“Okay everyone. It is time to look at the bacteria from the surfaces you chose and see how much they have grown in a week,” my biology lab teacher told us.

“What in the world did all of that come off of?” The girl across our table asked me, staring at our petri dish.

“We chose the bottom of my boot,” I replied.

“Wow.”

“That’s what happens when you work with animals every Saturday. I’m not surprised.”

“Well, alright then.”

“Oh my gosh!” I exclaimed.

“Breathe. It’s okay,” my friend said.

I sit up a little straighter, feeling tall for the first time in my life and pretty proud of myself. I look around. What a beautiful day. There is nothing quite like a perfect afternoon in West Texas. A slight breeze, and the smell of the outdoors. What does “outdoor” smell like? Animals and dirt. But where I come from, a little dirt never hurt anybody. Not a cloud in the sky or a chance of rain. That’s the kind of day we love.

“Easy Jesse,” I tell my horse. “Good boy. Let’s just walk.”

As we walk around the arena, I slowly start to relax a little.

“Your horse is only as calm as you are,” he added.

“This is okay. I feel better.”

You see, Jesse is not just an ordinary horse. He is the most beautiful bay colored quarter horse I have ever seen. He is also the first one I ever rode.
“Not too bad for my first time, right?”

“Right,” my friend agreed.

“Hello?” my best friend said, finally answering her phone, when I called her later that day.

“We have a problem.” I replied.

“Well, what is the problem?”

“I think I’m love.”

“Oh! Wow. That’s pretty awesome.”

“I could get used to this.”

“This” is what we call “going to Deborah’s.” But we do not just ride for fun. It is all a part of her organization better known as Horses, Hearts and Hands (H3), which provides equine assisted therapy for people with special needs and veterans. Not only is this therapy good for the riders, it is also good for the horses, because each one has a problem. Jesse, for example, has polyps in his nose.

I love it when people ask why I get up before dawn on Saturday mornings. Winston Churchill once said that “there is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.” There has never been a more true statement. Two plus two might equal four, but the positive effects horses have on humans are truly indescribable. And that is why I get up before dawn on Saturday mornings. To see kids with special needs get so excited when they ride. To see how much the therapy helps them. And to be a part of something so special—that is well worth getting up for. It is not just good for our riders; it is good for our volunteers also. Not only do I get the chance to make a positive difference in the lives of others, but people can learn a lot from horses-like how to be patient and enjoy the little things in life. At first I was not sure about working with horses, but have decided to stay after getting my
scholarship hours in, and am now the official photographer. Add everything up, and volunteering at Horses, Hearts and Hands (H3) is an amazing experience.
Meet the horses! (And the dog).