

A Tribute to Tank

We lost our beloved Tank in July 2014. We miss him terribly. He will live on in our hearts and in the spirit of our ministry at Jeremiah's Crossing. Please read his story below.

Tank was a Morgan/Quarter cross. He joined the ranch team with Lace. They were great trail buddies before they joined the Jeremiah's Crossing team. Tank was a gentle giant and took very good care of his riders. He was especially sensitive to his students challenged by seizures. He often knew when his student was going to have a seizure before any of the staff was aware.

The funds to purchase Tank were donated by Don and Rosemary Czerniejewski. Thanks Don and Rose!

A Tribute:

It has taken me almost three months, since we lost our beloved Tank, to find the words to share with you the beauty and dignity with which Tank served his students at Jeremiah's Crossing. Three months to be ready to say good-bye in this public forum. I miss him, more than I ever imagined I would.

Tank came to us as part of a duo of new horses. We were able to purchase him due to a wonderful donation provided to us by the Czerniejewski family. They were aware that we needed a couple of seasoned horses to teach our young herd how to be comfortable in new situations. We met Tank, and his best friend Lace, fell in love with Lace, and on the way home realized they needed to stay together forever. We called his owner, Kelly Anderson, and told her we'd take them both. And so, Tank and Lace came home to Jeremiah's Crossing.

Tank never wavered from his determination to care for his riders. I didn't matter if the rider was a seasoned veteran, or brand new to the saddle. He was a gentle giant with a crooked blaze and a boyish look, that would win your heart if you gave him the slightest opportunity.

I'll never forget the first time I rode Tank on our trails. Roger led out with Chief, our resident Mustang. I followed behind, on Tank. After all the stories Kelly had told us

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about “steady Tank,” I was anticipating a quiet, uneventful ride in the woods. You might imagine my surprise when I found myself facing the wrong way on the trail in just a blink of an eye! In the moment before, Chief had spooked at something on the trail and looked back at Tank. Tank, mistook the look as a threatening gesture from Chief, the herd boss, dug in his front feet, and with me on board, spun 180 degrees...with me on his back! Of course, Roger didn't see ANY of this and calmly inquired as to why I was facing the wrong direction on the trail. (He never does see my rodeo rides.) That was the one and only time Tank ever had a misstep on the trail.

Everyone at Jeremiah's Crossing learned from Tank. You didn't have to ride him to be his student. Tank taught adaptability is not difficult if you pay attention. One of his students, Emmie, communicates with sign language. She knew the sign for “Tank” making a “T,” and she knew the sign for “walk,” hands out over the saddle horn, palms down, moving hands forward and back. Tank learned that when Emmie's body moved side to side as her hands moved forward and back, his horse leader was going to ask him to walk. Soon, he was stepping out as Emmie asked, not waiting for the horse leader at all.

Tank also taught horse leaders and side walkers to pay more attention to a student challenged by seizures. He would be walking along, doing everything he was asked, and then he would stop. Just stop. His horse leaders would try every leading technique they had ever learned to get him to walk. He might take a step or two, but then, he would stop again. No amount of tugging would make him move and then, Dani would have a seizure. Right there in the saddle. Tank stood stock still, like a statue. Instructors, side walkers, and Dani's parents would crowd around, deciding what was best for Dani in the moment. Tank never moved a muscle. He knew before anyone that she was going to have a seizure. Everyone who ever worked with Tank learned to try to figure out what he was telling them, rather than decide he was being stubborn.

This past summer, we could tell Tank wasn't feeling well. His body was betraying him. At only 25 years young, he developed Cushings and began treatment. He was losing weight, and was a bit unsteady on his feet, so we pulled him from the program. Even though he wasn't feeling well, he always seemed eager to join the lesson crew as they

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were being tacked up, and was sad when he didn't get his saddle. In July, he seemed to be making progress, so we added him back to the line up for one lesson.

Emmie was so excited to see Tank at the mounting block, and Tank was delighted to see Emmie! The light was shining in his eyes as she climbed aboard, and then, the signal he had waited all summer for...Emmie signing "Tank, Walk!" With a wiggle from the saddle, they were off!

Tank and Emmie's team had a fantastic lesson. Tank never missed a beat. To say we were thrilled would be an incredible understatement. Tank was on the mend! When we returned from our annual mission conference, he would be back in lessons, working once again, doing what he loved most. Caring for others.

Unfortunately, that scenario never played itself out. While we were waiting to speak to one of our supporting churches, near Buffalo, NY, we received a call that Tank was down in the paddock. Our brave caretakers managed to help him toward the stalls, called the veterinarian, and kept us posted all through the church service. By the time the service was over, Tank had passed away.

Tank's tack is still hanging on the hooks that bear his name. I'm not quite ready to reassign his bridle or grooming kit. His halter will always be his. Someday, when our barn is in built, we'll place his picture and halter in a place of honor. A reminder that we all have our specialty in life, and we all have something to teach others.

Tank, we will miss you. You will live forever in our hearts.

Written Fall 2014