

## An Open Letter from Shirley and Randy to Those That Loved Ebenezer

Many people have asked us why we wanted to help Ebenezer 2+ years ago. I thought I would try and explain some of the reasons I felt compelled to in hopes that it might inspire someone else to do the same.

We knew about Ebenezer because we were like many of you, we stopped one day with our young son in 1996 when we saw him standing out in his field and introduced ourselves. We were a little taken aback that this beautiful creature was alone on this little slice of heaven at the west end of Grandview. However, after that day we stopped infrequently because it was during the time our son was growing and finishing school and going off to college. I remember my mom calling me to tell me the donkey we visited was in the Kansas City newspaper on Christmas Day, 1997. That's when we learned his name was Ebenezer.

At some point I was visiting Ebenezer when the owner and his wife stopped by to check on him. It was Ben and Victoria Alvarado. I got their phone numbers (he tore the corner off of one of their bank deposit slips) in case I needed to get in touch with them and I gave them my number. I went home and taped their information into the front of our personal address book labeling it Ebenezer's mom and dad and it has been there ever since. Just like a lot of people that knew Ebenezer, I periodically would stop and feed him carrots or an apple when I passed by.

One morning in September of 2009 I felt like I should drive that way to work. What I saw shocked me enough to make me stop and back my car up in the street and drive onto the pad at the gate of Ebenezer's pasture. He was so thin I could see his bones. It was September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009. I just could not believe how bad he looked and all I could think was it was getting close to winter and he would never survive in that condition. That night on the way home from work I stopped and bought carrots and apples and I told Ebenezer that I would be coming back with food everyday and that I would get him fattened up before winter. Thus began my journey with Ebenezer. And eventually Randy would be helping me because my car was totaled and I needed transportation to and from work and he had to help me feed Ebenezer because I wasn't going to quit doing it. Randy and I became partners in an endeavor to save Ebenezer.

We went rain or shine, not knowing that donkeys don't like to get rained on because their hair doesn't repel water like a horse. There were times when Ebenezer would suddenly stop eating and he would move away from the fence and mucous would start coming out of his nose – a lot of it. I called Mr. Alvarado several times and asked what was going on with him and he said he had no idea.

As winter set in it got too cold for us to be standing out at his fence feeding him so we started going down to his shelter to feed him. We felt like trespassers but we were worried about Ebenezer. All he was wearing was a little kid's sleeping bag to keep warm and if it rained or snowed the thing would be soaking wet and Ebenezer would be chilled. We had to bring water for him because there was no running water on the place and the creek would be frozen solid. It was just so weird how Ebenezer eventually trained us that he wanted each type of food we gave him in separate pans. But, he would still have issues where he would stop eating and would jerk his neck and mucous would start coming from his nose and mouth. At the time we didn't realize he was choking on food. Or that his teeth were bad. Or that his hooves were diseased. And eventually he ended up with pneumonia from aspirating food into his lungs.

We found out all of that when we hired Dr. Wagner from Equine Health Solutions to come meet Ebenezer on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010. On January 15<sup>th</sup> Doc Wagner told us Ebenezer's blood work was good enough to make him a candidate to fix him up. However we only had a week to decide to get started or we needed to put him down because it was cruel to leave him in that condition. Our hearts sank when he told us it would be about \$1700 and that he needed to be in the clinic at Raymore to get him well. We sat down with Mr. Alvarado and his daughter and son-in-law at his home in Ruskin to discuss Ebe's health with them and he said he didn't have any money to do these things. The daughter and son-in-law didn't offer to contribute to help with the bill. In fact Mr. Alvarado volunteered that none of his five kids wanted to help Ebenezer. Randy and I were so overwhelmed that we cried over Ebenezer's fate.

I went to work and talked to friends about what we could do to raise money. Finally one of them suggested that we see if *The Kansas City Star* would run a story for us. And to my astonishment it only took one email to Don Bradley on Monday, February 1, 2010 and he asked if he could meet me out there that day at 4:30 pm. The next day the story appeared and the rest is history. We had enough money the day the story ran because somebody from St. Louis called and put \$1,000 on their credit card. The next day EHS had 96 pieces of mail to open and we knew we were going to help Ebenezer. Now we had to figure out how to get him there.

As Ebenezer's sign by his building said, "The Lord has helped us." And he did again and again. We had friends named Jr. and Francis Teague that had donated the metal sides for Ebe's barn. They had a daughter that loved horses and she had a horse trailer. So Marina Teague came to pick up Ebenezer on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February. When I went down to get him at his shelter I just kept telling him he needed to trust me and that it was going to be all right. It took about 3 tries to get him in the trailer, I messed up the second one and let go of him too soon or it would have been only two. I think he was scared to death to be in there but Marina did a wonderful job of going slow and taking nice and easy rounded corners. When we got to EHS he wanted to exit the trailer but he sure didn't want to

go in the building. The first thing he did was pooh on the doc when he took his temperature. He weighed in at 471 lbs. Then his journey began to regain his health. I went everyday that I could to see Ebenezer before I went to work. I didn't like Sundays because the clinic was closed so I couldn't go down and mess with him.

On February 28, 2010 we went back to talk to Mr. Alvarado, his daughter and son-in-law about replacing Ebenezer's barn. I wasn't sure how we were going to pay for it, but Dr. Wagner said that we had to have a dry environment to keep Ebe's hooves healthy. Mr. Alvarado wasn't too happy about the idea. He didn't want his property values to go up so he would have more taxes to pay. We finally got his permission and went to meet with the people at City Hall on March 10<sup>th</sup>. After much wrangling we were told as long as we replaced the building in the same spot it should not be a problem and should not cause Mr. Alvarado's property taxes to go up. We talked to Greg Melcher who lived around the corner from Ebenezer's property about putting up the building all the while wondering to ourselves how we were going to pay for it. Again, the Lord helped us. The company I worked for sold in February and as part of the deal I became fully vested in a small 401k and it was just enough money to build the barn after I had the taxes and penalties taken out of it. On March 30<sup>th</sup> the concrete floor was poured for the new barn. Randy and I salvaged items from the old barn, had a metal junk dealer come and pick up a bunch of old metal, and had a lot of the old unusable wood taken off to be burned. There were roaches and bugs galore in stacks of wood that were used for dog-eared fencing. It was gross especially when we thought about the fact that Ebenezer used to lay by that stack of wood in the old building because it was the only place the ground wasn't wet.

Unfortunately there was lots of set backs caused by the weather so Ebe had to stay longer than he really needed to at EHS while we worked on his building. I lost my job on April 7<sup>th</sup> which I should have known was the Lord helping me again. I got to spend more time with Ebenezer at EHS and I got to work on the property cleaning it up while Randy was working. That was my little slice of heaven. Finally we got enough improvements made and fencing up to keep Ebenezer out of the creek and it was time to bring him home. It was a crisp but sunny spring day on Wednesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>. Marina Teague picked him up at EHS and I followed in my car. I did great until we got to coming down the big hill to the property and it hit me that he was finally going to be home and he was healthy. I cried when he came down out of the trailer.

So many people had helped us at this point it was overwhelming. We had over 400 cards and letters and donations from all over the country. That was pretty good stuff for a 31 year old donkey from Grandview who had no idea he was receiving the red carpet treatment. Good old Ebenezer, he just wanted to head butt some people and get on with his life.

That summer with Ebenezer is something I will never forget. We became good buddies. He loved Randy because he would kind of wrestle with him some. Me, I just always had kisses and love pats and lots of combing and fussing over him. I learned to pick hooves, take his temperature, clean and dress wounds, and how to give dewormer and eventually injections, what fly spray worked best, what fly traps worked best, and I could sure muck out a stall. I would not trade any of the minutes and hours I spent with Ebenezer for anything. The unconditional love he gave was something I will always cherish.

As a tribute to Ebenezer and the community that loved him and saved him, Randy and I would like to have an artist named Paul McGovney (see Pegasus on the Country Club Plaza) sculpt a bronze life-size statue of Ebe and have it installed at City Hall. I don't have everything in place yet to do this but it is our dream because of the way Ebenezer was friendly to everyone. He was considered the unofficial goodwill ambassador of Grandview and was honored in the Harry's Hay Days Parade as the Grand Marshall for 2010. Countless people stopped to tell us how Ebenezer had helped them or their families get through rough times. I used to tell Dr. Wagner that I thought Ebe was like a confessional, people came and talked to him and went away feeling better. And back in the day, that is how Ebenezer existed, getting handouts of food from well-meaning passers by. God Bless you all for that. And without Mr. Alvarado there wouldn't have been an Ebenezer and without God, none of us would have understood the special qualities of this beautiful creature.

So, I would really like to hear from you. Give me your thoughts, good or bad when it comes to honoring this special "citizen" of the greater Kansas City area. My email is [shirleyphillips@kc.rr.com](mailto:shirleyphillips@kc.rr.com). I will let you know what the City has to say and how we will collect the money to get it done. It may not be this year on the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Grandview but it sure would be fitting for one larger than life donkey named Ebenezer if we could!

Ebenezer has his own Facebook page at Ebenezer TheDonkey. Please share any memories or photos that you have of Ebenezer. Information is also updated frequently at [www.Ebenezerthedonkey.com](http://www.Ebenezerthedonkey.com) by Joe Dimino. There are so many wonderful & creative people that cared about him. Enjoy the many tributes to Ebenezer posted on both sites – it will do your heart good.

**God bless all of you for your kindnesses to our buddy Ebenezer,**

Shirley & Randy