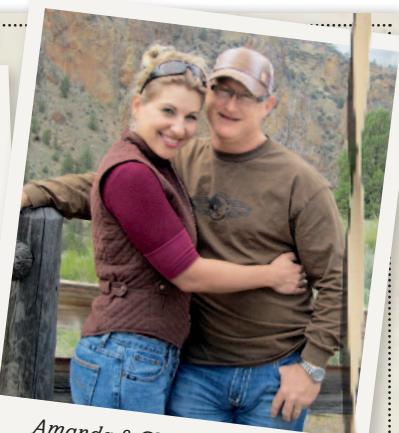




Ranch participant Kisan, 17, decorated Patience with Bible verses.



Amanda & Christopher Moore  
**REIGNING GRACE RANCH**



Therapeutic barn chores

a 2011 race, when Amanda and Christopher Moore brought the onyx-colored gelding to their ranch for rehabilitation. Now Joshua's Dream stood among 25 other rescues, including Shiloh, a former show horse whose owners had embedded razor blades in her front hooves to create a more exaggerated trot. But it was Joshua's Dream who "made an absolute beeline for that boy," recalls Amanda, 34. "This 1,500-pound racehorse sweetly laid his head on Mike's chest and nuzzled him. And Mike—tough guy that he is—looked up, smiled, and said, 'I love this.'"

Over the next few months, the pair grew even closer: Mike would spend time removing the trapped pebbles from his new friend's hooves and carefully brushing his mane and tail. Even Mike's foster care caseworker noticed a change in his behavior, reporting that the boy was less prone to angry outbursts.

### Taking life by the reins

According to Amanda, that sort of magic happens every single day at the 20-acre nonprofit ranch. "We pair abused, neglected and slaughter-bound horses with children who are lost and broken," she explains, "and together, they learn how to trust and love again."

Four years ago, Amanda and her husband, Christopher, 41, were in need of rescuing themselves when their information technology company's financial success began driving them apart. "We had become so focused on our possessions instead of each other," she says. Stressed out and working endless hours, Amanda says she also developed a shopping addiction. In an effort to strengthen their marriage, the couple—high school sweethearts who'd both grown up riding—purchased two Tennessee walking horses. →

# Happy trails

At a nonprofit ranch that caters to kids in need, the healing starts with the first nuzzle.

by **LESLIE GOLDMAN**

**M**ike\*, 14, strode into the fence-enclosed paddock of Reigning Grace Ranch in northeast Scottsdale, AZ, and dared any horse to approach him. Removed from his home by authorities when he began following in his parents' drug-dealing footsteps, the spiky-haired eighth grader had been ricocheting around the foster care system for

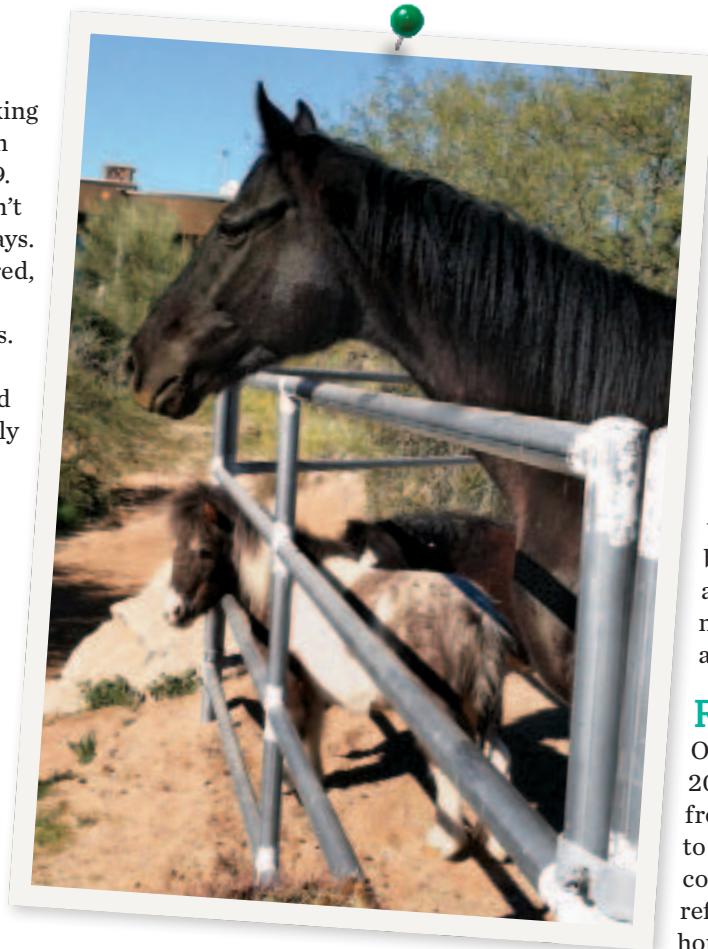
more than three years. Nobody wanted to deal with the kid.

Except Joshua's Dream. The 6-year-old Thoroughbred (and great-grandson of Secretariat) had been severely mistreated during his years on the racetrack, pumped full of speed-enhancing steroids and forced to run on an injured front leg. He was slated to be euthanized following a tendon blowout during

Evening trail rides and shared barn work helped them reconnect, but a sinking economy forced them from their home in August 2009. “And to be honest, we hadn’t saved a penny,” Amanda says.

Their company shuttered, they moved to a friend’s property with their horses. There, Amanda began mentoring a neighborhood boy named Sean\*, a socially awkward 11-year-old who was being homeschooled after having been bullied. “He needed a skill that would help him develop confidence, and he also needed to learn how to set boundaries,” says Amanda, who majored in education and taught high school for 10 years.

Sean quickly took a shine to their horse Hannah, herself skittish from abuse.



*1,500-pound Joshua’s Dream (above) made an absolute beeline for the boy and sweetly laid his head on his chest.*

Together, the pair worked on trust-building exercises, such as having Sean introduce Hannah to objects that were scary to her, like a soccer ball or black tarp, to prove he could keep her safe. He also took to riding Hannah without a saddle to allow the two to feel each other’s movements. “All these experiences helped them develop a way of communicating with each other,” Amanda says, “and Sean finally felt like he was good at something.” Sean’s progress was so inspiring that she decided she wanted to dedicate herself to helping more kids in this way.

Christopher eventually found work

with another technology company, which enabled the couple to lease some land of their own and open Reigning Grace in October 2009. Amanda has since begun training as a certified equus coach—a life coach who uses horses to help clients gain insight into their problems. “There’s a sign with an old English proverb hanging in our barn that says, ‘Show me your horse and I will tell you what you are,’” she explains. “Time after time, our horses gravitate toward a child who comes from the same situation as it does. When the child gets frustrated with the horse, we’ll ask, ‘Well, what is the horse

doing that’s upsetting you?’ They realize their horse is reflecting their own negative qualities and something clicks.” Slowly, the loudmouthed grow quieter, the bullies soften, the shy let their walls down.

“We spend so much time judging one another or thinking we’re being judged, but horses don’t judge you,” says volunteer Joey Ogburn, 43. “You can tell them your problems or bury your face in their coat and cry. They give back so much and all they ask for is a little hay in return.”

**Road to recovery**

Over the past three years, 200 kids with issues ranging from turbulent home lives to autism and ADD have come to Reigning Grace, referred by foster programs, homeless shelters, local Big Brothers Big Sisters chapters and old-fashioned word of mouth. Trained volunteer staff guide the children through 90-minute sessions that include barn chores as well as free riding lessons, which are funded with donations from children’s organizations, individuals and companies.

Though more than 30 horses have also been rehabilitated and adopted out to safe homes during this time, Amanda is most proud of Reigning Grace’s track record when it comes to offering at-risk kids a sense of consistency, security and acceptance. “We’re nurturing their creativity and individuality and encouraging them to live their life with an authentic purpose,” she says. “Whether you’re a horse or a human, feeling loved—and important—is crucial to breaking the cycle of abuse.”