorado River Toad, are native to this area and are out from May through summer. They are very prominent during the monsoon season as that is their time to mate. They are usually seen out at night, especially in the warmer weather. The toads produce a toxin that is released through glands on their body.

Dogs usually find these creatures very interesting, and upon picking up/licking the toad, get poisoned. The poison acts as a hallucinogenic and has cardiac effects. Pets can have hypersalivation (drooling), ataxia (uncoordinated walking), seizures, become hyperthermic (very high fever) and can go into cardiac arrest and die.

If you see your dog playing with a toad, or is starting to drool, walk funny etc, use a garden hose to rinse his mouth out. Be sure to rinse his mouth out starting with the corner of the mouth and flushing it out toward the front of the mouth. Just keep on flushing those toxins out. You want to get all of the poison out. Get your dog to the emergency vet as soon as possible.

If you would like more information on the Sonoran Toad and other wildlife in our area visit the Arizona-Sonoran Desert Museum at www.desertmuseum.org

Toxins in the Environment

by Terry Stevens of Liberty Wildlife

We have seen many things recur in the wildlife population over the years and poisonings are near the top of the list. These are mostly from rodenticide used to control rats and mice but what most people fail to consider is the cascading effect of toxins in the environment. Not only do poisons affect more than the target species, but these compounds concentrate as they move up the food chain. Add to this the fact that there are no “species specific” poisons and you can see why lots of animals that feed freely in the wild are at risk from accidentally ingesting harmful substances.



Rat poison is particularly egregious as it is easily purchased over the counter and the packaging never considers or mentions that hawks, owls, and eagles are

free to feed on rodents who have ingested this material. Birds of prey are never above a free meal, and a rat that is now sick and moving slowly as a result becomes an attractive target. A hawk or great horned owl can consume more than one or two rats or other small mammals per day, and a busy barn owl feeding a family of six hungry owlets may consume upwards of 40 mice in a single night. If the mice have been eating poisoned pellets, the birds will also become ill and die a slow painful death. And what most people don't realize is that bald eagles, our national bird, is a notorious scavenger and will eat not only fish, but any small to medium mammal that presents itself. This is especially true in our part of the country where water is a luxury and fishing might not be a successful strategy.

The problem then compounds itself as removing these apex predators from the environment only allows more rodents to breed. Mouse populations increase exponentially as opposed to owls and hawks that, by comparison, reproduce at a more leisurely pace. The bottom line is, if you want to limit rats and mice, relying on nontoxic methods is a far better plan than using poison. Not only will it protect your pets, horses and other desirable animals, but will allow nature to help keep the balance the way it has for millions of years.

This website is a great educational resource about poisons and raptors.

<http://www.raptorsarethesolution.org/>



Poisoning of a Neighborhood Owl

by Gina Mure'

I recently went out on my back patio and saw our lovely neighborhood owl sitting on the ground. He immediately tried to fly away (we both scared the heck out of each other). I called the wild bird rescue Wild at Heart and was told to watch him for a couple of hours, as it was possible he flew into a window and was just dazed. A few hours later he was still there and a wonderful volunteer came out to pick him up. He wasn't bleeding and it didn't appear that his wings had been broken.

When I heard back from Wild at Heart a couple of days later, I was very sad to hear he did not make it. I was told he most likely ate a poisoned pack rat, mouse or squirrel that had ingested poison a resident had left out for rodent control. Another possibility is the owl ingested poisoned meat left for a coyote or bobcat.

Owls hunt live prey and eat all rodents as well as rabbits. If their prey is poisoned, they will be as well. If you have some kind of rodent problem, PLEASE, do not use poison! Use a trap instead. Owls hunt and kill far more rodents than poison can.

There seems to be a big debate regarding poison bait boxes intended for rodents. I was told that professional pest control companies are required to use particular types of poison that cannot be transferred from a dead animal. Please, if you insist on poisoning, contact a professional to provide you with this type of rodent control.

I'm obviously not an expert on the subject, but wanted to share this sad story to raise awareness in our area. Please remember that many dogs accompany their owners on trail rides and walks, and leaving poison out puts them at risk, too. The only things we should have to worry about protecting our dogs from out here are rattlesnakes!

Owls, hawks and eagles are our best rodent control as they hunt in our back yard and the surrounding area. Even a small action can have a huge impact on our desert environment and the creatures we are blessed to share it with.

PLEASE, NO MORE POISON!

The Gift of Having Friends and Community

by Terry Holmes-Stecyk

I began the year with a nasty bout of the flu from hell, spending a couple of days trapped in my house by the necessities of being close to a bathroom at all times. I was weak, still had critters to tend, and needed rest and fluids.

After 2 days I could finally sip water and eat dry crackers. In 4 days I graduated to broth. Thankfully a couple of leftover cartons of organic Costco chicken broth were still in the pantry from holiday meals. After that, nothing but real food was left in the freezer; however, nothing my body wanted. Going to the grocery store with a 35-minute commute still seemed more than I could do. Sigh, tears, sniff, post on Facebook...

A neighbor saw my post on Facebook about not feeling well. Within an hour, steaming containers of chicken noodle soup arrived, along with fresh-baked bread and organic apple juice. The next day, another neighbor stopped by with a box full of more containers of chicken noodle soup, immune system-building wellness shots, more juice and even healthy versions of canned soups when the fresh stuff was finished. As an added bonus, a bag of carrots for my horse and mini donkeys was included, too. These healing gifts not only filled our tummies but also truly filled our hearts with gratitude for our friends and this wonderful community.

In hindsight, I should have called on people to come help with the critters, or asked them to pick up a few things for me while at the store, but I didn't want to be a burden. I didn't want to bother people or have them go out of their way for me. I had forgotten a lesson I had heard years ago in church. "Not allowing others to help you is stealing a blessing from them. Allowing others to help, to perhaps feel good about what they did for someone else, is a good thing, not a burden." I love to help others and needed to remember, so do others.

Perhaps we can all try to be just a bit more thoughtful in our neighborhood, too. Come lend a hand on roadside cleanup day. If you truly cannot come, pick up a beer can or lunch sack on the road you travel that was carelessly thrown from a window. Let's wave to strangers more as they drive to and from home. I wish we could throw a party for those amazing "tractor guys" who grade the roads following a rain without a thought for payment. Maybe turn off those high-powered lights at night. You may not know they shine into the room of someone trying to sleep or perhaps that they pollute the sky for someone star-gazing. Turn down the music a bit more. Sound travels in the desert and what may seem not so bad to you carries to those around you.

Keep paying it forward as you may never know how even the smallest gesture can change the life of someone else. Be kind, stay kind. Just a simple act of kindness and thoughtfulness does matter more than you know!

Having a Horse in Your Life

Author Unknown, Contributed by Terry Stecyk

To have a horse in your life is a gift. In the matter of a few short years, a horse can teach a young boy or girl courage, if they choose to grab mane and hang on for dear life. Even the smallest of ponies is mightier than the tallest of kids. To conquer the fear of falling off, having one's toes crushed, or being publicly humiliated at a horse show is an admirable feat for any child. For that, we can be grateful.

Horses teach us responsibility. Unlike a bicycle or a computer, a horse needs regular care and most of it requires that you get dirty and smelly and up off the couch. Choosing to leave your cozy kitchen to break the crust of ice off the water buckets is to choose responsibility. When our horses dip their noses and drink heartily, we know we've made the right choice.



Learning to care for a horse is both an art and a science. Some are easy keepers, requiring little more than regular turnout, a flake of hay and a trough of clean water. Others will test you-- you'll struggle to keep them from being too fat or too thin. You'll have their hooves shod regularly only to find shoes gone missing. Some are so accident-prone you'll swear they're intentionally finding new ways to injure themselves.

If you weren't raised with horses, you can't know that they have unique personalities. You'd expect this from dogs, but horses? Indeed, there are clever horses, grumpy horses and even horses with a sense of humor. Those prone to humor will test you by finding new ways to escape from the barn when you least expect it.

Horses can be timid or brave, lazy or athletic, obstinate or willing.

You will hit it off with some horses and others will elude you altogether. There are as many “types” of horses as there are people which makes the whole partnership thing all the more interesting.

If you’ve never ridden a horse, you probably assume it’s a simple thing you can learn in a weekend. You can, in fact, learn the basics on a Sunday, but to truly ride well takes a lifetime. Working with a living being is far more complex than turning a key in the ignition and putting the car or tractor in “drive.”

In addition to listening to your instructor, your horse will have a few things to say to you as well. On a good day, he’ll be happy to go along with the program and tolerate your mistakes; on a bad day, you’ll swear he’s trying to kill you. Perhaps he’s naughty or perhaps he’s fed up with how slowly you’re learning his language.

Regardless, the horse will have an opinion. He may choose to challenge you (which can ultimately make you a better rider) or he may carefully carry you over fences--if it suits him. It all depends on the partnership--and partnership is what it’s all about.

If you face your fears, swallow your pride, and are willing to work at it, you’ll learn lessons in courage, commitment and compassion in addition to basic survival skills. You’ll discover just how hard you’re willing to work toward a goal, how little you know, and how much you have to learn.

And, while some people think the horse “does all the work,” you’ll be challenged physically as well as mentally. Your horse may humble you completely. Or, you may find that sitting on his back is the closest you’ll get to heaven.

You can choose to intimidate your horse, but do you really want to? The results may come more quickly, but will your work ever be as graceful as that gained through trust? The best partners choose to listen, as well as to tell. When it works, we experience a sweet sense of accomplishment brought about by smarts, hard work and mutual understanding between horse and rider. These are the days when you know with absolute certainty that your horse is enjoying his work.

If we make it to adulthood with horses still in our lives, most of us have to squeeze riding into our over-saturated schedules, balancing our need for things equine with those of our households and employers. There is never enough time to ride, or to ride as well as we’d like. Hours in the barn are stolen pleasures.

If it is in your blood to love horses, you share your life with them. Our horses know our secrets; we braid our tears into their manes and whisper our hopes into their ears. A barn is a sanctuary in an unsettled world, a sheltered place where life’s true priorities are clear: a warm place to sleep, someone who loves us and the luxury of regular meals. Some of us need these reminders.

When you step back, it’s not just about horses--it’s about love, life and learning. On any given day, a friend is celebrating the birth of a foal, a blue ribbon or recovery from an illness. That same day, there is also loss: a broken limb, a case of colic, a decision to sustain a life or end it gently. As horse people, we share the accelerated life cycle of horses: the hurried rush of life, love, loss and death that caring for these animals brings us. When our partners pass, it is more than a moment of sorrow.

We mark our loss with words of gratitude for the ways our lives have been blessed. Our memories are of joy, awe and wonder. Absolute union. We honor our horses for their brave hearts, courage and willingness to give.

To those outside our circle, it must seem strange. To see us in our muddy boots, who would guess such poetry lives in our hearts? We celebrate our companions with praise worthy of heroes. Indeed, horses have the hearts of warriors and often carry us into and out of fields of battle.

Listen to stories of that once-in-a-lifetime horse, of journeys made and challenges met. The best of horses rise to the challenges we set before them, asking little in return.

Those who know them understand how fully a horse can hold a human heart. Together, we share the pain of sudden loss and the lingering taste of long-term illness. We shoulder the burden of deciding when or whether to end the life of a true companion.

In the end, we’re not certain if God entrusts us to our horses--or our horses to us. Does it matter?

We’re grateful God loaned us the horse in the first place.