

## A CHRONOLOGY OF THE 2018 SUMMER SESSION AT EAGLES' WINGS STABLE

### Monday – Class 1

**June 11, 2018 – 6:45 p.m.** - Being a new member of the Board at Eagles' Wings Stable, Inc., I am in the process of learning about our operations. To do this, I will be observing the interaction of our students, horses, instructors, and volunteers during our Summer Session. I arrived early and had the riding arena to myself. Before long, Natalee, also a Board member, came into the arena. She had been in the barn grooming Joe, one of our horses. After his grooming, Joe promptly laid down and rolled on the stable floor – so much for wanting to look pretty. Natalee has been a board member for some time – she exudes a passion for Eagles' Wings that is obvious to all who meet her.

Then came Kevin, one of the volunteer horse leaders. This was my first time in meeting Kevin – he like Natalee had this remarkable presence. As the other volunteer horse leaders and side walkers arrived, I introduced myself and to my reassurance, they all exhibited the same presence as Natalee and Kevin.

Next came Debbie, another Board member, who like all the others, has a remarkable presence – she likes working with people and animals and it shows.

Then came Tina, our Volunteer Coordinator – get this, she is a volunteer herself who schedules and coordinates all our volunteer activities – amazing and extraordinary.

Then quietly, almost sneaking in came Ann and Keith – I have never been to a riding class where they were not there – they are the origin of this special presence at Eagles' Wings that is very tangible.

Then one-by-one came the horses came into the arena led by their horse leaders. The horses, except for Rerun, were a little harder to read than the people. Rerun approached one of the orange cones, picked it up and gently shook it back and forth – I think he was happy that a new session was about to begin.

Then the stars of the show, our students, arrived with their parents. We have two new students in the Monday class, both are very young, guessing around 2-3 years old and their parents brought them hoping that the experience at Eagles' Wings would benefit them.



Also in the class was a young man who had been riding at Eagles' Wings for some time. Two of the volunteers had an old picture of them with him in the middle – he was clearly shorter than both of them. This picture that they took last night clearly showed him to be taller than both.

The first session went very well for all – the new riders had a lot of smiles on their faces and the more advanced rider learned about how to communicate with his horse by the position of his body.

The hour went by quickly – the parents of the new students seemed relieved and pleased about the outcome of the class. They are looking forward to next week. Gail, one of our star certified instructors, had a large volume of notes to process to establish a baseline to chart student progress over the next eight weeks. She, like everyone else I have met at Eagles’ Wings, has the special presence – she got and gave lots of hugs.

I was, as Natalee might say, “gobsmacked” by my experience last night. I will be following the summer session and providing updates as we go.

**June 18, 2018 – 6:45 p.m.** – It just keeps getting better each time I come to Eagles’ Wings to observe a therapeutic riding class. The new students, not new now, were both back for their class as well as our more advanced rider who has been riding at EWS since he was six. The arena was warm but all the ceiling fans were going, so there was some breeze. This did not go unnoticed by one of our horses – Winnie. She liked stopping under one of the fans whenever she could much to the delight of her young rider. We had a couple of volunteer substitutions, Tina and Moe, who were side walkers with Winnie. Maybe it wasn’t Winnie who was stopping under the fans after all.



Gail had our advanced rider continuing to practice turning his head to help direct his horse, Rerun. Keith



explained that you should look where you are going. When you look to the right with the intention of making a turn to the right, your body and balance make subtle changes. That slight change in the position of the hips, pelvis, and seat bones tells your horse about the turn you're planning. Turning your focus creates a misalignment in your horse, who's looking straight ahead. The horse likes his or her body to be straight and they like you to sit straight, too. The misalignment tells the horse that your body is preparing for a change of direction. Who knew?

The mothers of the beginning students were observing the class and both seemed more relaxed than they did last week as did their young riders.

Class ended with Gail writing all her notes and with everyone headed to their air-conditioned cars. I will return next Monday.



**June 25, 2018 – 6:45 Class:** It was a beautiful evening at Eagles' Wings Stable – all three riders enjoyed their riding class. Our two new riders are making progress, little by little, but it is progress nonetheless.

Here is a story from another therapeutic riding stable, it is not atypical of what is happening at Eagles' Wings – new parents, take heart.

**SUCCESS STORY:** "I wanted to take the time to give my appreciation for your organization, staff, counselors, and volunteers on behalf of my son. Horse-riding therapy has been an integral part of several therapies he goes through to help diminish the daily challenges he endures with autism. Your program especially tugs at a parent's heart-strings because positive results can be seen almost immediately across a broad range of challenge areas. His riding sessions do so much more than just improve his core body strength, coordination, and stamina. They have improved his social interaction skills through his relationships with the counselors, volunteers, horses, and even the barnyard cat. The bond between our son and the horses he has ridden, groomed, and fed is the most special of all. These connections, once made, become easier to apply with other animals and humans in his everyday life. For me, one of the most heart-warming contributions of horse-riding therapy is the confidence and sense of pride it instills in my son. I've seen his confidence soar because he has been accepted unconditionally and without judgment by the horses he has bonded with. I've also witnessed the pride he has in caring for the horses that care for him."



"And He will raise you up  
on eagles' wings,

Bear you on the breath of  
dawn,

Make you to shine like  
the sun,

And hold you in the palm  
of His Hand."

*Michael Joncas*



**July 9, 2018 – 6:45 Class:** Much to the amusement of all, the evening began with Rerun performing his famous cone trick with his trainer Kevin. Rerun picks up the cone in his mouth and gently shakes it back and forth – as if he is signaling Gail that it is time to start the class. The evening was busy with students given tasks to do. Gail would have them take a picture from a bucket and then instruct them to ride around the arena and find the identical picture that was posted on the arena wall. Our two young riders seemed to get a kick out of the exercise. Our older student participated, but he also had an exercise where he would pull a card that had a part of the horse on it – parts such as withers and barrel. Then he would have to show Gail where the part was on Rerun. Then the students also did crisscrosses across the area, making turns around the cones. The posture of the young riders was much improved from the first class.



The highlight of the evening was when all got to trot their horses – giggles and laughter was the response from all. Great way to end the evening. The two young riders were both tired from their hard work – but they were smiling as they melted into their mother’s arms. The older rider seemed to have more energy than we he first walked in – probably take a while for his excitement to die down.



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**SUCCESS STORY:** Another illustration of the benefit of the riding program is a young rider called Jane. Jane is a delightful five-year old girl with Down syndrome, who just started school. While Jane can walk, her balance and coordination are developing slowly, so her parents were excited about the ability of therapeutic riding to assist her development. Jane also struggles emotionally because she cannot keep up with her peers on the playground.

It was Jane's physical therapist that first remarked about Jane's improved walking ability one month after Jane had begun therapeutic riding. She noticed that Jane was walking with more control and upright posture. In addition, Jane began to feel empowered by her newfound mobility atop the horse. Her mood improved, and she began to engage more with her peers by telling them about her horse and the riding lessons she was taking.