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# Hoofprints in the sand: David Lichman's cross- country benefit tour touches many hearts

Many people know David Lichman as a 5-Star Parelli trainer driven by a passion to help horses and their people achieve the best possible partnerships. David has traveled the world hosting clinics and teaching, in many years spending more than 200 days on the road. Not as many people know of David's commitment to help children and grown folks who, for whatever the reason or circumstance, can benefit from an equine connection.

Watching his daughter volunteering at an Equine-Assisted Therapy Center years ago, David first realized the healing magic that lives within the horse. He'd always been keenly aware of the connection between human and horse, but this day, watching a young autistic girl smile for the first time in her life while sitting on a horse, David felt a new dimension of that healing. He was never able to forget the feeling that moment gave him. Quietly, over the years, David has helped promote equine-assisted therapy and often wondered how he might do more.

David grew up in the Boston area and often played on Marblehead Beach. He always remembered the day he saw hoof prints in the sand there and, even though he had no horses in his life then, he promised himself one day he would ride his own horse on that very beach.

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Sunrise at Marblehead: David and Julio  
direct Scotty and Thirteen in a double  
hind-leg stand. Photo by Tanya Braganti

# “Tribulations AND ELATIONS”

BY DUTCH HENRY



## THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

Recently David felt the urge to load up his horses, Thirteen, a 16-year-old Tennessee Walker; Scotty, a 15-year-old Tennessee Walker; and Julio, a 19-year-old Andalusian, and head for Marblehead Beach to fulfill that childhood dream. But it would be a long journey as David, his wife Nancy, and their two children, Tova, 21, and Sam, 17, are now based in Sacramento, California.

At that moment, the idea of playing on his childhood beach with his horses was as strong as it ever had been. However, David could not make sense of just loading up, making the drive and splashing in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean with his three amigos. Somehow, to this very giving man, that felt selfish. One morning, playing with the horses, the idea came to him. He would make the trek an adventure. It could be an opportunity for friends and students to meet his horses and see the connection, love and teamwork they'd built over the years. Not in a lesson, or clinic type atmosphere, but in a fun visit, perhaps a show. That thought process gave birth to the idea of a tour that would feature David and his horses playing and dancing together at liberty. But still he wasn't satisfied.

While planning his summer tour, David had another thought. What if, at each tour stop, he featured someone from a local equine-assisted organization as a special



The Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina, gave permission to David and his three horses to be photographed at liberty in front of the fabulous Biltmore House. Photo by Kathy Ziegler

guest? And in the process help raise much needed operating funds for each one? So in association with the Parelli Education Institute, David came up with a strategy to donate 50 percent of the proceeds to the marvelous equine organizations devoted to helping others.

At each stop they would perform their "Horses At Liberty—Musical ~ Magical ~ Educational," a Friday evening extravaganza of dancing, playing and riding, demonstrating the remarkable bond that can be realized with a horse. David would also conduct a two-day clinic every weekend, helping folks understand how

to achieve this bond with their own horse. He set a goal to raise at least \$10,000.

With the help of PATH International member and publicity advisor Petina Cole, they began to select tour venues, and with the advice of the local hosts, they selected the beneficiaries at each location. After much coordination effort by Cheryl Jones, many phone calls and arrangements made, it was time to set out on an adventure that would touch many hearts.

David and his horses would log over 10,000 miles in two and a half months, visiting nine cities, teaching clinics, performing their Friday night musical

Navy seal veteran Robert Foley (mounted, right): first time on a horse in 35 years! Photo by Tanya Braganti



extravaganza, visiting old friends and making new ones. They raised over \$12,000 for the local beneficiaries, too.

"It was one of the most emotional things I've done in my career—meeting all the wonderful people and sharing the bond I have with my horses." David said. "Among all the other things to come out of this experience was getting to spend two and a half months with my son Sam."

The trip was a success, but there were also a few bumps along the way. David calls it his "Tribulations and Elations Tour." At each destination hearts were touched, clinics helped folks to fine-tune their lessons and money was raised to help good people and horses help others. But David, Thirteen, Scotty and Julio also faced challenges they could not have foreseen, which they overcame with grace and imperturbability.

### AND SO IT BEGAN...

The first stop was Paradise Stables in Moscow, Idaho, and the beneficiary was Palouse Area Therapeutic Horsemanship, arranged by Sue Jacobson. David understood the ticket pre-sales for the

Robert enjoys a quiet moment with Thirteen. Photo by Tanya Braganti



Friday night extravaganza were low, but he was okay with that because it would give the horses and him a chance to "get their traveling sea legs." It seemed though, that the local news had done such a great job of announcing and promoting the show that the venue was in fact sold out, and those sea legs were earned performing to an exuberant capacity crowd.

Seven days later they rolled into the Anipro Arena in Absarokee, Montana. The beneficiary was Operation Second Chance, arranged by Hank Tuell. That evening David discovered Thirteen had likely been kicked in the head, breaking bones in his nasal passage. David spent the

continued next page

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night with the veterinarian and Thirteen, who had to be fitted with what he now calls his "superhero mask."

Thirteen would be sidelined for two shows, leaving it up to Julio to do extra duty. Julio already had the heaviest load, opening the show under saddle, performing at liberty and re-saddled for riding to music. Julio at 19 has a touch of arthritis, but he handled the additional workload like the champ he is. Thirteen could not be kept down, so he did a cameo walk through. He really wanted to play, but the vets did not want him to elevate his respiration rate and risk disturbing the clotting and healing in his sinuses.

The next show at **Leatherdale Equine Center at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine in St. Paul, Minnesota**, beneficiary **Horses Helping Humans**, arranged by Shannon Bruce, placed extra duty on Julio too. Thirteen rejoined the cast at the next tour stop, **Lilac Hill Farm in Green Lake, Wisconsin**, beneficiary, **Helping Hands, Healing Hooves**, arranged by Heather Burke. "He was ready to get back at it and he never missed a beat," David recalled.

Then on to Canada they rambled, destination **Northfield Farm in Rockwood,**

**Ontario**. Beneficiary was **Equine Guelph** at the University Of Guelph, arranged by Gayle Ecker. The show and the audience were just perfect, and David even had time to visit the farm of Lori Northrup, president of the Parelli Education Institute. The trip across the border, however, proved a bit of a challenge. While waiting for the veterinary health certifi-

cates on the US side, David had the good fortune to meet a gentleman who crosses the border with horses regularly. He warned David to pull off the road before crossing the bridge and carry his papers in hand to the other side for signatures before crossing with his rig and horses. Without doing that, they would send him back. So he did.

It was no small feat to pull off the 10-lane road at the bridge, cross five lanes of traffic on foot carrying a bag holding his computer and another

holding the papers. But David wanted to be sure he had everything. Apparently the US Border Patrol Agents were worried about David's bag, as they approached him in the middle of the bridge, hands on their guns, demanding he set his bag down and back away. Eventually David was allowed to proceed, but not before he



David and Robert celebrate the realization of a shared dream. Photo by Tanya Braganti

Thirteen and Scott sit for their photo on the beach at Marblehead, Massachusetts. Photo by Tanya Braganti



Thirteen at Montana Equine Surgical Center wearing his Superhero mask, which keeps pressure on his fractured sinus.



returned that ominous computer bag to the truck, crossing all that traffic on foot a few more times.

After Canada it was on to **Boston and Marblehead Beach**. The goal of a lifetime was about to be fulfilled. Here he met retired Navy Seal Robert Foley, who had seen David's video on YouTube with his horses on the beach at Pt. Reyes, California and contacted David to share with him the inspiration he drew from that. Since Robert lives in Maine, not all that far from Marblehead, David invited Robert to join him for the day at Marblehead. It was at the beach that David learned of the severity of Robert's struggles with both mental and physical issues brought on by his service to our country.

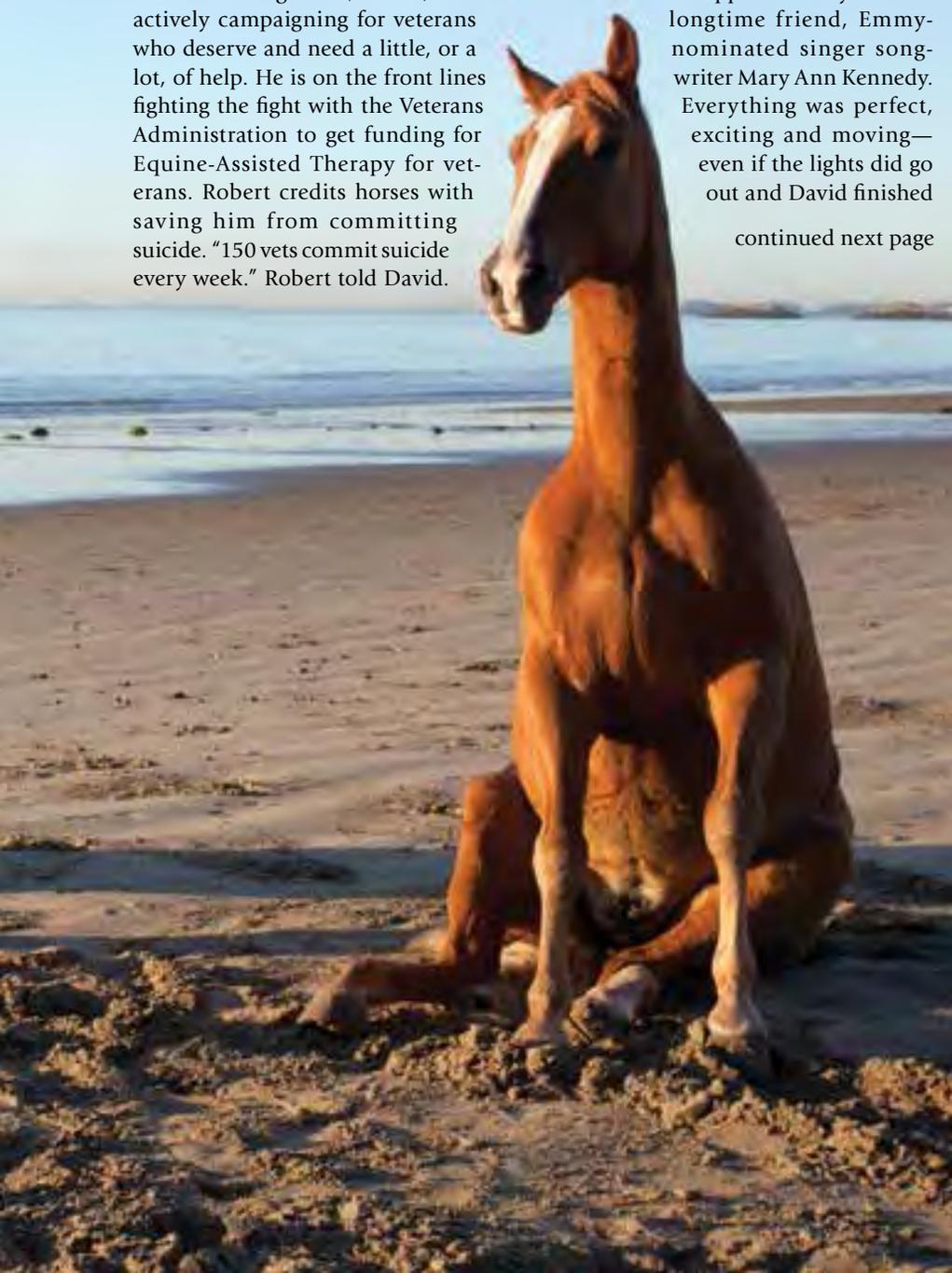
Robert was not seeking special favors, thanks or recognition; in fact, he is actively campaigning for veterans who deserve and need a little, or a lot, of help. He is on the front lines fighting the fight with the Veterans Administration to get funding for Equine-Assisted Therapy for veterans. Robert credits horses with saving him from committing suicide. "150 vets commit suicide every week." Robert told David.

"If we were losing 150 people a week in Afghanistan, we'd sure have a different approach; why can't we here at home?"

With Robert, videographer Mike D'Apice, David's family and Parelli helpers, there were a total of 11 folks on the beach, and David's horses were a bit distracted, wanting to visit with everyone. But the Marblehead day was even more compelling than David could have imagined. He gave Robert a ride on Thirteen. "That's the first time I've been on a horse in 35 years," he told David. It was a moment that touched both of them deeply.

From Boston they headed south for the **Biltmore Equestrian Center in Asheville, North Carolina**. Beneficiary **Shepherd Youth Ranch**, arranged by Ashley Hayes, and featuring a special appearance by David's longtime friend, Emmy-nominated singer songwriter Mary Ann Kennedy. Everything was perfect, exciting and moving—even if the lights did go out and David finished

continued next page



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Robert Foley running with Thirteen on the beach at Marblehead. Photo by Tanya Braganti



“Retired Navy Seal Robert Foley, who had seen David’s video on YouTube with his horses on the beach at Pt. Reyes, California, is actively campaigning for veterans who deserve and need a little, or a lot, of help. He is on the front lines fighting the fight with the Veterans Administration to get funding for Equine-Assisted Therapy for veterans.”

the show by headlights and flashlights! And shooting a balloon with bow and arrow while riding Thirteen bareback and bridless at a canter in the dark. Bill Cecil, CEO of the Biltmore Estate, gave David rare permission to photograph his horses *at liberty* in front of the Biltmore House. Photographer Kathy Ziegler created some amazing shots.

Next stop was **Clearview Horse Farm, Shelbyville, Tennessee**. The beneficiary, **East Lincoln Elementary School**, was arranged by Marie Lloyd. This is one of those forgotten public schools where the teachers use their own money to help the children buy books, supplies and even clothes. Marie and everyone were heart-broken when they found out the children would not be able to attend the Friday night show. No transportation could be arranged. David would not let the children down. “If they can’t come to the show, we’ll take the show to the children,” he declared.

Petina Cole, David’s logistics operator and tour publicist, arranged for David to do the show on the school lawn, and they set up a small ring right there. “600 children filed out of that school and surrounded us. It was better than we could have planned!” David said.

The children had endless questions and boundless excitement. The show went off without a hitch, with Thirteen, Scotty and Julio sharing their magic in the hot Tennessee afternoon sun to the cheers and applause of the children. The grand finale, David shooting balloons with bow and arrow while riding Thirteen bareback to the rhythm of music, inspired yelps

and gasps from the youngsters. David rode a sweaty Thirteen to the edge of the makeshift ring, began to slide off, but his sweaty blue jeans stuck to his leg. Instead of a graceful dismount, he fell with a thud and broke two ribs.

He still had the show and clinics to do back at Clearview Horse Farm, so with the help of a few pain pills and nearby Parelli instructors John and Kathy Baar, they got it done with class and grace.

**Taylor Rodeo Arena in Taylor, Texas** was the next and final tour stop. Benefit organization, **The Horse Boy Foundation**, arranged by Rupert Isaacson and Iliane Lorenz, was extremely helpful. A special treat here was a riding exhibition by the Horse Boy Foundation riders. David did need to enlist the aid of a few pain pills to do his performance, but together, he and his horses finished the tour.

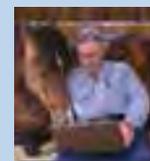
Plans were to rest that Monday, but a knock came on the door followed by an announcement, “One of your horses is bleeding!”

Thirteen had again injured his face. This time he managed to cut his face open from ear to ear, as if he had tried to scalp himself. The veterinarian stitched him up, and put in a drain that needed to come out in a week; Thirteen could not travel until then. Everything healed nicely, and David had some time then to rest and even squeeze in a bit of sightseeing. Thirteen’s drain came out in a week and they rolled on toward home, making a few stops along the way to rest the horses and visit friends. They drove down the home stretch after a 15-hour marathon effort, but they had completed the tour they set out to do. “We

limped in, but we got it done.” David said.

The tour was a huge success, and while there were more than a few bumps in the road, there was plenty of healing and goodness too. “We had a lot of things to deal with on this trip, but we had a lot of joy too: seeing the children at the elementary school in Tennessee laughing, meeting Robert on the beach, performing at dawn in front of the Biltmore House, playing with my horses for two and a half months, leaving hoofprints in the sand at Marblehead Beach, and raising the money for the charities. And spending all this time on an adventure like this with my son ... yes we had things to deal with, but I hope folks realize, doing something good is worth a few tribulations,” David said.

**Contact David Lichman through his website [www.davidlichman.com](http://www.davidlichman.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. You can reach Dutch at [dutchhenry@hughes.net](mailto:dutchhenry@hughes.net). He would love to hear from you. Join his blog at, <http://dutchhenry.blogspot.com>. His novel “We’ll Have the Summer,” is available on Amazon and Dutch’s website [www.dutchhenryauthor.com](http://www.dutchhenryauthor.com)