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MICHAEL MARTIN MURPHEY: LIVING THE LIFE HE DREAMED

BY DUTCH HENRY



Growing up in the city and spending the summers of his youth on his grandparents' ranch, Michael Martin Murphey learned about the horse-human bond early in life. It was there the spark of enjoying the world from horseback first ignited deep within him, forging ideas and dreams that shaped a lifetime. The ideas did not take long to sprout into real life adventures and by the age of 15, he vowed he would see as much of America from horseback as possible. And help others see it too.

Over the years Michael has led hundreds of trail rides in all the most beautiful places our country has to offer. He has guided horse enthusiasts to the bottom of the majestic Grand Canyon and under the pink cliffs of Bryce Canyon in Utah. He led a group of riders along the entire 500 miles of the Colorado trail and many other spectacular horseback adventures. Michael takes his guitar and music with him on the trail, and says he always wanted to go to that kind of party and couldn't find any, so he figured he'd make his own, and share the party with as many people as he could.

Formed also in those early years was a deep love of the American West and the ranching way of life. He would listen to stories told by his uncles and grandparents of cowboy and ranch life, and lived them plenty himself, helping to shape the music he would write and perform. So rooted in his heart is a love for the Western way of life that he founded the Murphey Western Institute to help preserve and perpetuate that rich and important history. By celebrating and promoting the history and traditions of the American West—through music, literature, poetry, sculpture, paintings and photography as well as through living history festivals and exhibits—the foundation not only keeps



alive that Western spirit but also gives it firm footing to continue.

WILDFIRE RIDES ON

Michael has enjoyed decades of musical success and is a much-loved Grammy winning singer and songwriter of Western music with six Gold albums, all tracing back to his roots in the American Western way. We all know his iconic song "Wildfire."

Most of us don't know it came to him in a dream. Michael was living in Los Angeles, attending UCLA, away from the reaches of the range, cattle and horses when that the song came to him in his sleep one night.

"I was missing Texas, and woke up from a dream. I got up and wrote the song in one sitting, from that dream." Michael said. "The song came from deep down in my subconscious. My grandfather told me a story when I was a little boy about a legendary ghost horse that the Indians talked about. In 1936, author J. Frank Dobie identified this ghost horse story as the most prominent one in the lore of the Southwest."

Michael has also been quoted as saying, "I can't tell you that I understand

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Photo by Donna Phillips

“Michael takes his guitar and music with him on the trail, and says he always wanted to go to that kind of party and couldn’t find any, so he figured he’d make his own, and share the party with as many people as he could.”

what the song means, but I think it’s about getting above the hard times. I’ve had people tell me they wish they could ride that mystical horse and get away from their hard times, whatever they are.”

“So I’ve spent the rest of my life trying to figure out what my dream is.”

THE DREAM THAT HELPS OTHERS

Whether Michael ever figures that out or not, his dream is obviously helping others. Through his music, guided trail rides and efforts to preserve the Western way of life and spirit, he touches lives and leaves them changed for the better. Even as a youth spending summers on the ranch, he had a drive to help those who were not so lucky. Volunteering at the Christian Youth Camp in Lewisville, Texas, he taught children to ride and gave them their first taste of the human-horse bond. The idea behind the camp was to introduce inner city youths to the country and teach them various outdoor skills, including horseback riding.

As is evidenced by all the trail rides Michael has hosted and continues to host, he retained that desire to introduce people to the joy of riding and exploring the world with a horse—even those not fortunate enough to have the ability to ride on their own.

“Those of us blessed enough to have the kind of bodies that are able to ride, and

can compete on horseback or just enjoy the fun horses can bring, can do a lot of service for kids who just dream and dream and dream they could do what we can do,” Michael explained. “There are so many people who look up to us who are able to ride, and wish they could have a horse, or just wish they were even physically able to ride a horse. It’s really important for us to give back, those of us who have been blessed with the ability to ride.”

Michael constantly looks for ways he can help others enjoy the thrill of knowing horses. Fourteen years ago, as he was wrapping up one of his big annual West Fest festivals, his son Ryan called and told him, “Dad, you have a granddaughter. Her name is Fiona Rose. She was born with



Fiona enjoys a pony ride with her dad, Ryan Murphey, and her grandmother, Diana Hobson.

NATIONAL BENEFIT TRAIL RIDE SET FOR JUNE 5-7 FOR THE FIONA ROSE MURPHEY FOUNDATION

By Gary Holt

The TWHBEA National Trail Ride to Benefit the Fiona Rose Murphey Foundation is held each year on the first weekend in June to coincide with National Trails Day. This year's event will be held June 5-7 in five states across the US and in Germany. Our goal is to provide the same great events at each location but at the same time we know there will be some fun and exciting things that each venue will offer to make for a memorable experience unique to that location, in addition to the beautiful trails.

Here is the schedule:

- ▶ Thursday, June 5—check-in and registration with an opportunity to ride the beautiful trails.
- ▶ Friday, June 6—enjoy the trails and learn about the sports of Extreme Trail or Cowboy Mounted Shooting from 3 to 5 p.m. You may even be able to try your skills at this exciting sport! The evening will be capped off with great entertainment.
- ▶ Saturday, June 7—another great day of trail riding; at 5 p.m., enjoy a wine and cheese meet and greet with the stars and fellowship with fellow trail riders. The final event will be a concert at 7 p.m. with legendary performers Michael Martin Murphey, Joni Harms, R. W. Hampton, Templeton Thompson and others to be announced.

In addition to beautiful trails at outstanding facilities and great food, clinics and entertainment, vendors will be onsite with everything equine for your shopping enjoyment.

Campers will make their reservations and pay their discounted campsite fees with the campgrounds. For a \$50 tax-deductible donation to the Fiona Rose Murphey Foundation, you may enjoy all of the activities including the concerts.

This year, events are being held in Tennessee, Missouri, Illinois, Colorado, Washington state and Germany. For further information, contact Gary Holt at 615-478-2138 and at www.equestrianlegacy.net

Gary I. Holt, President • Legacy Benefit Group • Equestrian Legacy Group



Fiona Rose Murphey is an inspiration to everyone she knows.

seven broken bones. Doctors say she has a condition called osteogenesis imperfecta or brittle bone disease. She's gonna be just fine, but it means her bones are gonna break real easy."

A VOW OF SUPPORT

Michael vowed at that moment to create a foundation to not only help Fiona, her mother and father deal with what lay ahead but also other children and families dealing with brittle bone and similar diseases. Within a year, **The Fiona Rose Murphey Foundation Charitable Trust**, was an up and running nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization.

The foundation today operates as he and his wife Karen had envisioned—offering aid, comfort and support to children with a wide range

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“Those of us blessed enough to have the kind of bodies that are able to ride, and can compete on horseback or just enjoy the fun horses can bring, can do a lot of service for kids who just dream and dream and dream they could do what we can do.”—Michael Martin Murphey

of bone disorders. “Insurance only covers so much,” Michael explained. “The wheelchairs, for instance, are often not suitable for children with brittle bone. Often things in the house must be redone, like sinks, steps and doors. The children may need braces and custom-made equipment. There are just so many things to consider above and beyond the huge medical expenses.” About one in every 20,000 children born in the US has this or a similar bone disorder.

The foundation also helps provide funds for children to receive therapeutic riding sessions, helping those kids who could only dream of riding a horse.

Funds to operate the foundation come from tax-deductible donations, concerts, trail rides and other fundraising efforts. Michael even sells autographed guitars with the lyrics to Wildfire inscribed!

There is a big fundraising trail ride coming up—it’s a nationally organized three-day event sponsored by the Tennessee Walking Horse Owners and Breeders Association (TWHBEA). On June 5 through June 7, folks in five different states and Germany will be stepping into the stirrups to ride for Fiona—and many others. Each event will feature fun trails, fellowship, food and evening concerts. I guess one could say that Michael’s years outfitting and hosting trails rides were good training for a part of his life that would offer him a chance to help others in a different way. Michael will be performing at the Circle E Guest Ranch, Belvidere, Tennessee ride. You can still register for that and any other location. Please see the sidebar on page 21



for more details.

Children with OI have no mental issues other than they want to do what everyone else wants to do. And a big part of what the foundation does is try to help that happen as much as possible. “We never know what contributions people are going to make,” Michael noted. “President Roosevelt was in a wheelchair. The list is long of folks who overcome great odds with a little help. We want to help.”

Little Fiona is 14 now, in high school and in band. A friend pushes her wheelchair. She is also attending college classes for math and science at Vanderbilt University. She has endured nearly 100 broken bones and dozens of surgeries, and remains upbeat and inspirational. She even gives motivational talks. Her granddaddy Michael says she’s an inspiration to lots of folks. I think she’s a precious chip off the old block.

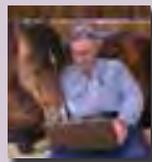


To learn more about the Fiona Rose Murphey Foundation, visit www.fionarosemurpheytrust.org

To learn more about the Murphey Western Institute, visit www.murpheywesterninstitute.org

To learn more about Wildfire, read the Story Behind The Song: ‘Wildfire,’ Michael Martin Murphey <http://theboot.com/story-behind-the-song-wildfire-michael-martin-murphey/?trackback=tsmclip>

Be sure to visit Michael’s website at www.michaelmartinmurphey.com



Dutch Henry is a novelist and writer who writes about “People & Horses Helping Horses & People” and resides in Virginia with his wife of 36 years, Robin; along with one horse, dogs, cats and chickens. Dutch also does free “Therapy For Therapy Horse Clinics” at therapeutic riding centers across the country to help horses maintain proper posture, free-and-easy movement and body carriage.

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