

Following the Tale of a Star

Interviewee: Linda Martin

Written by Cheryl Karoly

Before Christine Marie, there were Star Riders. I had the chance to interview Linda, who is the current Program Director of Star Riders. I only hope I can give credit to the amazing story that she told me.

At 6 months old, Christine was starting to have severe seizures. When Linda took her to the hospital, she was told Christine should spend the rest of her life in an institution. She was diagnosed through MRIs with tuberscleorsis. It is close to the Elephant Man disease, in that tubers develop in the body and in the brain. The tubers harden and grow with age.

When she was 3 years old, Linda put her on the back of a horse. She realized that it was on horseback that she had the best communication with Christine. At 5 years old, Christine started to talk and sing.

When Christine was 16 years old, one of her two brain tumors grew. Hydrocephalus also developed, and a brain operation was done. About that time, Linda was introduced to the horse program at Easter Seal. Easter was the director of a program that was for other-abled children: an equestrian therapy program called Star Riders. Easter was also a cancer survivor. Unfortunately, the cancer in Christine had moved to the colon.

That is when the Make-A-Wish foundation stepped in. Make-A-Wish sent Christine and her family to Hawaii so Christine could swim with her much beloved dolphins. She passed away in the year 2000. Christine Marie Martin died at the age of 19.

This is 2006. A couple years or so after Christine's departure, the program was handed to Linda. Star Riders currently serves over 100 children, all on the shoulders of volunteers and grants. This is an equestrian therapy program, but it offers more social support than the world of academia. Before this happened though, the program was renamed "Christine Marie's Star Riders." When I asked Linda how she could keep coming back to this, she gave me a humbling answer. "I see her smile on the faces of the kids. Sometimes when they give me hugs, she's there too. And I know she's up in heaven, looking down on us."

One of the first horses Linda bought, Mona Lisa, was actually purchased from a CSUMB student. Val is also a former CSUMB student, who came to the program 2 years ago. She liked what she saw, and you can still see her just about anytime you're there. Ida and Gary started riding with Linda and Christine when she was alive. There was a mutual bond, and they started going to classes together to learn how to work with their community and gained knowledge of what their children were diagnosed with. Although Christine is gone, there is always the hope for a better future.