

“If your dream doesn't scare you, it isn't big enough.”
– **Mark Batterson**

For as long as I can remember I have been a dreamer. I often felt alone, because the only person who understood and supported my crazy dreams was my Dad. He would always tell me, “Stephanie, you are the toughest person I know.” No matter the dream, he would tell me to go for it. He was my biggest cheer leader growing up and throughout much of my adult life. I had no idea that so many of the things I had dreamt of all my life would manifest into a life changing mission.

Growing up I remember having a deep love of horses. From dressing up as a cowgirl and riding the rocking horse in the backyard, to going on actual cattle drives, or just riding around my grandparents farm on their various horses. I knew when I was young I wanted horses when I grew up. Time passed and the dream was buried as life became filled with adult responsibilities.

Throughout my childhood my parents encouraged me to participate on mission trips including building homes in Mexico, tree planting on a Navajo reservation, and teaching vacation bible school on a reservation in Canada. Serving others became an important part of my life. As I grew, I developed an immense love for the military. Serving in the military did not seem like the right fit for me, but I wanted to serve my country in some way.

Through life's twists and turns, I found myself working for the federal government. I excelled in my position as a Contracting Officer and became consumed in my career not wanting to acknowledge the trauma that was beginning to reemerge, brewing just beneath the surface. It had been there for years burrowing deep into my mind, body, and soul turning everything it touched black.

In 2012 I fell into a valley of darkness and despair. Everything in my world seemed to be moving at a pace that my mind could not keep up with. I was exhausted. I just needed things to stop; I needed to be able to take a breath. I found myself on the edge; within moments of making my world stop...for good. Someone was watching over me. In those moments of despair, I found a beacon of hope, my lighthouse in the storm.

I was able to recover from that experience not realizing I had not really dealt with the trauma, but I had once again found a way to silence it for the time being.

Over the next few years stresses in my world eroded away my health. I struggled with back pain so severe there were days I could not walk. In 2017 my health deteriorated so badly that I was struggling thinking, walking, and eating. I could barely function.

My husband was helpless as I continued to deteriorate. I struggled taking care of my kids, including my youngest who was just over a year old who was also struggling with medical issues. Life was hard.

In 2018 I collapsed mentally, physically, and emotionally. The doctors told me I had to leave my job, or it was going to kill me. I told them I couldn't quit, but that I just needed a little more time and then I would take a break. They told me I wouldn't make it. I did not listen. I went to work the following day but could barely function. I hit rock bottom. I either had to ask for help or my body was going to give up. I made the decision I wanted to live, but not just live, truly be alive.

With the incredible support of my husband, I took a leave of absence from work and sought out help. Realizing the standard approaches had not helped me, I sought out unique healing methodologies and quickly realized that my road back to health and healing was going to take a community of healers. I learned to meditate and listen to my body. I started working with a doctor who helped me with my diet, hormones, and exercise. However, I struggled trying to find someone to help me with the emotional trauma. I had tried counselors, and a psychiatrist over the years, but they weren't the right fit for me. And then I found Stephanie Shipper with Reaction Resources. Little did I know my life was about to change...FOREVER!

I began working with Stephanie. She had a truly unique approach. After the first session the constant racing in my mind was gone. The world had finally slowed down enough where I could take a breath. I had no idea that the mental racing in my mind was exhausting me physically. A few more sessions and I continued to see unimaginable progress. Then in the summer of 2018 I had the session that changed my life. It was at that session that I realized I wanted to start a horse therapy program for Veterans. In that moment the name came to me.... Valley of Hope. I left Stephanie's office and immediately began taking steps to make the vision a reality.

In the fall of 2018, I purchased a very sick rescue horse, Roxy, who I nursed back to health. She has been my teacher and healer over the past few years. In 2019 Valley of Hope became a 501(c)(3). In 2020 my husband and I purchased 10 acres and added a miniature pony, and a miniature mule to our herd. I have spent my time developing a business plan, saving money to hire a website developer, and learning everything I could about how to care for horses, equine therapy, and building a non-profit from the ground up. While I wanted this dream to happen as fast as possible, I wanted to be thoughtful and sensible every step of the way.

As I looked back, I started to realize there were signs in my life pointing me on this path. Signs I had overlooked through the years. One such sign happened at my daughters sixth grade graduation. The guest speaker was talking about his work with wild horses through a non-profit. I remember thinking how much I would love to do that. I began researching the guest speaker. His name was Mo Brings Plenty and he was working with an organization called the CANA Foundation. I learned he was an actor on my new favorite series... Yellowstone. (What were the odds this actor was guest speaking at a graduation for a school in the suburbs of Kansas City, Missouri?)

I spent a great deal of time researching horses and trying to figure out which breed would be a good fit for a horse therapy program. I loved the idea of rescue horses, specifically drafts. Then one day I was reading about the Nokota and I knew it was the horse for the program. I was sure

when I saw a post online from the CANA Foundation about The Nokota Horse Conservancy. It was the sign confirmed.

I was also noticing miracles on my journey:

I spent months trying to learn the process for starting a non-profit. I spoke with lawyers and was told the paperwork process alone was going to cost \$4,000. Then one day I was walking in the grocery store and ran into an old neighbor. She asked what I was up to and I shared with her my dream. She gave me the number of an accountant who was willing to prepare all the necessary documentation at no expense. I met with him the following week and we filed everything including the federal tax-exempt documentation. He charged me less than \$200.00 for everything, and he continues to help me today.

In 2019 my husband and I decided we were going to start looking for a new home. We spent months looking at home after home. Many were not the right fit, but homes that we were interested in sold fast or we were unable to come to agreement on the terms. We had been making improvements on our home and had mentioned our plans to sell the house to our neighbor. The neighbor informed us that the previous owners wanted to buy the house back. So, they made us an offer and we accepted.

Knowing the housing market, we decided it was time to find a rental and give up on the house search for the time being. Then one Friday morning a house posted, and we decided to take a look. As we drove out to the property it did not seem like the right fit. We did the walk-thru and still were not sure. We started to imagine our lives there and began to get excited. We submitted an offer with a letter outlining our dream(s). Fifteen offers were received within 2 days. The owners narrowed it down to 2 offers and in the end, we were selected. We were told we had offered significantly less than the other offeror. Before moving in I was looking through some of my favorite sites and realized one of the horse rescues I had been following was my new neighbor.