

An Amazing Reunion – Larry’s Story

In January of 2024, HRET received an email from Katie who was writing on behalf of her grandfather, Papa, Larry Egner. Here is Larry’s story.

Papa grew up on a family farm in Wisconsin, where he spent his formative years alongside his buggy horse named Beauty. He told tales of horseback adventures both on the farm and through opportunities with Hines VA Hospital at BraveHearts In Harvard, IL. The once-vibrant VA program that whisked veterans to BraveHearts became a mere memory, leaving Papa yearning for the hoofbeats of the past.

In November of 2023 Papa was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer which cast a huge shadow over our lives. Papa’s spirit, however, remained unbroken.

On one ride home from an oncology appointment, Papa recounted the ribbons he had won during his time with his horse at BraveHearts. He began to wonder if his horse – Shiloh - was still around. Since the horses were in their late 20s twelve years ago, the possibility seemed remote.

A four hour roundtrip to Harvard to find Shiloh seemed like an insurmountable challenge given Papa’s health. However, Papa was obsessed with finding the paint. Whenever I took him to a stable to just look at horses, he was always on the lookout for his Shiloh.

Katie finds HRET



One day HRET popped up in a computer search. It was a nearby stable that offered accessible support since Papa is in a wheelchair and on portable oxygen. I reached out to Marlene, the executive director of HRET and she extended a compassionate welcome. She and her team guided us through all of the necessary paperwork and medical consultations so that we could get Papa back up on a horse.

Finally, the awaited email arrived! Papa had a date for his first lesson!!

During our drive, Papa’s anticipation was palpable. He had started getting ready at 3 pm for a 7 pm lesson!

We started with a stable tour. Papa was being introduced to horses along the way. After the 3rd or 4th horse, I heard the name “Shiloh” . I turned to the volunteer next to me and said,

“If his name is Shiloh, it won’t even matter what he looks like, he’ll be fixated on that horse.” You see, Papa’s horse from BraveHearts was named Shiloh.

I then heard Papa exclaim, “Oh a paint···I love paints!” Suddenly, his gaze locked onto the nameplate, which said Shiloh, then back up to the paint and with unwavering certainty, he declared, “That’s my horse!!”

And sure enough, Shiloh had been purchased from BraveHearts by Marlene’s husband, Art!

As Papa approached Shiloh, the bond between them was undeniable. Shiloh remembered him after all these years. It was a reunion steeped in nostalgia and wonder, leaving everyone present in tears! An even bigger shock came when Grandma sent a picture of Papa riding Shiloh 12 years earlier at BraveHearts. In the photo Marlene was leading Shiloh and Larry around the arena for her PATH certification!!

The evening was incredible. Not only was Papa riding again, but he discovered that he and Art were both veterans with a shared history of time in Germany. What an incredible reunion.

As we departed the stables that evening, Papa’s face radiated with joy. Not only did his dream of getting on a horse again come true, but he and Shiloh were together again.

The Rest of the Story

Since that first lesson more amazing things have happened:

- Larry presented HRET and Shiloh with the ribbons they had won together.
- His initial visit has become a weekly class.
- He went from one lap to eight laps around the arena.
- God willing, Larry will be participating in the Special Olympics this coming fall with Shiloh.
- Larry competed in the HRET Spring Ride-a-thon and came in first place with the most money raised.
- Remember that Stage IV cancer, per Larry’s physician it’s in remission!! The doctors can’t explain it but told Larry to keep doing whatever he is doing.

That is truly what **Empowering** people through the **Spirit** of the horse means. This is just one example of the amazing things HRET staff, volunteers and participants experience through the bonding of people and horses.