



## Heaven's Gait Ranch, Inc.

December 3, 2021

Dear Family & Friends,

We hope your heart is happy as we approach the end of the year! While 2021 presented unique challenges, your steady support was crucial to our mission, and our participants, veterans, horses, staff, and volunteers can't thank you enough for making Heaven's Gait Ranch your priority in this post-pandemic world.

Your generosity provided 1,266 lessons to 63 individuals with special needs and disabilities. Your kindness gave purpose to ten program horses and one miniature donkey who brought out the best in our participants even when the world was at its worst. Your understanding made HGR an employer and family of choice for seven hardworking individuals -- two of whom are U.S. Military Veterans. And your compassion offered over 3,000 hours of volunteer service -- promoting personal fulfillment & encouraging community engagement.

With stakes higher than ever to remain competitive, the #1 question that caught me off guard this year was the frequent, yet well-intentioned, "How are you feeling?" Pregnant with my first child, it's easier to say, "good" than it is to stop and engage. However, as I write this today, grateful for HGR's fifth year and eager for the next, I'll give you my honest & loaded answer: I'm feeling... "a lot."



Your continued support has made our small nonprofit shift gears and survive another year, when large, for-profit entities are still scrambling. Therefore, I'm feeling more motivated than ever: to do all that we can, for as long as we can, to the best of our ability. I'm feeling obligated: to be fiscally responsible, to keep putting our money where our mouth is, and to do more, not only because we can, but also because we should. I'm feeling inspired: to keep surrounding ourselves with good people, to continue setting goals, and to keep reaching for new heights. And I'm feeling blessed: that you've entrusted us to carry on your legacy of love and support for those in need. What a gift it is to be part of a community that cares as well as you do.

While Brian and I are personally preparing for our first child, this is not our first venture into the unknown. Heaven's Gait Ranch is a young organization, and many of you have been with us every step of the way. For the last five years, you've watched wonder, prayer, and dedication transform an idea into a reality that has touched the lives of countless individuals and families. You know our stories of sleepless nights, trials, errors, and successes. You've listened to our fears and encouraged us to learn from your experiences and faith. Together, you've helped us endure physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion beyond our wildest expectations, and we've survived sticky situations by mastering the mantra, "It'll all be worth it."

Worth what? That is the question. Whether you're building a baby or nurturing a nonprofit, you're driven by gratitude today and the thought of tomorrow. You're driven by the potential someone evokes in you & the potential you see in others to make the world shine a little brighter. The grit. The grind. The heartache. You determine what's worth it for the next generation -- and the generations to come after it. What a gift you're given when you start to ponder the meaning of your life & the impact you can have on someone else's. While reflection narrows your focus, it simultaneously expands your heart & fills your soul.

So as you reflect on your year and contemplate the next, we hope you remember the power of your purpose and know that we couldn't do this without you. Have a wonderful holiday season, and a happy, healthy new year!

Sincerely,

*Margaret Mary McBlaren*

Founder, Executive Director

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### 2021 HGR Veteran Highlight

When he received a letter from President Johnson “cordially inviting him to serve his country,” Steve Moker answered the call.

At 17 years old, Steve had already worked on machines. At age 19, he lost his mother, and at 21, he lost his president. By age 22, he was drafted off the job, leaving his father, sister, and brother-in-law behind.

Drafted on January 2, 1964, Steve was sent to Ft. Leonard Wood, MO for basic training and AIT, then onto Ft. Belvoir, VA. He became a combat engineer whose military occupational specialty was “Demolition Expert.” Responsibilities ranged from probing for explosives with a fixed bayonet to specializing in dynamite.



With four years of experience already under his belt, he was quickly put in charge of “the young guys” -- the 18 and 19 year olds just arriving for duty. He recalls, “It was a problem: you’d take turns to sleep, and when it was your turn, you’d just hope the other guys would stay awake. They were just kids.”

After a “rough beach landing” at Qui Nhon, Vietnam, Steve went into the central highlands where he settled into his new home base, known as “Happy Valley.” While there were moments of beauty, those moments were often very short lived. “Just when you’d start to think it’s a beautiful day, you’d start to hear gunfire and immediately take cover.”

One night in “the pit,” Steve recalls the 173rd Airborne being attacked by Viet Cong -- “a lot of Viet Cong.” A Captain came up to him, giving him a telephone: there was a ship in the bay, and when someone called for coordinates, he was to notify them to bring in fire for support because they were being overrun. At that time, Steve remembers seeing napalm.



When he came back to base, he was ordered to build a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (also known as a MASH unit). “It was a gory scene,” he states. “It took days to pick through the live bodies and bring them to safety. Snipers were everywhere.” His men were tasked with building a make-shift steel airport, and Steve’s job was to build an extension; they needed more stretchers.

The choppers would come in; doctors were there. We’d bring them to Room 1 where we were asked, ‘Living or Dead?’ If living, the second question was, ‘What do they need?’ Gangrene was a real problem. The next room was a morgue, where the burial squad tagged the dead. They’d take the dog tags, put them in their mouths, and put them into bags. Planes kept coming, every 3-4 minutes. They just kept coming. And coming. And coming.”

At one point he said, “This is too much.” He couldn’t stand the sight of seeing wedding bands, and he started wondering, “How did I get here?” Despite constant commotion, Steve always remembered to stay in a secure position. “But when you’re by yourself sometimes, your mind can just blow.”





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Steve recalls going on another post, this time reporting at noon on Christmas Eve that dragged into the morning. He watched a procession of candles going uphill until they suddenly stopped. Still on guard, he hollered, "Halt! Who goes there?" No one answered, and after hollering two more times, he emptied a magazine into silence. He was supposed to go home the next day.

After finding no one out there, his company commander wanted to see him, offering Steve the opportunity to be transferred to Hawaii where he would be trained as a helicopter pilot. He remembered working as a machinist, making \$3.00/hr, and although test pilots could make \$500.00/hr, Steve knew he just wanted to get home to his father. He recalls, "Every Friday was 'clean up.' They'd haul in as many as 10 downed choppers at a time."

He had 15 minutes to pack two bags. He "kept low and ran as fast as [he] could" to a 123 transport headed to Saigon. From there he flew to Oakland, CA where he was brought to a big gymnasium. He was told he didn't have to turn anything in, but "most guys wanted nothing to do with their uniforms or military memorabilia." He regrets leaving behind his big, winter coat and boots, but he just kept thinking about getting home. One item that he kept was a scapular worn around his neck, given to him by a priest in Vietnam. Steve still has it to this day.

When he finally arrived at home to his family, Steve had ten days to report back to his civilian job. He says, "I didn't want to lose seniority. I needed to go back to work. I worked 47 days straight until I got one day off. I had some rough times there, but the president of the company made it clear that if you were a veteran, you stayed." Steve continued to work for Badger Meter for 43 years.

Decades later, Steve shares that he still gets anxiety and has nightmares, but he reminds himself that he has been "very fortunate."



For the last four years, Steve has been coming to Heaven's Gait Ranch, participating in our Equine Services for Heroes program with other combat veterans. "If you're hurting, the horses know it," he says. "They're very sympathetic."

Aside from working with the horses every week, Steve says his overall experience at the ranch has been positive for many reasons.

He says, "I've learned that people are kind. When I came home from Vietnam, people were terrible. They spit in my face. I got into fights. But here, they honor you."



## Heaven's Gait Ranch, Inc.

Rider fees cover less than 20% of the actual cost; therefore, your commitment to our cause sets the bar for future services. Veterans will always remain 100% sponsored by donations; however, after prayerful consideration, our Board determined that it's time for participant fees to increase. Please help us close a growing gap, and know that your generosity really makes a difference.

### How You Can Help HGR in 2022 & Beyond

1. Support our Participants — Sponsor a veteran or participant for \$1,000 per season, or donate \$550 toward a partial scholarship. Full sponsorships allow veterans to participate for free. Partial scholarships keep our rider fees affordable to families in need.
2. Support our Herd — While all 11 of HGR's program animals are pledged to be sponsored in 2022 for seasonal veterinary care & routine hoof trims, financial support for daily equine management is much needed and greatly appreciated. The true cost of care extends beyond the increasing cost of raw goods; it includes human resources needed to administer them. Please help us provide the best care for our best friends when they need it most.
3. Consider a Corporate Matching Gift — Many businesses offer matching donations. Does your employer care about health and human services, military veterans, or animals? Please ask your employer today, advocate on our behalf, or let us know if this is an option, and we'd be happy to connect.
4. Leave a Legacy & Help HGR Build an Endowment — Planning for the future and creating the legacy you wish to leave is one of the most effective ways to ensure a lasting impact. Making a gift to Heaven's Gait Ranch, Inc. in your will or living trust, known as a bequest, can guarantee that your legacy endures. Your gift may be a specific dollar amount, stocks, bonds, an estate, a percentage of your estate, or the remainder after all other provisions are specified. If you have named Heaven's Gait Ranch in your will or trust, please let us know so we can ensure your gift is used according to your wishes. Notifying us of your plans will enable us to plan for the use of your future gift. If you prefer to remain anonymous, we will keep your name and gift in strict confidence. Please contact Brian McClaren at 920-400-0628 or [info@heavensgaitranch.org](mailto:info@heavensgaitranch.org) for more information.



Gifts of any size can be mailed to Heaven's Gait Ranch, Inc. at 940 S. Main St., Cedar Grove, WI 53013, or you can Text to Give: (920) 315-7551 using the keyword: horses.

When you text "horses" to (920) 315-7551, you'll receive a link to access a secure platform, GiveCentral. Here, you can make a one-time or recurring donation.

**As a small nonprofit working to make a big difference, we will remember you!**