

Courtney & Eli



“Courtney’s” mother had been incarcerated for several years when she was referred to the ranch for fighting in school. Many of the children who are court appointed to attend Shepherd Youth Ranch for poor behaviors are suffering from a past filled with abuse, neglect, grief or loss. Courtney’s life was no different.

During her first session at the ranch Courtney chose a little buckskin, dun quarter horse named Eli from a herd of five horses to be her partner. Unfortunately, Eli and the other horses were taking advantage of the brisk, cool weather. They playfully sprinted to the opposite end of the 5 acre pasture just as Courtney began making her selection. Disappointed, she related the experience with the horses to many rejections that she had experienced in life.

After some time, while Courtney shared her painful wounds, Eli began to make his way across the pasture. As he separated himself further and further from the herd, it was clear that he was headed straight to her!

Eli reached Courtney and stopped. He positioned his body in such a way that she was able to drape her arms across his back. As she buried her head in his mane, she began to cry. “He came back” she said, “he picked me, finally someone picked me!”

For a young teenage girl who had experienced the devastation of rejection and abandonment most of her life, this was a significant moment. Just as Christ chooses his children daily, this little horse whose name itself means “elevate”, desired to spend time with this precious child above all things.

As the session came to a close, Courtney whispered a secret into Eli’s soft ear and made her way out of the pasture. Although Eli rarely “spoke” to humans, on this particular day when Courtney turned to wave good bye, the little dun ran toward her and let out a whinny never before heard! It was clear, he had indeed chosen her!