

Dear CKRH,

The purpose of this letter is to share a little about my life and express my gratitude for the experience that was provided to me by the staff at CKRH. This program has provided me with skills that I can apply to my everyday life, both present and future. The layout of this program has allowed me to ease into an environment which eventually gave me the opportunity to feel comfortable enough to dig deep into my soul. Once that barrier was broken, I was able to share my thoughts and feelings with everyone involved in the program.

In recent years, prior to having this opportunity with CKRH, I had experienced several “bottoms” in my life. I am an honorably discharged veteran from the U.S. Air Force as of Dec. 1, 2009. During my service as an active duty member of the military, a certain event led to an injury that would have a lifelong effect on both my emotional and physical state. As a result of this injury I was prescribed opiate medication over the course of a few years and eventually developed an addiction during my military career.

Immediately after my discharge from the military, I began to live a life of addiction: illegal activities, manipulation, lying, hurting those around me, etc. This lifestyle eventually caught up with me and I found myself in handcuffs for the first time in my life, facing charges for trafficking and possession. I lost the support of all my friends and the majority of my family. That being said, I was soon released from jail on bond and my addiction took over once again. I would soon hit a new bottom and returned to jail for the second time. That would be my experience over the next couple of years: in and out of jail, on-again off-again active addiction, each time finding a new and deeper bottom.

My life wouldn't start to turn around until I would find the bottom deep enough to make me want to change. This turn-around came April 27, 2013, when I found myself waking up in a hospital after overdosing and flat lining on heroin while driving through downtown Cincinnati. My addiction had killed me, literally. During this event, I slammed into seven parked cars and was eventually brought to a stop by a telephone pole. I am so thankful that those cars were empty, that nobody was walking on the sidewalks or across the street and that nobody else was involved in this accident.

Waking up in that Cincinnati hospital is where I found the willingness to do whatever I would have to do in order to remain sober. With the legal charges I now faced, I accepted an opportunity to attend a drug court program that consists of a minimum of 18 months and involves intensive outpatient treatment that is monitored by the courts. I haven't touched a narcotic since that day, but I have struggled with the idea that I was an alcoholic. So I would soon find myself getting into trouble off and on as a result of drinking, until it would result in going to jail for the last time Mar 1, 2014. I was then offered the opportunity to attend the Veterans Treatment Court in Lexington. That willingness to do anything to remain sober would resurface in my life, and I have remained sober ever since. I have provided a brief personal history of my life in order for the readers to understand my true appreciation for what CKRH has provided me. Volunteering to enter this six-week program, I was skeptical about what it could really offer. I would soon be surprised at the depth of

emotional connection that I would find myself experiencing with my horse, Rhett Butler. Shortly after developing this relationship with Rhett, Denise and Charlotte would begin their role as instructors and further provided me information on what this emotional connection with Rhett really consisted of overall. I found myself feeling a different level of confidence that I hadn't felt for a long time, pride even. However, this was just the beginning and things would get much deeper.

As the weeks progressed, Denise and Charlotte would carefully explain the daily goals and provide the participants of the program with tools and tips on how to incorporate our experiences and emotions with our horse, to our daily lives. It appeared that with each passing week each participant would become more and more comfortable with their horse; this is also true for me. It seemed that we all became more willing to open up and speak from the heart about current struggles and obstacles, what we planned to do about them, and how to make plans for the future to avoid those certain obstacles and struggles. As well as how to handle living life on life's terms when we run into those obstacles that are unavoidable. Denise and Charlotte were able to do this while incorporating our horses the entire time, it was incredible.

Part of my story of recovery involves the fear of being judged for my past experiences and poor choices. During my time at the CKRH, I didn't experience any type of judgment or awkward treatment, the staff was amazing. My story also includes a fear of developing relationships, a fear of not being good enough, a fear of falling short and a fear of someone turning their back on me.

Through this course, I can honestly say that I believe that I was able to develop a friendship not only with Rhett Butler, but to the instructors as well, which is huge for me. There is nothing like having a 1,000-pound horse walk up to you without his lead rope attached and put his head in your lap like a puppy. It was an emotional connection that I have longed to feel for. The freedom that Denise and Charlotte were able to allow us to connect with our horses, our alone time, was exactly what I needed to focus on letting down my wall and opening up to my horse. This would in-turn give me a level of comfort that made it possible to share with the staff and other participants during our skill building exercises. For the first time in a long time, I was able to take off this mask that I like to wear and truly be myself, and for that I am grateful.

I would like to again reiterate my gratitude for the experiences that CKRH and its staff has provided me. The equine therapy has provided me a different understanding of many skills that therapy by human interaction alone just doesn't offer. I plan to further my experience at the CKRH by enrolling in the horsemanship section of the program, and I'm positive that it too will provide tools that I can carry with me for the rest of my life. I want to personally thank CKRH, Veterans Treatment Court and give a special thanks to Denise and Charlotte, who spent the time to give me an unforgettable experience.

Sincerely,

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