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Style Show set for September 19

by *Tim Campbell*
Chief Financial Officer

The 47th Annual Healing Hearts Celebration is coming up on September 19th, 2023 at the Y.O. Ranch Hotel and Conference Center in Kerrville, Texas. This much anticipated annual event, produced by the Hill Country Youth Ranch Auxiliary, raises funds for the Ranch's Enrichment Programs, a wide array of life-enhancing activities that serve as pathways for healing and growth for Ranch residents.

The doors open at 9 a.m. for special access to the boutique (best of the best clothing, jewelry, and accessories accumulated all year at the HCYR Thrift Shop), bidding on 100 carefully curated silent auction packages, raffle ticket purchases, and the opportunity to mingle and catch up with friends.

Lunch is served and the program starts promptly at 11 a.m. and runs through 1:00 p.m. Ac-

tivities include a delicious plated lunch, style show, HCYR mission focus and drive, live auction, and raffle winner reveals.

Space is limited for this, the longest-running charity event in the Texas Hill Country. The first Style Show, held in 1977 at the River Inn north of Hunt, was the first event sponsored by the newly formed HCYR Auxiliary.

Only 500 seats are available and tickets are selling fast. Individual tickets cost \$60, or purchase a whole table of 10 for \$600. Sponsorship (which includes a table of 10) and underwriting packages (includes two tickets) are available as well to showcase your company and your support for Hill Country Youth Ranch.

If you support the Ranch but are unable to participate in person, we have a solution for you! The program portion of the event will be live-streamed for viewing anywhere. You can secure a virtual ticket at no cost from the

event website and watch the activities from the comfort of your home/office with the opportunity to bid on silent auction items, participate in raffles, and donate during the mission drive. No matter where you live, there's an opportunity to be involved in our biggest event of the year!

How to purchase tickets and tables!

To purchase your tickets via credit/debit card just type bit.ly/healinghearts23 into your web browser or scan this QR code with your phone.

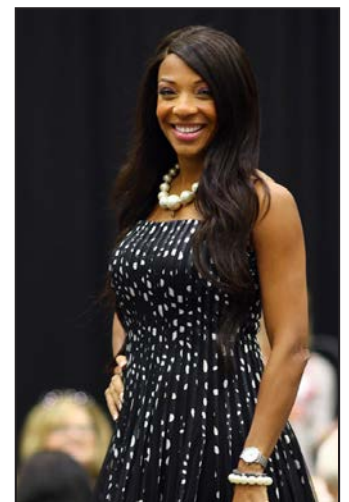
To pay by check, please make your check payable to HCYR Auxiliary, indicate how many tickets/tables you want to purchase, include your email address for confirmation, and mail your check to Carolyn Richardson at 515 E Nottingham Dr, San Antonio, TX, 78209.

Questions? Call or email Tim Campbell at 830-367-6107 or tcampbell@youth-ranch.org.

Hope you can join us in person or online for this year's Healing Hearts Celebration!



HCYR's annual fundraiser – the Healing Hearts Celebration – features an amazing array of art and decorative items, jewelry, and unique items in a silent auction (far left), an entertaining live auction, and a mega-affle. All topped off with a sales boutique (top left), a wonderful plated lunch (bottom left), and (right), the pièce de résistance, our 47th annual Style Show. Don't miss it!



A Call to Action – the time for us is now

by Krystle Ramsay
Executive Director

As I began thinking and praying about this article, I struggled with how to convey what God had laid on my heart. As Christians, we often assume that God will just tell us what we need to do and how to do it. God says “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). In my preparation, He reminded me of an article I wrote in October 2019. We had just announced my upcoming transition to Executive Director and we were preparing for the next season.

In that article I wrote, ‘As long as I can remember, I knew I was called to work with children. I remember when Lily walked into my Nursery Class and feeling instantly drawn to her. She was adopted and I remember telling my mother that adoption was in my future. There was a shift in my heart and a whisper in my ear. I would have my own Lily. I did not know what that meant or what that would look like but I knew in that moment, God spoke it and I believed it.

As a young child, God began to stir in my heart the desire to work with children. Now looking back, I see how each moment,

each interaction, each experience was preparing me for my life’s mission and work. One thing I am certain of, my adoption story began on August 29, 2005. That stir in my heart and whisper in my ear was God leading me to HCYR where my adoption calling would come to fruition.’

Many things have changed in the years since Lily and in my eighteen years at HCYR. In all the wins, accomplishments, challenges, and setbacks, God’s faithfulness has not changed. We are in a season where we feel God is calling us to action in a way that requires us to completely step out in faith. For more than thirty years, HCYR has partnered with the State of Texas to care for children placed through the foster care system. Our state contracts have presented several challenges over the years and have impacted the way we care for children. Someone once told me, “you can’t fulfill God’s full plan and mission if you are in partnership with the State.” That comment resonated with me over the years while the fear of financial independence and responsibility caused me to debate the truth in it.

My humanness and Type A personality present quite the

challenge. I want God to show me the plan. I like goals, checklists, and spreadsheets but we all know that is not how God works. He reminded me of Elijah on Mount Carmel who tells the people, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; if Baal is God, follow him”. We all know how the story goes. Baal does not come through for the people and God shows up in a miraculous way. I King 18:38 says, “Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.”

I have no doubt in my mind that God has carried us through our journey. He commissioned us to care for his little ones and we will continue to answer that calling. As we move forward, we ask that you join us in prayer for direction, wisdom, and the financial resources to accomplish our goals. What we are doing is no small feat. We are stepping out in faith and asking you all to come along side of us.

We cannot continue to work within a system designed to limit and hinder individual growth and healing. Our children have endured so much in their short



lives. They are ripped from their families without any explanation to suffer through multiple placements and schools while never being able to establish real connections with a loving family. Then they finally feel safe enough to connect here to then be moved again because the State does not perceive HCYR as a family. In truth, we are often the only family children experience.

In recent years, changes in the law have made our role in foster care much more difficult. Federal legislation, evolving constantly, and a lawsuit brought against the Texas foster care system, seek to eradicate the need for homes that look like us because we threaten their political agenda. It has made government partnership

almost impossible.

I wish all children were able to experience a traditional Christian upbringing with loving parents. Unfortunately, we live in a broken world and traditional family dynamics are not the norm. In 2022, one in four children lived in homes without their fathers and more than 2.5 million children lived with their grandparents across the U.S. Families are struggling and the need is great.

So here we are, coming full circle. As Gary has said, “We are returning to our roots.” We seek a future free of state contracts. The charge is upon us. We move forward in faith and have been called to action to do this now. Angels have joined us in funding this initiative. Many more are needed.

"We are in a season where we feel God is calling us to action in a way that requires us to completely step out in faith."

*Krystle Ramsay
HCYR Executive Director*

**With God
all things are possible**

"Through a new initiative, we're now on the verge of being able to fund our renowned childcare program without state contracts. We ask for your prayers."

*Gary Priour, HCYR Founder
and Fundraising Director*

The Priour and Ramsay families walk toward the HCYR Chapel in 2019 as they plan a transition of leadership that began in 2020.

Generous giving opens return to family roots

by Gary Priour, Ranch Founder

We are returning to the place of our beginning, knowing that God has called us all these years to a unique, holistic version of child-care and youth development. He has put angels in our path to help us fulfill this mission, one step at a time over 47 years. Through a new initiative, we're now on the verge of being able to fund our renowned childcare program without state contracts. We ask for your prayers.

After building the first cabins, we opened in 1978 with private placements and volunteer house-parents. We added a few county placements as Child Protective Services grew after the passage of the 1975 Family Code, whose purpose included organizing Texas foster care for the first time.

There were no contract fees from the state during those early years, so we depended on a generous community, the HCYR Auxiliary, and special events like our telethons and auctions to fund our programs. Growth was remarkable.

1980s

1979-1989 – The original campus near Ingram grew from 2 cabins housing 16 children to 8 cabins housing 64 children. HCYR became known as one of the premier programs in the state caring for emotionally troubled children. The stock market crash of 1987 caused the state to cut off all financial assistance for foster children. But we let all the children stay, and the community rallied, as they had when we first started building, to fill the gaps.

1990s

1990-2000 – Following the recession of the late 80s, the state organized a Level of Care system to provide reimbursement to facilities caring for severely traumatized children. A committee from Austin asked for a meeting at our Ingram campus, and during the meeting, the PRS Commissioner said, "Gary, you've been caring for some of the state's most difficult children and you even kept them during the recession. We appreciate the work you're doing, and would like to contract with you so you can get paid."

That meeting led to a partnership that lasted over a decade and fueled the addition of our two assessment centers and development of a full continuum of services to care for all levels of need. I was invited to join task forces during the PRS Sunset Review, and to participate in the planning of CPS statewide. I was honored to serve on committees with Commissioner Jim Hine, who became a friend. While on those committees, I never asked for more money, but rather for more time with children who needed us to become their long-term family, something that wasn't in the vision of the state planners, who thought all children should be moved to community foster care or adoption, despite statistics showing that the most traumatized children were often relationship averse and that their stability might depend on staying in the same community of caregivers for an extended time.

2000s

2001-2011 – This decade saw our most rapid expansion yet. We built a new children's village on the beautiful Big Springs Ranch near Leakey. We added the Charter School system in 2001 to further individualize education.

In 2008, we were given a defunct children's home near Ingram to start our long-dreamed-about Transitional Living Program for aged out foster youth so they would have what traditional families offer – a place to learn adult living skills while working or going to college.

During this time, we also pleaded with the state to stop moving children with a cookie-cutter approach. I testified in Austin and wrote articles on "The Other 10%" about children who needed stability more than a "one-size-fits-all" template. When the state didn't listen, I found sponsors for Family Code amendments at each legislative session from 2001 through 2011, calling for a "unified permanency planning team" to individualize decisions, giving providers, caseworkers and the children themselves a seat at the table before disruptive moves were made. When we failed again in 2011, I returned home to work on

raising an endowment to allow us to 'financially adopt' children and wean from state contracts – going back to where we had started.

2010s

2011-2022 – Our endowment campaign began in 2012 to increase the HCYR endowment and allow for financially adopting children who would otherwise be moved as they grew, without consultation with HCYR or the child. The former partnership with state officials soured during this decade as a federal judge intent on removing children from faith-based children's homes ended all possibilities of a reasonable solution, and the constant moving of kids without good reason escalated. After a pause during COVID to focus on programs needing protection, we have returned to our plan to replace state contracts with donor-funded private placements.

2023

In 2023 we are determined to open our homes at Big Springs Ranch, one bed at a time, to serve families, including grandparents and other kin, struggling to care for children who have been left with them, with no help from the state. Our announcement of this initiative brought encouraging responses from our readers, including from a friend who had followed our efforts for years and who is leading the way in gathering supporters to help fund each bed annually while we work on endowing them permanently. For more information, email me at gary@youth-ranch.org.

As I look around at 47 years of accomplishment in building three educational villages, and at over 2100 alumni out in the world breaking the cycle of abuse and living productive lives, I feel deeply fulfilled. I personally have just one last goal. It is to see us free of our dependence on state financing so that children who need us are not subjected to arbitrary and thoughtless decisions about their futures. They deserve to be stakeholders with a voice. This initiative will give them that voice.

Because our God who called us is faithful, He will give us the grace we need every step of the way, all the way to the finish line.

Pioneers lead the way, again



Liegh and Greg Brown, shown above with some of their boys on the front porch at Davenport Homestead, are taking the lead in converting their home to private placements to help children and families wanting to stay out of the state system. Davenport (below) was completed in 1998 and was the first house for children on Big Springs Ranch. It was constructed on the site of the original Haby pioneer home, built a century earlier, in 1890. So the pioneering continues!



Looking for a mission in life?

Big Springs Ranch for Children, located near Leakey on the banks of the Frio River, is looking for couples to help expand our new initiative to provide home and care for children being raised by grandparents or other kin who need help in their efforts to keep the children out of the state system but who lack the means or skills to become full-time parents themselves. A donor has generously offered to fill the financial gap by funding the first beds in the first house to create a model. A wonderful veteran couple (top) will be houseparents for the first house, Davenport Homestead (above). Our challenge is to find other couples and singles to expand the initiative to other houses on the campus, eventually rendering BSRC independent of state contracts, as has long been our goal.

Call Christy at 830-367-2131 for information about positions at BSRC (Leakey) or HCYR (Ingram)

HCYR Memorials & Honors

Each month HCYR receives memorial gifts honoring loved ones who have passed away and other gifts remembering special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Because they are so important to the daily operation of the Ranch, and in keeping with their two-fold purpose, we gratefully acknowledge all such gifts both in the newsletter and in cards sent to family members. The following list includes loved ones honored by gifts from June 7 through August 4, 2023.

In Memory Of:

BETTY BALES (*Grandmother*)
Brice & Vivian Ringo Webb
AUBREY BEADLE
Joe & Peggy McKay
BEA BODE
HCYR Auxiliary
TRUDY BRUNE
Nena and John Byers
Tim Campbell
Josh & Camille Green
Dave Hofer
Kathy Brune Iosue (*Happy Heavenly 90th Birthday*)
Cheryl Langreder
Gary & Carol Priour
Jonah & Faith Priour
Michael Priour
Kendall and Barbara Reynolds
Cindy & Michael Shulman
Mark & Cindy Thomas
DEWITT CAMP
Jake & Kari Short
MARY JANE CAMPBELL
Karen Brune
Marc & Lorrie Hess
Mary Sladky
JEANY COUGHRAN
Dora Lee Sewell
JOEL CRAIG
Gary & Carol Priour
Tivy Class of '52
JETT CREIGHTON
Ronnie & Rochelle Lumpkins
Royce & Gina Lumpkins
Joe & Roxanne Raymond
LLOYD DICKENS
Karen Brune
B. J. DUNLAP
Jake & Kari Short
NELDA DUNN
Lorna Barbour
Priscilla Fuentes
Karen & Ed Povlish
Laurie Staff
Lunch Group: Jo Ann,
Phyllis, Becky, Eva, Mary,
Amy & Lynetta
Sam & Susana Trevino
Jan Yaklin
CARRIE ERSCH
Edward & Sylvia Albrecht

LINDA LEWIS EWING
Gary & Carol Priour
Thomas Ewing
TOMALTA "TOMMIE" GROSS
Royce & Karen Herbort
RUTHIE HARZ
Carolyn Jo Goodall
ALVIN JAMES HELMERS
Elroy & Doris Behrends
WILLIAM HUFFMAN
Kermit & Marian Strackbein
EDWARD & RUTH KIRK
Benny & Penny Grimmer
ROBBY LOVING
Frances Loving
CAROLINE GLORY MCGOWEN
(*Precious Baby*)
Mary Jane Morrison
STEVE MELTZER
Bill & Lynda Tolleson
RANDY MOORMAN
Karen Brune
CECIL & PEGGY NORVILLE
Donald & Betty Norville
CHARLES LEWIS PENCE
Jake & Kari Short
JERRY POLLOCK
Billie Stoepler
DOMINGA P. RAMIREZ
Arnold & Suzel Vela
GUADALUPE RAMIREZ
Richard Cantu
DEE ROBINSON
Edward (Rob) Robinson
CHARLES ROCKETT
David Adamek
HAZEL RUFF
Ken & Margie Oehler
WALTER RAY SCHELLHASE
Tivy Class of 1952
ROBERT SIEKER
Marian Carsey & Terry Collins
Richard & Judy Fairchild
Tom & Linda Johnston
SCOTT & JULIA STEHLING
Mike & Candy Stewart
MRS. LOLA STEINBACH
Armand & Karen Antony &
Family
WILLIAM STONE
Patricia Stone

LOIS BELDEN THURMOND
PEO Chapter EN
Robert & Margaret McAllen
Dr. Donald & Amy Priour
Mike & Candy Stewart
Harvey & Marilyn Vordenbaum
VIRGINIA WAGNER
Linda Brown Stephens
DOROTHY WEINHEIMER
Clarence & Elaine Jenke
THOMAS WHEATCRAFT
Kelton & Ann Duecker
Pat & Kathy Laabs
Craig, Bronwyn & Glenn Martin
TAYLOR WILLINGHAM
Gary & Carol Priour
Ben & June Willingham
BRAD WILLIS
Gary & Carol Speer
MICHAEL WILSON
Carolyn Lawrence

In Honor Of:

HERMAN BILLNITZER
Mike & Betty Lou Schofield
BARBARA WORD FISHER
Betsy Drapela
Cynthia Word
JAY KELLEY
Gary & Louise Moss
Edward Andrews Foundation
KERRVILLE
Brian Bowers
KIM OMLOR
Dale Olbrych
Salas Family

Tax Tip: The end of the year is a good time to think about charitable gifts. If you are age 70½ and are required to make minimum distributions (RMD) from your IRA, you can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution from this RMD. This has the benefit of lowering your Adjusted Gross Income and your income tax. You still get the benefit of the Standard Deduction if you do not itemize.

Auxiliary Twine

Dear Friends,

I would like to begin by extending my heartfelt gratitude to each volunteer at the HCYR Thrift Shop, board member, mentors and you, our generous donors. You are the heartbeat of the HCYR Auxiliary. Thank you to the volunteers who provide birthday cakes for the children at the Ranch. Thank you to each one of you who prays for each child to find healing, peace, and to know that they are loved.

Simply stated, The Healing Hearts Style Show, Silent and Live auction is successful because we have a mighty group that works tirelessly to bring you fabulous fashions, exquisite jewelry, beautiful silent auction items, and exciting live auction surprises!

See you September 19th! You won't want to miss this event! It is successful because we all believe in the mission of The Hill Country Youth Ranch.

The Hill Country Youth Ranch Thrift Shop is a favorite destination for shopping. Many thanks to Bridget Dale and her brigade for making our Thrift Shop the new Tuesday Morning!

HCYR Auxiliary will meet next on August 28th, 11 o'clock at the Kroc.

Grace and peace,

Cheryl Sieker, President
Hill Country Youth Ranch Auxiliary

500 Club

The **500 Club** is our way to honor donors who have given \$500 or more to HCYR. We are pleased to announce new members whose donations total over \$500 by virtue of gifts made from June 6 through August 4, 2023.

Generous cash donations came from **Bobbie Gray, Boyce, LA; Richard & Nancy Cheevers, Liverpool, NY; Loyd Feynn, Cottage Grove, OR; Kendall & Barbara Reynolds,**

Fredericksburg, TX; Jared & Candice Douthit, Kerrville, TX; Chris Loup, Kerrville, TX; Linda Lunde, Kerrville, TX; Jack Peterson, Kerrville, TX; Janet Rhode, Kerrville, TX; Patrick & Kathy Laabs, San Antonio, TX; Faye L. & William L. Cowden Foundation, San Antonio, TX.

Thank you to these new members, and to all our **500 Club** members, for your generous and enduring support.

Household Items Needed

At the Youth Ranch we are in the process of upgrading the household items in all of our houses. It's an effort to make sure our children feel comfortable in their own rooms and in their own homes. Please help us out! We are in need of new or gently used items. Here is our current "most needed" list: twin and full-sized comforters and bedspreads, towels, washcloths, bath mats, kid's room decor items, bedside lamps, bedside rugs, bed pillows, twin sheets and pillowcases, kitchen towels and potholders, silverware, extra large pans and serving dishes, and unbreakable glasses.

Friend, poet, helper, leader has gone home

by Carol Priour, Fine Arts Director

In early March, my first granddaughter was born in the Fredericksburg hospital. They named her Mercy. And it was truly a day of mercy on so many levels. My son and his wife had had many losses but they kept believing that God would bring them a second child to join their only living son, Miles. Mercy was healthy and strong and would be able to go home the very next day. Almost 6 years ago, little Mercy's older brother, Judah, who lived only 20 months, had been immediately whisked off to the NICU for breathing assistance, and a 5-month hospital stint.

On this March day of joy and mercy, my dear friend, Trudy Brune, was in an assisted living center near the hospital. It had been some time since we had visited. So, while little Mercy was getting some 'Mommy and Daddy time', I arranged a visit with Trudy. When I knocked on her door she called out from her chair, "Come in!" in her best 'sparkly' voice.

The golden light from a nearby window highlighted her face and angelic snow white hair. I quickly surmised that standing and walking had become hard for her as I glanced across the sitting room where a walker on wheels sat ready to assist. I received my great big sisterly hug on my knees in front of her chair. Too many days had passed since I had last seen Trudy, and I could feel the loss of strength in her arms. True to her "I'm no victim, I am a blessed child of God" philosophy, she did not let on if she was in any physical pain.

Even though I had no idea that this would be the last time I would see my precious friend alive, I somehow realized that this would be a sacred meeting, and it was. So much was expressed that day and not just with words . . . true friends have a way of communicating heart to heart.

The visit wasn't a long one – probably just about an hour. I could sense she was getting tired. I got caught up on her family news – the trials and triumphs of her beloved children and grandchildren. And we talked about her husband Ed, who was already with our Lord. I told her about my new grandbaby, and the many chal-

lenges at the Youth Ranch, how we were exploring new ways to serve children and families who need us.

As we talked I told my friend how it had become ever more difficult to work with state placements. I told her there were many families who needed us – grandparents with addicted children, or neglectful children, who had left their own children in the care of the grandparents or other family members who have no idea how they are possibly going to care for these children that they love so much. They want to keep them out of the foster care system that is so broken. But due to their own age, or failing health, or finances, they just cannot provide adequate parenting. We have helped a few of them, but want to help more.

Turns out, Trudy had read about our efforts in the newsletter and knew of these challenges. When I left we prayed together, for family, for our mission, for our executive director Krystle, and for guidance. After our prayer, Trudy said in her 'loud and firm' voice, in reference to the new possibilities, "YOU HAVE MY BLESSING." Then she softly said, "You will see."

Trudy didn't walk me to the door as she usually did, but I could almost feel her hand on my shoulder. As I looked back and looked into her light-filled eyes, my heart could hear her unspoken voice saying, "I will be with you always, my sister."

On the way back home, memories of our more than 20-year friendship flooded my mind as I revisited some of the most beautiful emotions of my lifetime. . .

Beside a stained glass window in the chapel at Big Springs Ranch for Children that Trudy Brune commissioned in my honor, there is a plaque that she selected. It reads "For my eternal friend . . . we knew each other before we came to earth." For generations, children will pass by that window and be reminded of the beauty and timelessness of a true friendship. Trudy believed in deep and forever connections. She knew that there is more to life than these fleeting years on earth. I have never known anyone with a stronger faith than Trudy, and she relied on that faith to help her navigate the toughest

times. From her difficult childhood, through the death of the love of her life, and through the many challenges that life had delivered. "Love survives," she affirmed.

Trudy loved sharing the spiritual truths she had come to know. Fifteen years ago, she asked me to illustrate and compile a book of her poetry. About twice a year, she would call to ask for another stack of the books. "The words God gave me are helping me help people here," she would say. Those poems represent a deep listening to God, and I treasure them, because every time I read one, I gather more meaning in my own life.

Trudy could have been a preacher, she so loved to talk, especially about the many miracles that accompanied her long life of almost 90 years. She often said, "Charity wins," and she told us that every penny she and Ed gave to better the lives of children at the Ranch came back to them, in one way or another. They built most of the BSRC campus – five children's residences, two schools, an athletic complex, a track, an administration building, and finally, a chapel overlooking the Frio River, where I was blessed to do some of my best work as an artist. She was so excited and encouraging, as I climbed up on a wobbly scaffold in my sixties, to paint a huge ceiling mural of the universe. When I designed and created the stained glass windows, she was my cheerleader. She was NOT HAVING any discouragement! When I didn't know how I could possibly go another day, she prayed with me and my energy was renewed – over and over again.

Trudy and I worked together to decorate each of the homes and other buildings she and Ed built at the Ranch. She directed attention to every detail – a stuffed animal on every bed, "for the nights when they feel alone and need something to hold" – a Bible on the nightstand "for when they need to remember that they have a true friend in Jesus" – a rug beside each bed "in case the floor gets cold in the wintertime" – and always, a handmade quilt so every child would be "covered in love". She organized and founded a group of quilters to make quilts for the children, and even made some of them herself.



Drawing by Carol Priour of Trudy Brune, 1933 - 2023.

Trudy told me many times that the most important element in any relationship is forgiveness. In forgiveness, she would say, we see the other person as God made them, not as the mistakes and poor choices they have made. She courageously forgave her own father for the brutally painful childhood she experienced, and as he lay on his deathbed, both legs amputated due to health complications, she voiced her forgiveness to him, and he accepted that forgiveness, through tears. Trudy lovingly cared for her father in his final days, until his last breath. "I am one tough cookie," she would often say! She had navigated some of the hardest things life can bring like a steel magnolia, and always reminded me that, "With God, all things are possible."

Every time I tried to thank Trudy for all she and Ed had done for the Youth Ranch, she would say, "To God be the Glory".

I feel like Trudy, who believed so strongly in the connection of human hearts, would say that God brought us all together through the mission of the Ranch, not only to help the children heal, but also to make deeper connections with one

another – that our finding our way to the Ranch was not by mistake. She would say that God brought every one of us together not only to make the world better, but to learn something. God wastes no opportunity to teach His children, we just need to learn how to listen.

It has been so hard to let her go, but my heart knows she is at peace. The candle has been put out because morning has come.

For me, everything about my friendship with Trudy was big – her unforgettable big laugh echoes in my heart, her big smile and shining eyes when she greeted you, her big ideas that at first could sometimes seem impossible, the huge amount of love she had for hurt children, animals, and her beloved family. And now the big chasm left here when she exited the planet. I know she's really still with us here, and I know she would say to take that ache, and transform it into a giving spirit by doing something for someone else. Giving always helped Trudy heal from the things in life that hurt.

I thank the Good Lord for this great big gift of friendship, and for His gift to the world when He created Trudy Brune.

Darien '11 finds family at the Ranch, stays

Editor's Note by Gary Priour:

Darien Lynn was removed from his home at age 9 in 2002. Over the next six years, he was moved 29 times into different foster homes around the state, and his resistance to trusting others only deepened. Finally, in 2008 he was reunited with his brother in a foster home. His brother kept talking about a place called Big Springs Ranch for Children and how loved he had felt there. The two of them advocated for a move to BSRC, provided they could be moved together and allowed to stay. Darien was 15 years old when he arrived at BSRC, and discovered, for the first time, a community of caring people who made him feel at home. Over the next three years, he studied hard, made good grades, learned to work in the summer work program, and enjoyed horseback riding and swimming in the Frio. He graduated as part of a community where he had found his longed-for family and support system, one that he knew would last a lifetime.

by Darien Lynn '11

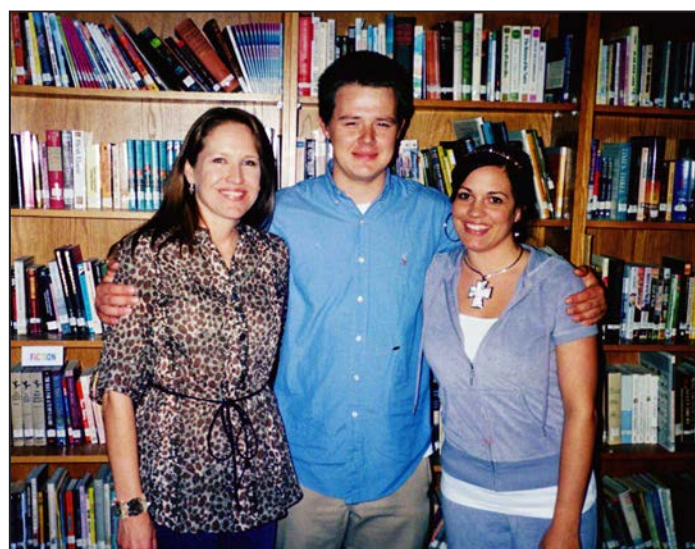
Hello, my name is Darien Lynn. I would like to tell you my story of growing up in foster care and how my life is as an adult now. When I got taken away from my family as a 9-year-old kid, I didn't know what to expect on where I was headed. So, I started acting out and before I knew it, I was traveling to and from different foster homes all over the state of Texas, with each move compounding my trauma.

So when I was 15 years old, my brother Roman and I, six years and 29 placements later, finally got to live together again at a foster home in San Antonio. My brother had once lived at Big Springs Ranch for Children near Leakey, and he kept telling our caseworker that he wanted to move back to that Ranch, but there was one condition. That's if I could move out there with him. At first, I didn't want to make still another move, but I wanted to be with my brother, so I went with him. I have to say that was the best decision I made as a child.

I arrived at Big Springs Ranch



Above left, Darien (top row, center) with his 2011 graduating class following their May 28 graduation ceremony at Brune Charter School. School Superintendent Mike Wood and commencement speaker Dr. Roberto Rodriguez flank the graduates. Above right, Darien with other Big Springs Ranch residents in 2010. Right, Darien in Brune School library with two teachers in 2009. Left, Darien sitting on the steps of Brune High School in 2008.



for Children at age 15 in 2008. I have to say that everyone made me feel part of the family there. The staff showed me a lot of love and encouraged me to become the best person I could be. To this day I still talk to members of my family from the Ranch.

As my high school graduation in May of 2011 neared, it was beginning to be time that I decide on what I wanted to do after I graduated. I was scared and didn't know what to do. Ranch staff told me about a campus they had opened in 2009 called Enhanced Horizons. It was a transitional living program for aged-out foster youth, especially for Ranch graduates, where young adults could go to learn about being an adult, starting college, or getting that first job. I visited that campus, near Ingram, and I immediately said yes to going to Enhanced Horizons that June.

After I moved to Enhanced Horizons in June of 2011, I was soon

hired to work with maintenance at Hill Country Youth Ranch, sister campus to Big Springs Ranch for Children, and just four miles from EH, to learn what it was like to have a job, with helpful supervisors teaching me job skills. I was paid through the Cailloux Summer Job Program. After that program was over, I received the help of the Texas Workforce Commission on getting a job through them while they were paying my wages through another young adult program.

When these programs that helped young adults like me had ended, it was time for me to find employment on my own. I was naturally stressed about taking this giant step into independence, after being in the foster care system for 10 years. Now I would be the one who had to put it all together, and make enough money to survive.

The Ranch had given me a sense of connection, and now

I needed a new community to connect with. So I decided the following Sunday I was going to church at Impact Christian Fellowship in Kerrville to see new people and find fellowship. That Sunday, as I started talking to people there, a lady who was in the catering business came up to me to tell me that God told her to

come talk to me. As we talked, I shared my stress about having no job and needing to find work. The lady told me she was hiring so I said to her, "I don't know how to cook or cater." She immediately said, "That's ok, we will teach you everything you need to know."

That sure enough answered



Darien, center, along with residents of HCYR and BSRC, serve as pall bearers at the 2012 funeral of Ruby Stevens, benefactor at all three Ranches. Darien was always ready to serve his family when asked.

connected through work, church, & sports

my stress about getting a job. I started by making \$8.50/hour, but I didn't care because it was something. Later I moved to work in the kitchen at Schreiner University. After a few years of working there, I transferred to Texas A&M San Antonio to cook there and attend San Antonio College.

As I began my new life in the city, working and attending college, everything started great, but I had not yet learned about boundaries, and my desire for connection and community led me to take some wrong turns. As I started to gather friends, my apartment became the party apartment. I stayed on with these friends for about 5 years during my early and mid 20's. While on that road of hosting parties and giving everyone rides to the club, my life started to waver in the wrong direction. Lots of people who cared about me became worried about me.

During this time, my lack of boundaries and good judgment led to an incident that almost ended my life, but wound up helping me change directions. One night I got a call from this person who I thought was my friend to ask if I could take him to his uncle's house. I asked him why he needed to go there so late in the day, and he insisted that his uncle needed him. So, I left home and picked up the guy. Halfway through the trip to his uncle's, he asked me if I could take him to a friend's house first. I asked him why, and he said so he could have a little fun with entertainment. I was like, I guess so. Maybe 20 minutes went by and I was just waiting outside in my car. He and his friend came out to beg me to come inside. I went inside and sat down in the guy's bedroom, which was filled with people. I was sitting there, tired and falling asleep. As I was in and out of sleep, these people wound up doing wrong stuff that made me not know how to function.

All of a sudden, this guy banged a gun across the back of my head and shot me in my left femoral artery. They took my car keys, phone, and wallet, and left me to bleed out. I was alone, running off adrenaline, and trying to figure

out what to do to save my life. I staggered outside and collapsed in a random person's yard, and I started to scream for help. This older man came out of his house, put a tourniquet around my leg, then called the cops. During those moments, I felt like I was dying. I remember EMS arriving and talking to me, but I couldn't answer them, so they rushed me to the University Hospital in San Antonio to resuscitate me and do emergency surgery to save my leg and life.

Coming out of that experience, I knew I needed two forms of rehab – physical on my leg, and spiritual in my life. I got on a plan to learn how to walk again and returned to church to help me gain control of my life. I turned to my love of the San Antonio Spurs for my entertainment. I also had to figure out how to survive and bring in income. Well, I decided to become a rideshare driver which allows me to work when I want and to also be my own boss. It also goes along with my habit of providing transportation to people, but before this, I did it without pay!

So, out of a horrible situation I ended up finding a good opportunity to become my own boss. I started making a good income as a driver, and now I'm getting to

see the fruits of me becoming who God meant for me to be.

Plus, I developed a love of the San Antonio Spurs. As everything was coming together, I started going to Oak Hills Church to meet my need for community and fellowship. I dove into being a part of what the church does, which is giving and serving. So, I ended up sponsoring a kid in Honduras as part of me wanting to help my community, and months later my church asked me if I would want to do an interview to talk about my last few years since joining the church. At the end of the interview, my church presented me with a car for my business!

I hope my story serves as encouragement to other Ranch alumni. I want to say to all of them that, while the road to becoming an adult isn't easy, remember what the Ranch taught us – to never give up and that God is with us and loves us. And also remember that there are people even worse off, with no one to turn to. So, continue to push in the right direction, and do not be afraid of reaching out to our Ranch family for any advice or help that you need. And just because you age out of foster care, the Ranch never closes the door on any of us. We are a forever family.



Darien's first job after leaving EH was catering and cooking. Above, he teaches his cousins to cook pizza at Christmas in 2020. Below, an array of food he prepared for a gathering at Schreiner U.



Since he was a boy in the foster care system, Darien has sought connection with community. He has met that need over time through belonging to a church and being generous with his time and resources through church benevolence and outreach. He also finds joy in being an all-in fan of the San Antonio Spurs. Left, he gets a shirt signed by his all-time favorite Spurs player Manu Ginobili. Right, his career as a rideshare driver for Uber, Door Dash, Grub Hub and other such services allows him to dress in his Spurs gear, wear his favorite cross necklace, and meet new and interesting people.



Summer doesn't mean learning stops!

Ranch kids are busy during the summer: working outside, learning skills & performing!

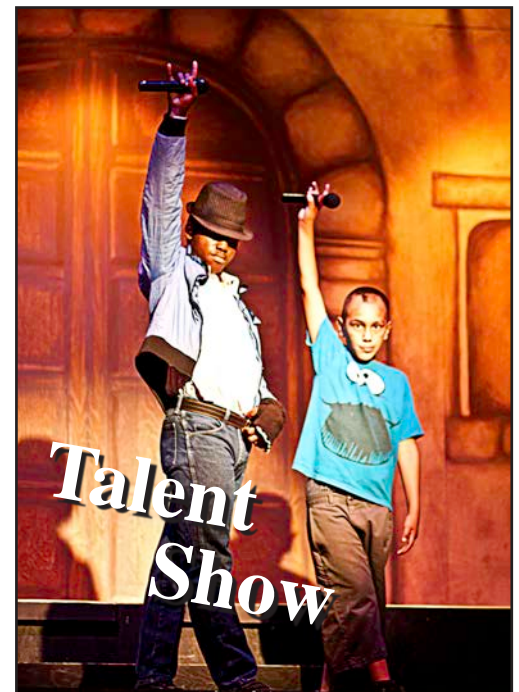


Work Crew



The summer programs at HCYR and BSRC are veritable smorgasbords of learning opportunities. In addition to morning work crew, elective classes are offered throughout the day in which children can hone their singing, dancing and musical skills in preparation for a talent show or recital. Or they can help their cabins raise funds for a family summer trip.

There are also many ways to relax, playing sports in the gym, swimming in our covered pool, or fishing at the pond. But in every case the activity involves learning, becoming more skilled, and growing into better citizens of the greater world.



Talent Show

Summer Classes

Every year our kids get to experience classes that lead to new skill awareness, including in such areas as cooking, dance, yoga, swimming, photography, singing, songwriting, landscaping, and fishing.

by Tony Gallucci, Publications

At Hill Country Youth Ranch it is our goal to help each of our children recognize their gifts and enhance them, and also to prepare them to be productive citizens ready to make a contribution. That means having a broad array of programs for skill discovery and development. These programs are in action throughout the school year, but summer presents the ideal time for a full day of elective classes covering all aspects of life.

One program that is unique to summer is the morning work crew. Kids apply just like for a real job and are assigned to teams to do gardening, landscaping, trailbuilding, and brush clearing. They are paid for their efforts and accomplishments but also for their teamwork,

problem solving, and project planning. Learning to work together is as important in giving team scores as individual effort. Many times, a young person who might struggle with academics at school emerges as a leader in work crew. Leaders are given bonuses and recognition.

In 1978, with the first Youth Ranch children, a couple of staff, and founder Gary Priour, the summer work crew, our oldest Enrichment Program, was launched with the planting of a summer vegetable garden. And every year since, the children work on teams with professional supervision, in exchange for a paycheck and the knowledge they are doing their part to improve their surroundings and contribute to Ranch life. With dozens of children working for pay, we are blessed to have benefactors who are funding the earnings, supplies, equipment, and teachers to keep this time-tested program going.

Years later, when our alumni bring their own families for a visit 'home', their favorite stories often point to their days on 'work crew' and they want to show their children where they cleared a path or managed an area in the garden.

