



LITTLE BITS

THERAPEUTIC RIDING ASSOCIATION
for persons with disabilities

info@littlebits.ca

www.littlebits.ca

November 2020

The Memorial Wall

by Jeffrey Pelton

"*SED MEMORIAS AETERNUM TEMPUS FUGIT*" is the title of the piece, carved in Latin above the clock: *Time flies but memory persists*. The clock measures minutes and hours which accumulate into life spans, but those can be unnecessarily brief. Memory persists but it needs help and that is what the tree does.

Three groups are memorialized in the tree: volunteers, horses, and riders. These nicely divide into the three parts of the tree: roots, trunk, and branches.

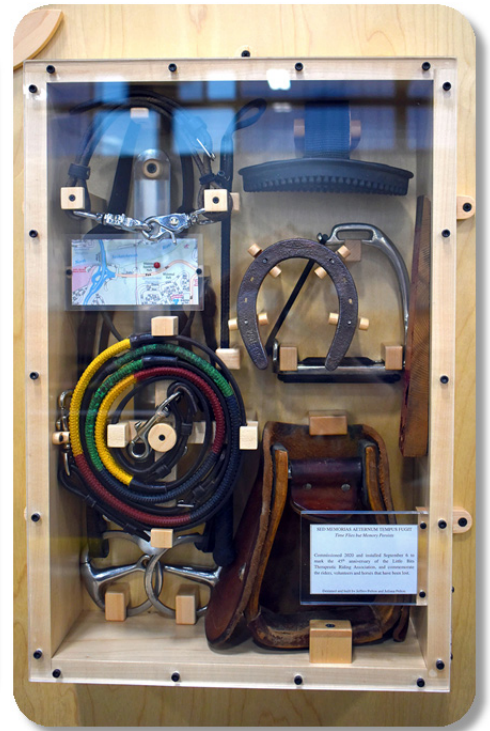
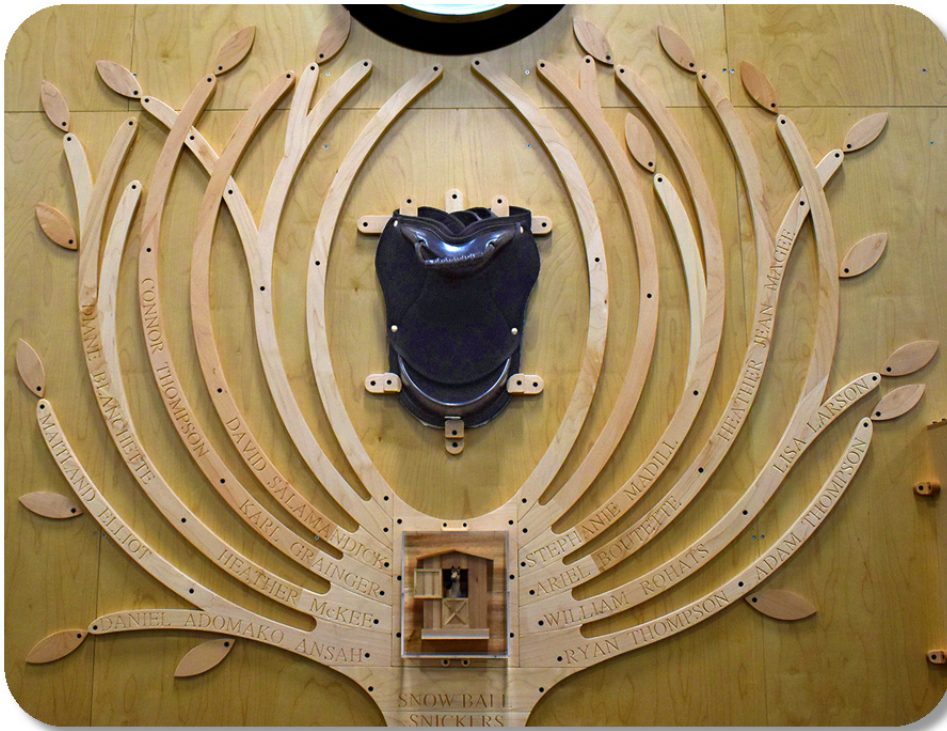
Volunteers got the roots because they are foundational to the enterprise. Without their contribution of time and effort, the entire structure fails to stand. Volunteers do not take on their role for recognition. They sometimes take part unobserved. Thus here they inhabit the least visible portion of the tree.

The horses are on the trunk because of their quite literal physical support of the riders. Like a tree trunk carrying nutrients and water from the roots to the leaves or photosynthesized energy from the leaves to the roots, the horses act as a conduit between the volunteers and the riders. Horses, like the trunk of the tree, are sturdy, upright, and reliable.

The riders are in the branches because the intent is to raise them up so they can grow and thrive. Thus they are in the apex position of the tree. They fuel every other part of the tree.

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The memorial wall went through several different forms before ending up as a tree. At one point it was a flattened out model of a barn with separate stalls for the horses and various windows and doors to accommodate the names of the volunteers and riders, but that would have been too elaborate and likely costly and certainly too fragile to be mounted in a public space without some sort of protective glass barrier covering it. The ghost of that idea still exists, however, in the center of the tree where the trunk splits into the branches. I built the small horse stall with the toy horse in it as a test model to get a sense of how the final object might look. I decided to incorporate it into the final design rather than discard it as it was a part of the process.

The tree was chosen because it was a much more straight-forward thing to build, and the image of the tree lends itself readily as a symbol of multiple concepts such as strength, growth, shelter, resilience, life, wisdom, etc., which are recognizable to many people.

I chose to use maple for the tree for mostly pragmatic reasons. It is abundant and thus inexpensive. It is hard so it carves well; it keeps a sharp edge and takes detail better than softer woods. It is pale in colour with rather subtle graining so it doesn't take attention away from the text that will be carved in it. The names carved in the maple are visible mostly by the shadows they cast. A darker wood would not provide sufficient contrast and would hamper readability.

In the centre of the tree branches is a riderless saddle pointing upwards. In a military procession, a riderless horse is symbolic of a warrior who will ride no more. The saddle is also here for more prosaic purposes. I dug through a supply shed for various objects to put in the tack box that is on the wall to the right of the tree, and I found the saddle. Initially, I intended to put the tack box where the saddle is but the saddle would have filled the box completely and left no room for all the other interesting paraphernalia I hoped to use. So, the saddle took the place of the tack box and the tack box was repositioned in a spot where the detail of the contents would be easier to see.

I'm not really sure why I included the tack box other than I like the composition of all the different objects jumbled together. Maybe it's like our memories: a hodge-podge of disparate elements that require focus for sense to be made. If memories are not organized and solidified in some way, they begin to slip away and eventually you forget what you have forgotten and it is like things never even happened. The tree is about memory and by carving the names into maple the fallibility of individual memory is circumvented and the people and horses that are gone continue to exist in a more concrete way. You can see the names but also feel them by running your fingers over the smooth lacquered maple.

Unfortunately the memorial tree is not a finished product; it must have more names added to it in the future. To accommodate this unavoidable need for change, the tree is made of separate planks that can be individually removed, carved, and replaced without a great deal of effort or disruption.



2020 In a Nutshell

by Marielle

This year of 2020 has been a very trying year for everyone. We held our Little Bits winter session with great success, but then suddenly we were mesmerised by what was happening around the world. We became aware that things were changing and not for the better. Our small piece of the world would suddenly become very different. The spring session was first suspended then cancelled due to this new virus that was spreading at speeds never heard of before. Covid-19 was here.

Some thought that this virus would be here for a while then gone, but this virus made us realize that we all had to change the way we live. Changes were made, protocols were written and we said "HELLO" to the summer riders for the one week of riding. It was hot and it was enjoyable for everyone involved. We were back.

We have learned to live with this virus, and we have adapted our program so that the fall session has been able to run but it is still a daily lesson.

Everyone said "Goodbye" to barn #2 on October 13th which was very bittersweet because on one hand, the last remaining barn was demolished but on the other hand, there now stands a brand-new shiny barn, ready to house horses and boarders.

Winter is coming early but we don't mind because we are in our fabulous arena, and we hope that 2021 brings hope, peace and one day a Covid-19-free world.



2020 In a Nutshell - by Marielle (continued)



The new barn!



Riding Calendar for 2021



Winter 2021 Riding Session (8 weeks)



Orientation: Wednesday, January 13 (6:00 pm to 9:00 pm)

Sundays: January 17 to March 7 (10:00 am to 3:00 pm)

Wednesdays: January 20 to March 10 (4:00 pm to 9:00 pm)

Spring 2021 Riding Session (11 weeks)

Sundays: April 4 to June 20, 2021 (10:00 am to 6:00 pm)

We DO program on April 4 – Easter Sunday

We DO NOT program on May 23 – May long weekend

Tuesday mornings: April 6 to June 15, 2021 (9:00 to 1:00 pm)

Tuesday afternoons: April 6 to June 15, 2021 (4:00 pm to 9:00 pm)

Wednesdays: April 7 to June 16 (3:00 pm to 9:00 pm)

Summer 2021 Riding Week

Monday, July 26 to Friday, July 30 (10:00 am to 3:00 pm)



Fall 2021 Riding Session (11 weeks)

Orientation: Wednesday, September 1 (6:00 pm to 9:00 pm)

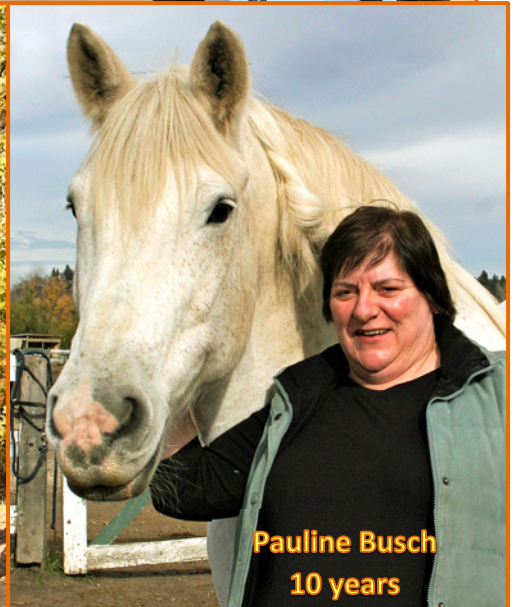
Sundays: Sept. 12 to **Nov. 21** (*Achievement Day*)
(10:00 am to 6:00 pm)

Tuesday mornings: Sept. 14 to **Nov. 23** (*Achievement Day*)
(9:00 am to 1:00 pm)

Tuesday afternoons: Sept. 14 to **Nov. 23** (*Achievement Day*)
(4:00 pm to 9:00 pm)

Wednesdays: Sept. 15 to **Nov. 24** (*Achievement Day*)
(3:00 pm to 9:00 pm)

2020 LBTRA Service Awards



Lollipop

April 18, 2007 - October 23, 2020

Our dear friend Lollipop, 'Lolli' as she was also affectionately known, has crossed the rainbow bridge to the greenest of meadows. She very recently suffered a displacement colic that ended her all-too-short life. Her ashes will be taken home to Calgary to be buried alongside her dam and close to her family.

All of us at WELCA and LBTRA extend our sincerest condolences to Sara Biddle and her family and friends whose hearts are broken today. All of us who had the pleasure of knowing Lollipop, or more so to have been hoisted on her strong and capable back, share this loss.

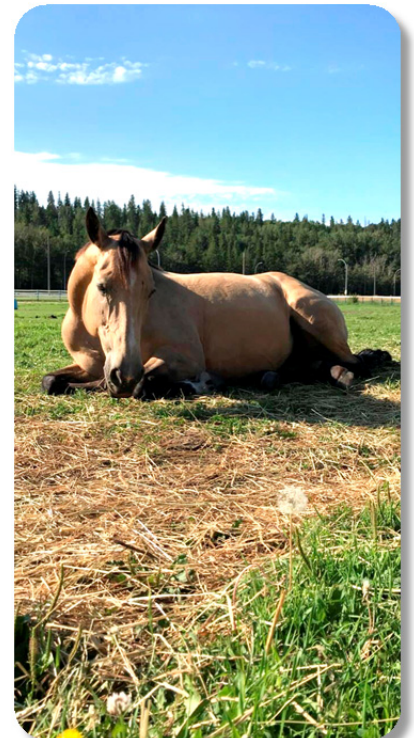
Lollipop was a 15.3HH Buckskin quarter horse mare. Sara brought her to WELCA in August of 2019 where she

immediately settled into her new home and began working in WELCA's Learn-to-Rides, Mini/Junior riders, and the Horsemanship Programs - walk, trot, canter and jump classes. Shortly after her arrival, her quiet demeanour leant itself beautifully to Little Bits (LBTRA) programs as well.

Lollipop was a skilled and generous horse who babysat every rider she carried – we're sure she never set a foot wrong while she forgave the errors of her learning riders. We all fell in love with her inner and outer beauty. She became the most wonderful teddy-horse with her snuggly winter coat.

Sara oversaw Lollipop's breeding, did all her training, and guided her in becoming a most amazing and talented horse. Sara dabbled in many disciplines but focused mostly in English, showing her talent and flexibility in so many ways. Theirs was a love affair that started long before Lollipop's birth and will last long after the heartbreak this day has brought.

The love of a horse is unlike any other. It changes us in more ways than we realize. It is the most cherished of life's gifts. They live on in our memories, hearts and laughter.



Olivia's Little Bits Journey

by Olivia

Can you imagine a little 12 year old horse crazy girl? Can you imagine how excited she would be to be able to be around horses once a week? Well, that was me 10 years ago when I started volunteering with Little Bits in 2010. Back when little Olivia began volunteering, I was only allowed to help tack and untack horses in the barn. I learned quickly (big thanks to Ros) and quickly fell in love with the Little Bits environment.

Fast forward a couple of years, I remember how excited I was when I was allowed to lead a horse into the arena, and fast forward a little more to how excited I was when I first began leading my very own horse and rider. It was one of the most amazing things I have ever experienced. So amazing, that I continued to come back to volunteer with Little Bits every Wednesday, every week, every Fall and every Spring. The joy that working with the wonderful riders has brought me over the years is indescribable. I can recall many conversations that sparked lots of laughter, storytelling, and many smiles on both the face of my rider and my own (and the horse, too, if you can believe it).



I managed to volunteer with Little Bits throughout my Junior High and High School years and the first two years of my Bachelor of Elementary Education degree at the University of Alberta. For the final two years of my degree I had to take a break from Little Bits, as I needed to focus on my student teaching practicums.

As soon as I graduated, I knew that I needed to get back to the program as soon as possible. I just missed it so much! Unfortunately, COVID-19 happened and this return was delayed until this Fall session of 2020. Now an elementary teacher, I am so happy to be back volunteering with Little Bits. I have loved every bit of my experience working with the horses, the other volunteers, and the bright smiling riders. There is something so relaxing and rewarding about spending my evening with amazing people and amazing horses. I could not imagine my life today without Little Bits in it. Wednesday evenings have become my favourite evening of the week, and I always look forward to them. All of the volunteers are so kind and never hesitate to make you feel welcome. I am so thankful for this wonderful program that has allowed me to become a part of the giant Little Bits family.

Thank you to GPMC and NMC!

We would like to send out a "Thank You" to Sheldon McKenna on behalf of the General Presidents Maintenance Committee for Canada (GPMC) and National Maintenance for Canada (NMC) for the generous \$10,000.00 donations they provided to Little Bits. This donation will help subsidize the riders in our program.

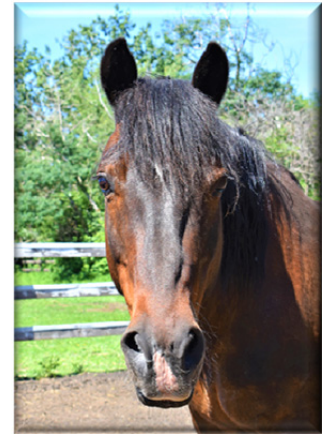
New Additions

by Marielle



Kassidy is a loveable chestnut Arab gelding that we started to use in the Winter 2020 program. Kassidy was so well received that we had him join the summer program, and his riders instantly fell in love with him. He is very curious but insists that the riders work with him. Kassidy lives with Caffi, Steel and Remy and all have a great time together. You can find Kassidy is now a regular in the Fall program where he works to help his riders reach their goal on their achievement day.

Big Mike (who is now just called Mike) is a large bay Welsh Cob gelding that was born June 1, 2002 and arrived at Whitemud on July 13, 2018. Mike joined Little Bits in the fall of 2018. Mike is a very curious horse that responds very well to his riders and leaders. Because Mike is only 14 hh, this enables side-walkers easier access to their rider, but Mike's wide girth in his barrel allows taller riders the ability to ride without feeling too big. We all love Mike and appreciate his gentle nature.



Scirocco

by Aliyyah

Scirocco means a hot dry wind in Africa. I'm not talking about hot dry wind; I'm talking about a lady. I'm talking about my amazing horse, and her full name is Scirocco Dancer. She has a beautiful gait, big brown eyes, and a long mane and tail. She's kind, sweet, and sensitive just like me.

Dancer has a white star on her forehead which makes her unique.



She is a Morab, which is a cross between an Arab and a Morgan horse. Bliss, a Morgan cross from Whitemud, may even be related to Dancer. Maybe they were best friends!

I've been riding Dancer for 2 years. She's always relaxed and is really good at following different commands. Dancer is 25 years old and she came to Whitemud in 2014 from Red Deer. She has had a lot of training, making her the horse she is today.

I wouldn't want to ride any other horse. Thank you, Dancer, for always being excited to see me, always being there for me, and making my time at the Whitemud Equine Center enjoyable.



Birinji ataňy gör-soň atyňy

by Osman

My name is Osman and I volunteer with Little Bits. I was born and raised in Turkmenistan. A horse is a major element of a Turkmen's identity. Akhal-teke is a Turkmen horse breed, and according to some sources they are the ancestors of the well-known Arabian breed. Akhal-teke horses have been selectively bred for many centuries by Turkmen and gained a reputation worldwide for their speed, stamina, intelligence, and hot-bloodedness.



There is a saying in Turkmen: *birinji ataňy gör-soň atyňy*, which means [in the morning] check on your father first then on your horse. Even further, it has been said that during times of sustenance scarcity, Turkmen would feed a horse before feeding himself or herself. This demonstrates just how much Turkmen care about their Akhal-teke horses and the importance of the latter in Turkmen culture.

With my motivation to explore the world and to study human health and health care, I decided to come to Canada from overseas and immerse myself in a new but very different culture. To pursue my interests, I acquired a Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Master of Science (MSc) degrees at the University of Alberta.

Coming to Canada for school, I have always wanted to be around horses but I just did not know how. Ironically, on my way to the University of Alberta, I was driving by the Whitemud Equine Centre for many years. When I better learned to manage my busy life by properly balancing school, work, and personal life, I decided to learn more about the Equine Centre. When I learned about LBTRA, I was ecstatic since what LBTRA does resonates with my fundamental beliefs of equality, inclusion, and compassion; the volunteering opportunity with LBTRA allows my desire to support people and passion for horses to be combined to have a positive impact on people with special needs.

At the beginning, I did expect I would get satisfaction and joy from this volunteering opportunity but little did I know how exceptionally amazing LBTRA personnel, riders, and horses were and how much better they would make this experience -- I think it is perfect. For me, it started with Marielle who is very kind, calm, and knowledgeable and who made my initial communications with LBTRA much more smooth and pleasant. During riding sessions, Jo-Anne, Catherine, Lisa, and Cindi were very supportive, kind, and attentive, which in turn made the environment more friendly, stress-free, and exciting. Moreover, I am very thankful for staff at the barn who taught me the intricate details of caring for horses. During my time volunteering with LBTRA, I had an opportunity to meet and connect with riders with different backgrounds and different needs. Seeing them progress and the excitement they radiated while riding induced feelings of happiness and accomplishment. While I do help the riders to enjoy their horse-riding sessions, in reality, I also do master a few things myself—communication, attention to detail, and teamwork.

It's All About the People Who Make Life Good -- The Horses Make It Better!

by Gwen McDonald Halabisky

Little Bits has been a very important part of my life for more than 20 years. I am glad that my late husband, Wayne encouraged/insisted that I sign up for this dream volunteer job.

I would like to thank the dedicated Board Members for your work behind the scenes to make this all possible and also the Whitemud Equine Centre staff and volunteers. Three of note, among the many others over the years, are Lynda T and Judy (staff) who made sure the many horses were well looked after and Jean (volunteer) who babied the horses and sponsored horses over the years.

Thank you to the parents, who are committed to their children and have enrolled them in the program. Also, I owe gratitude toward the students, both children and adults, for being brave enough to overcome their fears and actually get up on a horse. You have made my life better.

The first Tuesday I came to Little Bits found me working with Sandy, another volunteer, who showed me the "ropes" in the barn and introduced me around during the break. The volunteer training has expanded since that time but volunteers still depend on Ros (Barn Manager) and the more experienced for guidance.

I have usually worked on Tuesday mornings, tacking, leading and side walking, but I have also had the opportunity to fill additional roles (e.g. poop-picker-upper). Others have included helping with volunteer orientation, volunteer appreciation, and photographing classes and events. All of this has given me the opportunity to meet some truly wonderful people. I have to thank the instructors I have worked with (Tuesday mornings, especially). The first instructors were Linda R. and Jo-Anne. There have been others over the years, including Lorraine, Lisa, Sonja, Melissa, Lynda T. and Catherine. These people are not just teachers but caring, knowledgeable professionals who make a great team. They facilitate the best learning experience for the rider by matching the horse with the rider's abilities. Marielle (Volunteer Coordinator) makes sure the most appropriate volunteer-student match is made and volunteers are well fed during breaks. I think she has a PhD in psychology and a master chef diploma.

Volunteers come to Little Bits for various reasons: they know a person with a handicap, or they used to ride, or they still ride, or they want to help, or they are like me, a horse person wannabe. We all come with different experiences and from all walks of life. Many of us stay for a long time and leave only when life circumstances initiate a change. These are the people who have a human quality that makes them a perfect fit with Little Bits.

Thank you to the "horse" people who helped me navigate the terrain of the tack-room and decipher the difference between a bridle and halter and a hoof pick and curry comb. In addition to Ros, there were Stan, Pete M. and Lynn along with others who would quietly correct my ineptness.



It's All About the People Who Make Life Good -- The Horses Make It Better!

(continued)

Some of the people I have met at Little Bits have become good solid friends. Several of them, along with their husbands, were a great support to me after my husband died. There are many others, the young and the "young at heart" who I have met more recently, in the "last" days of the old arena and in the new arena. You have already had a positive impact on my life.

Each person, whether it be staff, student or volunteer, has enriched my life. I clearly got more than I gave. Yes, the horses are important, but we just figuratively rode on their backs on an exciting journey.

Smiles and Hoofbeats

Why I volunteer during a pandemic

by Jocelyn

Walking up to the Whitemud Equine facility, I check for three things: my car keys, my cell phone (I am a Millennial) and now, most importantly, my mask. I am very fortunate that wearing a mask doesn't bother me. I will have a mask on and not even realize I'm wearing it until someone doesn't laugh at my joke (COVID-19 has taught me that facial expressions are hugely important to hitting a punch line). Under normal circumstances, smiling at someone is a small but very effective way of helping ease the tension in a room or on the mounting block. However, now with our obscured visage, I have rediscovered the power of human (and horse) connection through eye contact.

I do not think that I would have had this breakthrough if it weren't for Little Bits. Communication between horse and rider is physical; it's balancing in the saddle, calm hands and slight pressure in the leg. There are many clients of Little Bits that are non-verbal, so leaders and side walkers need to listen and look to the instructor for the safety of the rider and the horse. We all took for granted just how much seeing each other's mouths affected our ability to communicate.

Because of COVID, I spend so much more time looking at the rider when we're not in motion -- watching their body language, looking at their facial expressions to see if they are happy, tired, or focused. This time of observation during a one-hour window has allowed me to appreciate just how much these amazing riders give to the horses and the volunteers: the way their eyes light up when they walk to the mounting block, the look of satisfaction in their eyes when they nail a half-reverse turn all by themselves, and the look of longing when they are helped to dismount and have to walk out of the arena. Their strong confident head nod shows that they know they'll be back next week and can't wait to get back on the horse. It makes me smile every single time; you just can't see it through the mask!

