My Healing Angel

Siri Lindley, 51, a former world-class triathlete, lives with her wife in Longmont, Colorado. She was treated for acute myeloid leukemia.

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When I rescued my horse, Savannah, in 2016, I didn't realize the profound impact she would have on my life. Not just on my identity but in giving me the strength and confidence to triumph over acute myeloid leukemia.

I rescued Savannah from slaughter—the brutal, painful practice of butchering horses for human consumption. In return, she changed my life.

My first task was to convince this 1,500-pound animal to trust me, to let me be a leader she could count on to protect and guide her. Horses can read humans; you cannot fool a horse. Don't try to pretend you are happy when you are not or not scared when you are. To become her leader, I had to gather all my courage, overcome my fears. The more I did, the more she became my trusted partner and soul mate.

Little did I know that she came into my life for an even greater purpose.

My initial treatment, a clinical trial that combined intensive targeted therapy with chemotherapy, got me to remission so I could qualify for a stem cell transplant. I was afraid and anxious, but Savannah would sense my fear and pain, nuzzle my nose and just sit calmly with me.

Horses have enormous hearts, literally and figuratively. Their hearts beat very slowly. When you stand next to one, your own heart rhythm gets slower too, calming you and giving you this beautiful sense of peace.

While in the hospital recovering from my stem cell transplant, the dream of riding my beautiful Savannah again kept me going. But when I was able to return home to the ranch, I was 20 pounds lighter, weak and feeling sick. Now, keep in mind, Savannah is a young, strong, feisty and fast Arabian thoroughbred. When I told my wife I was going to ride Savannah, she seemed very concerned.

I saddled up my beautiful girl and carefully got on. She could sense my lightness and weakness but also my pure joy. She took tiny, little baby steps. She sensed what I needed to feel safe and supported. Usually, Savannah pulls hard on the reins so she can reach down and eat the fresh

grass. I have to pull with all my might to keep her from doing that. But this time, although there was fresh springtime grass all around, she didn't even try to graze.

As the days and weeks went by, Savannah challenged me a bit more. I was in awe of her intuitiveness, the level of care she showed me, her understanding not just of where I was in my recovery but what I needed to move forward, to believe in myself and not be so afraid.

I had trained her to trust me as her guide. Now she was my guide, a beautiful, understanding spirit who built up my confidence on the path to becoming cancer-free.

Editor's note: Life coach and author Siri Lindley is cofounder of Believe Ranch and Rescue, a nonprofit dedicated to rescuing thoroughbred horses. Her website is SiriLindley.com.

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