



Unlikely Recruits - Hope for Veterans Haunted by PTSD

By Becky Streefer

Toni Mattson, co-founder of Trinity Equestrian Center in Eau Claire, recently released her first book titled *Unlikely Recruits: How God Enlists Horses to Heal Veterans*. *Unlikely Recruits* is compiled of 20 very true and very personal stories, all meant to provide hope to veterans. "I've had an astounding front-row seat," says Mattson, "to witness and participate in the miraculous changes realized by these brave, but broken veterans. Stories about hope and healing, grace and redemption, and the often agonizing journey that paves the groundwork for their personal transformation and triumph."

When veterans arrive at Trinity, they are often there as a last resort. The heroes that show up there have all but given up. And then they meet the horses. "Veterans often readily trust the horse," Mattson says. "The horse doesn't judge them and won't lie to them—none of the things humans tend to do." Veterans easily form a connection and relationship with their horse, and from that foundation, the Trinity team can begin to help the veteran maneuver the process of healing.

Unlikely Recruits is not only about the trials of the veterans, but more importantly about their triumphs. "These are the accounts of the hell they went and continue to go through, but also the amazing story of their victory," Mattson says. "The stories are really about what happens when veterans are courageous enough to say they need help, and that they are willing to step into that journey."

Stories like Duncan, a 43-year-old, four-time deployed Army veteran, struggling with haunting nightmares and survivor's guilt



about not being able to save his best friend, Karl, while in battle. After working with his horse for 11 weeks, the staff tried a new tactic with a game called Keep Out. No matter what Duncan did, he could not keep his horse away from the food it wanted. During this exercise, he finally realized the truth: his friend Karl had an addiction to adrenaline and it caused him to do dangerous and irresponsible things. Duncan finally accepted that what happened to Karl wasn't his fault, and after more therapy with Trinity's horses, Duncan's nightmares subsided and he felt some peace about his past.

Through *Unlikely Recruits*, Mattson wanted to give veterans like Duncan a voice, and in so doing, give other veterans hope. "I wanted to give them proof to see that this is real," she says. "And show them it's possible to find healing, experience it, feel it, be restored and redeemed—everything they say they so badly need."

For more information, visit Mattson's website at Tonimattson.com. *Unlikely Recruits* can be purchased from Amazon, and proceeds go to support the Veteran Wellness Program at Trinity Equestrian Center. All programs are always free to veterans and their families.

