

My second home is Old Friends at Cabin Creek in New York, a small satellite farm branched off of Old Friends in Kentucky. The volunteers at Old Friends along with its fifteen equine residents have become a second family to me. I started volunteering in February of 2012 and have been there ever since. I am so grateful to be a part of an organization that does so much for these beautiful and sentient beings.

Three months before I started volunteering, my mother left my family and my parents divorced. It was one of the most unexpected and difficult events I have faced. I started volunteering because I thought it would be something fun to do and somewhere to spend the weekends. As I became more involved, I realized that this wasn't just a side thing for me to do. It was serious. There are thousands of horses in danger and my job as a volunteer is to educate the public as well. While volunteering is fun, it also requires a true passion and concern for the well-being of horses everywhere, not just the few in our care. Horses teach us so much and we should allow every horse the opportunity to share its world with us.

This idea resonated with me when one of our stallions passed away. His name was Key Contender. He arrived at the farm about two weeks after I did. He was so gentle and kind-hearted. We became very good friends right away and we had a relationship that was different than any of my relationships with the other horses. We were learning together.

In late June of 2012, Key Contender suddenly colicked and died early the next morning. My reaction wasn't one to be expected. I did not immediately feel sad and I did not feel despair. I only felt gratitude. Key Contender taught me so much. He taught me that many people hide behind masks, shielding their insecurities and worries from the world. Key could see right through those masks and saw the real me when many others didn't. I had been wearing a mask ever since my mother left. I had been hiding how truly shaken I was (and am) about my parents' divorce. But Key understood me. I used to talk to him and he would stand at the fence and nuzzle the hair on the top of my head. It has taken me a long time to come to terms with the fact that I was wearing a mask to hide how truly sad and disappointed I was (and still am). Even when I wrote a "eulogy" for Key's funeral explaining how he could read through masks, I still didn't realize that I was one of the people. But I do now. And I finally understand the relationship we had.

Old Friends at Cabin Creek has changed my life because it has given me hope when I had no faith and has raised me up high when I was low. They have saved horses that have taught me valuable life lessons that have helped me through the lowest points in my life. Had it not been for Old Friends, I most likely wouldn't be as collected and sane as I am today. Old Friends has been my therapy and has gotten me through the hardest time of my life. I still struggle with depression and anxiety almost every day, but I am so lucky to be loved by not just one family, but two.

Mary Eddy