

Horses provide support to navigate our journey with cancer...



Rayna & Chase Your Dreams

No prescription required!

There are many reasons that I am reminded that I have incurred a loss due to breast cancer. It is not only during breast cancer awareness month or world cancer day, there are many times every year. My grandmother was one of, if not, the first woman in Canada to have a mastectomy and then a double mastectomy. Breast cancer ended her life when she was 61. Her daughter, my mother, also had her life cut short at age 61 when she lost her battle with breast cancer.

While managing doctor's appointments, treatments and protocols there is an element of self-care required by all – those with the diagnosis and those that are in a supporting role.

For me, I was 'support'. Helping when and where I could... But I found that I would get lost in the 'medicalness' of all the processes, forgetting the human element of caring for self. There was nothing I could do to 'fix' or 'save' my mother... I felt completely powerless...

To help manage all that was coming forward around me and from within me; stress, anger, grief, anxiety, depression just to name a few, I tried many different traditional therapies. Most of these types of therapies would have me continue to dive into the 'story' or revisiting each situation, which felt like I was being continuously triggered each time I spoke of the circumstances. It was not until I got off the couch, both my living room and from the therapists offices, that I found the greatest success managing my feelings, emotions, thoughts and expressions occurred when I connected with a herd of FEEL (*Facilitated Equine Experiential Learning*) horses...

A champion of this type of horse work and the therapeutic benefits of learning with horses while navigating cancer was Tammy MacDonald Doran. Unfortunately, Tammy lost her battle with breast cancer in the spring of 2020.

In memory of Tammy, her family and friends provided a donation to The FEEL Breast Cancer Fund, which helps subsidize sessions for individuals, families or groups supported through Horse Spirit Connections.

These three women, each diagnosed with breast cancer; Jessa at 28, Emma at 27 and Alison at 40, share their therapeutic experiences with horses during their FEEL sessions.

Rayna Morrison (RM) ~ How much horse experience did you have before your first horse session?

Jessa (J) ~ Absolutely none! Horses actually scared and terrified me. They are big and powerful, I was very nervous to be around a horse.

Emma (E) ~ I did a bit of horseback riding when I was much younger, but no experience healing with horses until I started my horse sessions.

Alison (A) ~ My daughter had a horse and I would help her groom and walk him, but I would not say I was a horse-woman or expert by any means.

RM ~ At what stage in your diagnosis or treatment did you connect with horses?

J ~ It was within a few months of receiving my diagnosis that I recognized that the forms of therapies I was involved were not working for me.

E ~ I was into the chemo stage of my treatment and I knew I needed to do something different. The talk therapy was not helping me with the feelings that there is something inside my body that is trying to kill me.

A ~ I did not start working with the horses until 7 years after I was clear of cancer. During my cancer treatment, I had gone through a divorce and another separation with partner. I thought I was 'dealing' with things, but not in a constructive way. I needed a place where I could heal, all of me; emotionally, physically, mentally. Connecting with the horses has given me a way to move forward. I call the horse work the opening of my golden window.



Alison & Mylo



Emma & Magnum



Jessa & Kolby

RM ~ Please describe your first FEEL horse session?

J ~ It was supportive. I was not the 'Girl with Cancer'. I was able to connect with two horses, Dallas and Tina. During my session, I was able to release & purge without feeling like I was being judged or criticized for what I was saying or doing.

E ~ Being with horses for the first time, I was nervous about what to expect. Once I realized that the horses were not going to 'ask' me anything, I was able to relax. It was the first time since my diagnosis that I was able to actually take a deep breath and breathe.

A ~ I had a very good long cry with a horse named Dusty. At first, I was just talking to her. we were not even talking about my cancer... and then the tears around my cancer started to flow. The tears were filled with fear. I was able to fully release these tears with her in a way I had not been able to do before in a traditional therapy setting.

RM ~ What are some of the benefits you found through your sessions with the horses?

J ~ The horses helped pull me out of the depression I was falling into. Being in their presence gave me a joyful experience. They live in the moment and now I live my life moment to moment. The horses support a therapeutic safe space for healing.

E ~ The horses do not do a medical check-in about the treatments or medications. They do not care about the story of your cancer journey. They only care about what you need in that moment. Some days when I was feeling really tired and worn out, I would sit in the field with the horses grazing around, just being in the presence of horses as if you are one in their herd. Learning from the horses to be horse-like has been so beneficial to my wellbeing.

A ~ The reason I like being with the horses is that they provide unconditional acceptance. They remind me that I am loveable. That I am beautiful. That I am a woman. They did not care that I had both my breasts removed. To them, I am a beautiful soul. When I am not with the horses, I am able to draw on the strength they have shown me that I have, that I can release without judgment, that I am truly in control on my own life. The lessons that horses have shared are always with me.

RM ~ How many sessions did you have before realizing a benefit?

J ~ I recognized a benefit during my first session. It was totally different. I felt totally supported, no judgement. Free to express myself and I learned more about myself in that one session than in the countless sessions with a therapist.

E ~ The first session had amazing benefits for me. I was able to realize all the fear I was holding and release that fear with total support of the horses. Each session has an amazing benefit, and those benefits are always with me, even when I have left the farm, I can still feel the support from the horses.

A ~ Being around my daughter's horse, I always found it peaceful and relaxing. Doing a horse session, I found the benefits amazing. I never would have guessed that one session could make me feel free.

RM ~ *How would you describe a horse session to someone?*

J ~ Each session is different depending on where you are within yourself and how you arrive. It is a safe space. Totally Supportive. There is no prescription for a session. It is based on what you need at that moment in time.

E ~ These sessions are not clinical. It is very therapeutic experience guided by a spirited and magical animal. You are not alone in the ring with the horse. You have your facilitator with you. They will offer interpretation of what the horses are showing or trying to communicate. I always feel very safe and supported.

A ~ Horses are intuitive. They have the ability to get to the root of any situation quickly and with grace and ease. They are non-judgmental. A horse will never be mad if you show up late because you are feeling sick, they are glad you showed up. The world of cancer can make you feel out of control. A session with horses makes you realize that you do have control and power over your own life. The horses teach you to tap into your body knowing.

RM ~ *From your sessions, do you have an Ah-Hah moment that you would like to share?*

J ~ Sometimes the horses would make me aware of something that I had never noticed. One thing that the horses brought up was I was hyper-focused on my cancer instead of moving forward. Everything in my life was focused on cancer and when the horses showed me that I was paying so much attention to the cancer and not where I was going in life, the cancer was becoming my life. It was a very unique realization that has stayed with me and I do my best not to let cancer be the sole focus of my life, but to keep living my life.

E ~ Don't sweat the small stuff. I feel as if I got sick, to have a reason to connect with the horses, to make myself a better person. I am now Emma2.0!! From the work with the horses, I have been able to find the good in every situation. That is powerful. I am not a victim.

A ~ That the horses were and continue to be instrumental in my healing. They taught me that being authentic is safe. How to deal positively with my emotions. That it is ok to be emotional. That is part of the releasing to find your power. Working with the horses has allowed me to feel in control of my life again.

RM ~ *Would you recommend a horse session for someone in a support role?*

J ~ My mother-in-law has had her own horse sessions. She noticed the positive changes that were occurring in me and wanted to have the opportunity to have her own experiences.

E ~ My son, Lucas who was five at the time, joined me and we did a horse session together. It was an opportunity for him to see that his mother was not dying. That I was still able to do things, like lift the leg of a 1,500lb animal, or lead this big horse around the ring. My son had the opportunity to express some of the feelings he was dealing with in a very positive way because of the support of the horses and our facilitator. It was something unique that we did together that had nothing to do with cancer. We had a special treat, as most of the sessions are done on the ground, we were both able to get on the horse and ride together. When my son sees a horse, or speaks of this day, it is always filled with laughter and love. Cancer has no influence on those memories.

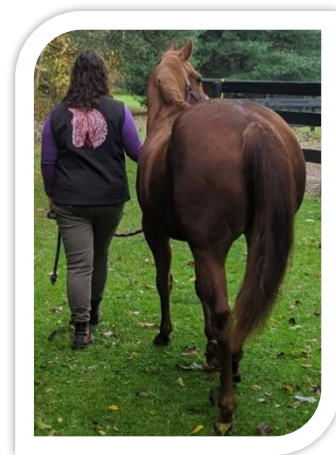


Jessa & Tina



Emma, son Lucas & Dallas

A ~ There is a lot of fear and anger that many caregivers deal with. Their care and wellbeing is very underserved. Horse sessions would provide them the support and understanding that they require, few speak of the needs of those helping keep life together during cancer. Having horse sessions for those in supporting roles; partners, husbands, children, friends, would be of great benefit.



Jessa & Tina

RM ~ *In one line, how would you define a horse session?*

J ~ A safe space of empowerment.

E ~ A place without judgment or expectations.

A ~ A sacred place of healing, a healthy refuge.

RM ~ *Is there anything else you wish to share for those navigating a journey with cancer?*

J ~ Horses don't care when you lose your hair, they don't care if you don't have eyelashes, they don't care if you just need a space to no longer be the 'positive cancer girl'. They don't give you sad looks or expect you to be strong. Horses give you the freedom to let your guard down and to just be real. The horses hold the space for you, so you are able to let your walls down and feel the emotions that you need to experience in order to deal with and grow.

E ~ You can feel safe opening up to the horses. They've kept every secret I've ever shared with them.

A ~ Stay open to the possibilities. Trust Me!

RM ~ My learning with the horses has helped me move through and embrace the emotions of a girl who lost both her mother and grandmother, many friends and now, as a woman, navigating an extensive family history and strong genetics of breast cancer from a place of negativity, anxiety, fear, pain, grief, sadness to a place of empowerment, release, understanding and acceptance.



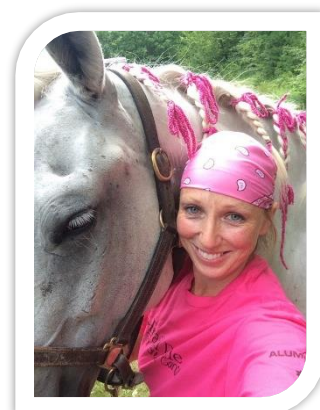
Alison & Mylo

The fear of what might be, that one day I will get cancer because of the history that flows through my veins, has been released and the acceptance of what is possible now fills my heart and soul. I continue to make it part of my regular self-care to schedule my own therapeutic equine sessions, when things in my life are going smoothly and especially when things seem to be going sideways.

The FEEL horses mentor me to a place of inner peace; where I have a choice, I have a voice and I am in charge of how I will react to all that life brings forward. The horses offer me a safe place to deal with any situation I face and all the emotions I feel. They guide me as I embrace my personal power, my self-confidence and let the beautiful light within me shine forth as I welcome each new day.

Rayna Morrison ~

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The horse sessions were facilitated under FEEL (Facilitated Equine Experiential Learning), a modality at Horse Spirit Connections and Navigate Life Positively. To find out more about the FEEL Breast Cancer Fund or to schedule time with our horse partners, please contact Horse Spirit Connections at www.HorseSpiritConnections.com.



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