



The Ranch Hand

A publication of In Balance Ranch Academy

Spring 2006

Ranch Staff Spotlight

Sarah Stockton
Teacher/Equine Staff

After graduating with a degree in Equine Science from Colorado State University, Sarah returned to Arizona and completed the teacher's certification program at Ottawa University in Phoenix. She then became certified to teach Secondary Science and taught for three years in the public school system. Currently, Sarah is working on her Master's degree in Counseling Psychology and Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy through Prescott College in Prescott, Arizona.

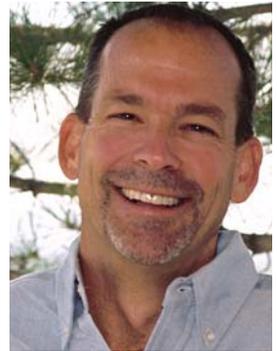


A native of Tucson, Sarah grew up around all animals, especially horses. She began riding and showing horses at age five. Her equine interests, as a child, ranged from 4-H to jumping on the national Quarter Horse circuit. Sarah was very active with the Horse Judging team during college, eventually coaching the team to national titles. In her "spare" time, she still enjoys riding and showing horses, training for competitive dog obedience, traveling and reading. She is very excited to join the In Balance Ranch Academy team!

What a Positive Peer Culture Has to Offer

by Patrick Barrasso MSW, LCSW

Colleagues will often ask me why I chose the Positive Peer Culture model as a pillar of In Balance Ranch Academy. I often go on to explain that it is consistent with the philosophy we have used since the inception of In Balance services for youth, starting in 1996. Helping guide young people to help each other is the basis of the positive peer culture. Young people will start to heal the shame that helped create the mess in their lives by helping each other with day to day difficulties. It is an interesting and difficult process to watch young people struggle but it is in these challenging times that true growth takes place. The other night I sat through a community meeting and witnessed two young people try to sort out a conflict with each other. There were several points when I wanted to intervene but I let it play out. They did an amazing job of bringing it to a productive resolution. You see, the heart of our philosophy is that young people can sort out most of their own difficulties with the proper support and guidance. In each step we take with young people at the Ranch the message is clear and consistent: "You are capable." It is this message that is reinforced in all aspects, whether it be in an equine experience, a community meeting led by the leadership council or fifteen mile hike, we continually go back to the idea that they are capable and we treat them as such.



Often drugs, alcohol and other self-defeating behavior leave their self esteem in serious jeopardy and they have diminished abilities to problem solve when they first come to the Ranch. After being at the Ranch a while, it is a rare occurrence that our students are told what to do; instead, they are guided to solutions that they feel ownership of. It takes a lot of time, faith, patience and fortitude to graduate from In Balance Ranch Academy. Those that do graduate, often have a new belief system regarding just how capable they truly are. This is what has kept our graduates successful long after their ranch experience is over. This is a credit to the positive peer culture, under the careful watch and guidance of our dedicated and competent staff. When I was in my crazy teenage years, (yes, they were crazier than most youth we treat) a coach from my junior high reached in and helped to re-direct my life. His words were not profound but his message was. He had a constant belief that I was capable of a different life than what I'd created for myself. I often wished he had just given me the answers to solve all my problems. Instead, he simply guided me through my problems until the solutions became known to me. It was his influence that helped launch Patrick, the counselor. My senior year in high school started the transformation in my life.



From "ranch hands" to "jungle swingers" — the recent trip to Costa Rica provided our young men with a chance to grow and learn and also have a ton of fun. For more on this adventure, see inside.

I started to believe I was capable and once I had a new belief system, people started to seek me out to help them. This process started to reinforce that I was a good person who could contribute something positive to my community. Once this shift took place, I also realized that I had to give up my negative peer subculture and surround myself with a positive one. One of those peers is my wife now of 27 years. This model that we use has changed the lives of thousands of young people across this world, including my own. Even though that coach had no idea what a positive peer culture was, he helped me believe in myself and encouraged me to help others. This is what we do every day at the Ranch, we help young people believe in themselves and in turn help each other.

Running in the Tucson Half Marathon



Community service is a continuing commitment for In Balance Ranch Academy. Students and staffers together trained for this half marathon and raised over \$5000 for the Arizona Cancer Center in Tucson.

The Bobbi Olsen Tucson Half Marathon on December 4th was a perfect event for In Balance students to train their bodies and their minds while helping to raise money for the Arizona Cancer Center at the same time. The boys completed a structured training program designed to maximize aerobic endurance, increase strength, and develop mental toughness. I modified the program on an individual basis each week to challenge more capable runners and to assist those who were more prone to injury to train safely. Our training efforts culminated in a very successful day: all fourteen IBRA runners finished the race and were proud of their amazing accomplishment. In addition, the young men and their families raised over \$5000 for the Arizona Cancer Center! The boys are continuing to run and many new students are beginning their training programs. Look for further race reports from our students in upcoming newsletters!

Lynda Hendricks, MS Ed., Academic Director

Running the Bobby Olsen Half Marathon was truly an experience I never thought I would ever accomplish. When I heard that I had a chance to run a marathon and help find a cure for cancer at the same time, I knew was in for sure. My mom had cancer three times in three different places. Thinking of her courageous battle with cancer kept me pushing through the training period and motivated me through the whole 13.1 miles on race day.

So I committed to training hard and pushed

myself to the best of my ability so I could hopefully place in the event. I wrote a fundraising letter to friends and family, and my parents mailed the letters to each person on my list. My family took the donations to the Arizona Cancer Center from the race very seriously. Overall we came up with over 1000 dollars to donate. This gave me so much motivation to know that I had support from so many people. Things were going as planned until, in the fourth month of training, I fractured my rib with only three weeks left before race day.

I trained with a lot of heart, and eventually I would finish my practice runs with all the really good runners. As my legs continued to strengthen, so did my appreciation for distance running. I started to get really into running, and ran whenever I had the chance.

The race began and I started off pretty fast so I could shake off all my peers. After about the first mile people began to pass me nonstop, which I can admit is a little demoralizing. As the race progressed I became slightly fatigued and there was a strange pain in my ankle. I decided I did not like running at the moment, and sped up so I could get the race over with. As I approached the last three miles I noticed myself speeding up and passing people as I had been passed at the beginning of the race. I began to recognize all the backs that had passed me at the beginning. I ended the race with a haste unknown to me, and as I crossed the finish line at an hour and forty-nine minutes, I heard a voice yelling my name. I turned and saw Lynda jumping up and down ecstatically holding up one finger, and I knew I had done well; she told me I had finished first for In Balance and tenth overall in my age group.

I really enjoy running and the fact that I am in the best shape I have ever been in. I am continuing to improve my endurance and speed; a big part of my relapse prevention/transition plan involves joining an athletic team and staying healthy. Running the Bobbi Olsen Half Marathon has given me the aerobic ability and motivation that I need to do that.

I was very emotional when realized I probably wasn't going to be able to run the half marathon I had trained so hard for in the past months. I went to the doctor the Thursday before the race and got permission from him and my parents to race in the half-marathon. I was excited to be able to run when I got a special surprise: about a week before the race my dad decided he wanted to run in the marathon with me! This also gave me motivation to show him my running ability.

This was my first half marathon. I woke up at 2:30 in the morning and drove to Tucson. Even though I was freezing, I still kept my head up. The race was very meaningful to me and my dad. My dad was by my side running for the first 7 miles or so. We talked a lot about was going on for me and what I am going through. After that I took off and felt a jolt of energy. I felt that my Higher Power was by my side. I didn't stop once throughout the whole race, which was very surprising since I hadn't trained in a month or so because of my fractured rib. I finished the race in 2 hours and 8 seconds. I came in 13th place for the 16 to 18 year old runners. I felt so proud of myself because I placed even with a fractured rib. I felt so accomplished and was so grateful that I could help others who are suffering through cancer. I am looking forward to running a lot more half marathons and maybe even a full marathon.

Sean K.



Ben B.

Fu Balance in Paradise

By Shannon Dexter, LCSW, LISAC, Clinical Director, Equine Program Director



A walk through the Butterfly Garden included a nursery for emerging monarchs and other butterflies.

As I put fingers to the keyboard, the project ahead intimidates me. How can I possibly describe in black and white, two-dimensional words on a page, the immense beauty of Costa Rica? How can I give you a feel for the culture, the people we met, the things we did and the country we felt a part of for eight glorious days? How can I describe the raucous laughter, the inside jokes we created together as a group of students and staff? With the caveat that at this point in my process I cannot imagine that I can succeed at this daunting task, I shall begin.

The trip unfolded with the inevitable herding of fourteen teens through the maze of airports, securities, ticket counters, customs, immigration, and finally to the streets of San Jose, Costa Rica. We were greeted by our guide Lucy, and our driver, Chris, and boarded our short bus to drive into the city. Our night in San Jose was quite brief: midnight until we drove out at 6:30 am for our first day in the country. Though we had at most five hours of sleep, all were excited and happy to be on our way.

We stopped at a restaurant for breakfast in a little village a couple of hours away. Many students immediately took the opportunities to use their Spanish and enjoyed being able to communicate. Some struggled with their few words or phrases and they and their peers laughed at their comic attempts. After we ate, we walked through the Butterfly Garden behind the restaurant and marveled at the chrysalises opening in a plexiglass nursery, and many monarchs and other butterflies. The most amazing butterfly was a beautiful iridescent blue almost four inches across.

Another hour and we were at the boat launch

to travel up the river to Tortuguero National Park on the far northeast corner of the country. Tortuguero is a huge national park where the river meets the Caribbean Sea. It is accessible only by boat or seaplane. The sea turtles that give the park its name, utilize the beach as their breeding ground and nursery. During December, they lay their eggs, hatch, and then the baby sea turtles waddle down the beach to the safety of the ocean. During the rest of the year the park showcases bird, plant and animal life in many varieties. Lucy, our guide, began to talk to us about them during that boat ride into the park and promised a more thorough introduction to the area's wildlife the next day during our boat tours.

After two hours of motoring up the river, we pulled into the Laguna Lodge. The main dining room consisted of an enormous open-air banana-leaf palapa—called a palenque in Costa Rica. The outlying cabins were screened rooms with tiled bathrooms. Two smaller palenques shaded hammocks, and a cool swimming pool called out to our sweaty students instantly. As soon as we toured the lodge most of them ditched their bags in their cabins and ran for the pool. Soon they were laughing and playing wild made-up games of cannonballs, jumps, spins, and leaping over the each other into the water. A four-foot long iguana watched them from a nearby tree and succeeded in surprising and/or freaking out most of us.

After lunch we loaded back into the boat to ride to the town a mile away. The tropical village bordered by the sea on one side and the river on the other was our first immersion into the Costa Rican culture. The students wandered the tiny shops and then instigated a spontaneous game of coconut volleyball on the beach.

We returned to the Lodge for more swimming time, hammock lounging, and general relaxing. The dinner at the Lodge was wonderful and after-

ward, we had a community meeting on some benches near the palenque. Students shared own-ups, patch-ups, and checked in with how they were feeling. They also shared gratitude and appreciations and we closed with a Serenity Prayer. A man from San Jose, California, came over to Skip to talk after our prayer caught his attention. He was traveling with another group and was the only person in recovery. Our group gave him a sense of fellowship and we chatted with him several times during the week as his group bumped into ours in the same general tour circle of the country.

The next morning we climbed back in the boat for our tour of the Park. The plant life is incredible and difficult to describe. The towering trees are covered with numerous parasitic and epiphytic flowers, and vines. The effect is like green drapery hanging from the tops of the trees down to the water in an endless buffet for the leaf-eating insects and mammals. As we came around a bend in the river we were greeted by the sweetest face in the jungle—a three toed sloth. It was hanging upside down, contentedly eating leaves only about five feet up from the water. Our boatman drove us right up to the furry creature and we took many pictures of students next to their friend the sloth.

Around another corner a troop of Howler Monkeys greeted us with their high-flying antics



The guys hooted and hollered as their competitive nature surged during this game of coconut volleyball. When their energies waned, they busted the coconut open and took turns pouring the milk down their hot parched throats.

through the trees overhead. Their hollering is an eerie gorilla-like roar that chills the spine.

Lucy taught us about the many species of birds including the colorful toucans, various egrets, cormorants, and herons. One of the egrets is called the Snowy Egret and sports bright yellow feet under his white body making him look like he's wearing yellow high-top sneakers. We also saw a lizard called the Jesus Lizard named for his ability to run across the surface of the water without falling in. A river otter swam by our boat, looking at us curiously. And as a grand finale for the morning, we saw a four foot long cayman which looks a lot like a crocodile but his eyes are perched on the top of his head like dual periscopes.

After another wonderful lunch, we split up and five students and Skip went off on a fishing trip with two brothers they met in town the previous day. The brothers were strangely enough, named Tony and Danny (Patrick and Betsy's sons' names!) The rest of us went back out in the boat to see more of the flora and fauna of the park. We quickly came upon a group of spider monkeys, one female very close to us with a tiny baby on her back. We also saw another 5 foot long cayman; this time he came right towards our boat and parked himself near our hull as we marveled at his stony face.

The fishing trip went extremely well bringing home three enormous snooks. The Lodge was nice enough to cook them for us for a delectable dinner that evening. After dinner, Lucy introduced some of our guys to her friends who play guitar, while others learned salsa and marenque dancing from her. With much laughter and many stomped-on toes, Lucy guided each willing student to the beat, the spins, and turns.

The next day we awoke early to take the boat back to the road. We rode several hours along horrific roads across the middle of the country into the volcano region. We stopped in a town called La Fortuna, ("the fortunate") as it survived living in the shadow of Vulcan Arenal, an active, constantly erupting volcano.

The next morning found us at the mountain-top next to Arenal for our first zip-line experience. First we rode a tram up the 4,100 feet to the top of the mountain. Dressed in rock-climbing harnesses, we listened intently to the instructions given us by our zip-line guides. One of the guides zipped down the cable to the next platform, while the other hooked our harness to a pulley on the cable. With the signal to "adios" we each dropped off the platform into the unknown, flying above the canopy, howling and screaming with exhilaration. Each of the dozen zip-lines took us from one platform to the next in a zigzagging blast down the mountain. The highest flew us over 600 feet

off the ground and the fastest zinged us at a dizzying 45 miles per hour. A couple of hours later, we landed on "terra firma" and laughed about our adventure. We spent the afternoon in some natural hot springs and then drove close enough to see the explosions of molten rocks spewing out of the mouth of the mountain. It was an awesome sight even from a safe distance.

The next day we drove to Monte Verde, the cloud forest. Here we climbed the trails, then stairs and towers to fly through the canopy in another series of zip-lines. The mountain is truly covered in clouds and we were splattered with the droplets as we soared through the trees and into the mist blind. This added an intense dimension to the already exciting experience we felt the previous day.

Onward to Jaco beach and the final days of our trip. We stopped on an overpass that provided a birds-eye view of a group of huge, frightening crocodiles in the river below. Some of the onlookers threw hunks of meat at them to watch them fight over it. The still, prehistoric crocs suddenly thrashed to life and attacked the hunks and each other. It was a sobering sight even from 100 feet up!

Jaco beach and the area was a bustling tourist village with stores selling colorful hammocks, ironwood and rosewood sculpture, t-shirts, and other arts and crafts. The people were friendly, willing to dicker, and able to translate anything from Colones into dollars. We poked around the shops and retired to our hotel on the beach for the night. The pool and ocean were inviting with their perfect temperature and the ocean's rolling waves.

The next morning we drove to Manuel Antonio to see another national park, a pristine

beach, and some adorable capuchin monkeys. With their round faces and sweet eyes, they were the most endearing of the monkeys we saw during the trip. Back to Jaco, we rented boogie boards and spent the afternoon crashing through the waves, riding a few choice rollers, and laughing at the joy of it all. The hotel had a wonderful poolside barbeque for us and we circled for a final group.

I hope I've done some justice to the amazing experiences we had on this trip. I am grateful to have had a week to immerse myself in a different language, culture, climate, and land; all with a fun, attentive, interested, and wonderful group of students and staff; and a phenomenal guide. Thanks to Lynda Hendricks for the extensive planning, to Patrick for letting her create this adventure, to parents for including your sons in the trip, and to the students for being great travel companions! ¡Pura Vida!



The zip line rides through the rain forest were "awesome!"

We asked the students to talk about what they'd learned about themselves, and what they wanted to bring back with them to the Ranch. We encouraged an attitude of gratitude; appreciating being able to see and be in a place as incredible as Costa Rica, rather than spend time feeling down about returning to the States. Students shared some remarkable insights. The following are paraphrases of just a few of the things students said:

"I learned to do for myself and I'm ready to take that back to the Ranch with me. I've been stuck for a long time and I feel like I'm done with that and ready to move on."

"I learned that I am responsible for my happiness and to stop looking out there and waiting for things to change to make me happy. I'm always saying to myself, 'I'll be happy when I get home; or when I move out;' or whatever. I realized I was in this amazing place and still doing that to myself. Then I decided to enjoy what we were doing and where we were and I felt great. It was a good realization. I need to keep working on this."

"I realized I am most triggered (about using substances) not by seeing people smoking or drinking, but by being in my own head when we were driving on the bus. That surprised me and I think I need to really look at that when we get back."

"I learned that I'm really pretty anxious when I'm out of my element and that I start getting impulsive and selfish when I'm anxious. I was surprised to be so anxious and surprised I started struggling so soon after leaving the Ranch."

Danny's Story

In Balance Ranch Academy's academic model is based on the foundation that all students will learn when the instructional approach matches the individual student's learning style. In addition, we believe a relationship-based, positive learning climate is essential for each student to reach his potential. Students naturally find the motivation to excel and reach their academic and career goals when they are engaged in a collaborative decision-making/learning process with their peers and teachers.

One of our students, Daniel A., requested that his story be included in this quarter's newsletter. Daniel's story is rife with emotions of frustration, hopelessness, and, finally, accomplishment. While his experience is unique to him, many other students we work with share the struggles of previous academic failure and the resulting negative effects that pervade all other areas of their lives. For our students, success in school is essential to empowerment in all facets of their lives.

My name is Daniel A. and I am a student at In Balance Ranch Academy. I would like to share with you how I went from a hopeless state of mind to becoming a confident high school graduate with a great future ahead of me.

I came to In Balance Ranch with a number of problems. However, the one I felt most hopeless about was the idea of graduating from high school. Well, really, completing any lessons at all seemed hopeless and overwhelming. I thought I was different than anyone else when it came to school because all of my life I could never meet the expectations of my teachers. I truly believed school success was impossible for me and that I had no future. After arriving at the ranch, I let Lynda know immediately that I was hopeless and could not do any schoolwork, even if my life depended on it. I had only earned six high school credits in the past three years and still needed to complete fifteen more to earn my diploma; I couldn't even begin to visualize myself doing that.

Despite all of my previous failure and school-related depression, my dad had faith that I was capable of achieving my diploma. He insisted that I complete both the therapeutic and academic parts of the program, which meant I had to complete high school before I could go home. At the time, I felt as if my whole world had just collapsed; I had to finish high school when the reality was that during my entire life I hadn't accomplished anything academically.

Two things turned around my frustration and anger and propelled me on a positive path: I committed to working as hard as necessary, and I decided to accept the help my teachers and peer study-groups were willing to give me. With their help and God's help, I began to do well. As soon as I started to do better, I had faith in myself and things really changed for me. Once I was open to the idea of success, I experienced it.

I have just finished the requirements for my diploma and am happy to have completed the hardest task I have ever attempted. I am also a year sober and am grateful for all of the help I received to make both of these goals possible. Thanks for reading my story. I hope it may help someone else who is struggling in a dark situation.

From Our Parents

"Thanks for a phenomenal weekend. Our entire family had a wonderful time just spending time together. We picked up a few pointers about communication that we are committed to implementing."

"Thanks, Betsy. I know you're really busy, but for several weeks I have been meaning to just say THANK YOU to you and Patrick. Our son was friends with an 18 year old who died of an overdose at his parents home in our neighborhood a few weeks ago. It reminded me that you literally are dealing with life and death situations, and just how lucky the community is that you are willing to sponsor your programs. Keep up the incredible work, and trust that my wife and I are behind you 100%."

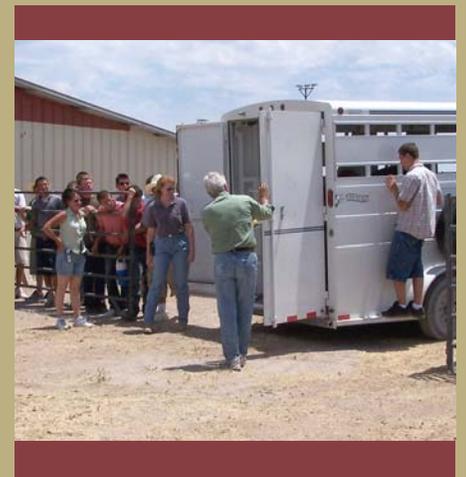
"My son Nicholas has been at In Balance since April of 2005, and in that period of time has become a "new" person. His sense of self, connection to people, nature, and animals, and overall understanding of the human condition, is exemplary, and has emerged as a result of his experience at In Balance. In all, we see our son, who was so troubled and who we almost lost only one year ago, becoming a wonderful loving young man who will make a real contribution to a better world."

A Gift from God

The following is an article written by a student about meeting Fred Rai and his eventual donation of all of his horses to In Balance Ranch Academy. Although he had numerous offers to buy his horses, he wanted them to be loved and cared for until the end of their days. He heard about us through one of our local staff and invited us to his ranch to meet him and the horses. I brought a van-full of students and we had an amazing time. Our relationship-based approach and Natural Horsemanship practices through Parelli Natural Horsemanship training resonated with Fred and he decided to donate all of his horses to our program. We are grateful to Fred and to his horses for adding their love and energy to our equine program.

As we pulled up in the van one Sunday morning to Fred Rai's ranch a feeling of serenity ran through my body. As soon as I saw him with his horses I was amazed at how beautiful they were. When I went into their pasture they all came up to greet me. They are some of the friendliest animals I have ever met. It was also an honor to meet Fred himself. I can't believe I actually shook his hand and made a great friendship with him. I consider it an honor to have his horses here at this ranch. I love them and I think when he turned them over to us he knew they were going to a special place. I look up to him a lot and someday I would like to be just like him. (A real cowboy, and a skilled trainer.) It was very nice of him to donate his horses to us and I can't thank him enough. Anyway we at the ranch love them and look forward to riding them all the time.

Hunter W.



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In Service...

Like this car (and semi!) wash, community-based projects, both on and off campus, instill the values of service, empathy, and leadership. Our students are involved in a variety of service projects, including the rescue and rehabilitation of horses, helping to teach riding to children with disabilities and volunteering time to other organizations. Josh Heide, Intake Supervisor at World Care appreciates the time the students give to the charity. World Care provides items to numerous places in the community and around the world. "The volunteers are how we stay alive," said Heide.



In Training...

Natural Horsemanship is about learning how horses interact with each other naturally; creating partnership, leadership, harmony, and fun with your horse through ground games and riding skills; and ultimately it's about self-awareness, other awareness, and relationship building in one's life. Linda Green, a Three Star Parelli Certified Trainer provides us guidance through workshops and certifications of our Level skills. For more information on this approach to interactions with horses see www.parelli.com.



In Touch...

Great news from the electronic frontier! We have recently installed a bigger satellite dish at the Ranch. This allows us to keep a better connection to the Internet and are planning to hardwire all staff buildings to make it easier for staff and families to communicate on a more regular basis.

In Addition...

In Balance Counseling is pleased to announce the opening of its Transitional Living Program on May 1, 2006. More information will be available on the Ranch website — www.inbalranch.com

The *Ranch Hand* is published four times per year by In Balance Ranch Academy. Please visit our website at www.inbalranch.com for the latest information about our services. Admissions questions may be directed to Betsy Barrasso at (520) 722-9631.