

College Essay – Caroline Riechel

“God made the horse from the breath of the wind, the beauty of the earth, and the soul of an angel.”

Horses have always meant more to me than just being a favorite animal or sport. Growing up, being around horses helped me build my self-confidence, worth, and purpose. Like most kids, I went through my own personal struggles. I was very lucky to have a place, like the horse barn I frequented, that supported me whenever I felt too overwhelmed. It helped me get through some challenging obstacles. It built me up at the same time, helping me to become the person I am today.

I started riding horses when I was in 4th grade. I remember knowing just how much riding meant for me then. I had no idea how much it would change me as I continued. There was a sense of ease and comfort that I always felt when I was around horses. I knew that when I was there nothing else really seemed to matter. I had a hard time trying to find myself in other places, especially at school. When I was in middle school, I started feeling a little lost. I stopped engaging others and distanced myself. I remember my parents and other professionals helping me to make sure it wasn't anything serious. I struggled through the rest of middle school searching for that “something.” My places where I seemed to leave all my worries and thoughts behind was the barn. The way horses responded to me with care and compassion made me feel safe. I felt like I had a purpose there. I learned the proper techniques of riding and horse care. Horses are extremely gentle animals and being able to really create that loving bond with them helped me discover what it was that made me feel whole.

Before I knew it, I was stepping into high school with new opportunities waiting for me. I decided to join an equestrian team and learned the true art of horsemanship and being a teammate. I really felt I was accomplishing something great while doing something I loved. When I was offered a position as a horse instructor my freshman year, I was completely shocked. Me? Teaching others what I love to do? I couldn't think of a greater honor. As high school went on, I continued to study for classes, volunteering in my community, and growing as a person through my work as an instructor. I began to put my challenges squarely behind me.

What really moved me on as an individual was when, after several weeks of shadowing the experienced horse instructors, the manager stated I was ready to teach by myself. It was suddenly just me, my students, and the horses. It was at that moment I believe it all just clicked for me. I felt like I really had a purpose. When I step foot into the arena, all the normal stresses, insecurities, worries, and anxiety are swept away. I have the responsibility for the safety of students, horses, fellow instructors, and myself. Throughout the last 3½ years of teaching, I have come to realize how much I mean to my students, because I was once them. I was once someone who was looking for guidance and help to become the best person I could be, and now I am someone they look up to. I know I will always be there for my students' challenges and successes in their lives. In hindsight, I think it's crazy how something so simple, like a hobby or desire, can shape a person into what they want to be.