

## High School Graduation Ceremony



**Lynda Hendricks, M.S. Ed, Academic Director**

La Mariposa Resort provided the perfect, serene setting for eleven In Balance Ranch Academy students and one Transitional Living student to participate in a ceremony commemorating their dream of graduating from high school. Two other students also earned their diplomas, although they were unable to attend the ceremony. Parents, siblings, extended family members and friends joined in the celebration. A gorgeous Tucson sunset provided the perfect backdrop to this important rite of passage for the new graduates.



Each student composed a speech to share with the attendees. Most of the graduates' speeches focused on the struggles they had endured with drug/alcohol addiction, experiences with school failure and resulting low self-esteem.



A prevalent theme of the students' presentations was the difficulties they encountered in a traditional high school setting and their reluctance to believe they could successfully graduate and go on to college. Many expressed their satisfaction at achieving high grades and their excitement for their future plans, which they shared with all in attendance. The following excerpt from one student's remarks exemplifies the difficulties our students typically face and the significance of achieving this important milestone:

*Despite my unique advantages at home, my journey through school has been quite the arduous one. This was not because I struggled with my classes, had problems with my teachers, or could not complete the work; rather, it was because I could not seem to go any period of time without an "incident". During the first year of high school I was expelled, during the second year I was arrested, and during the third I was destitute. I was lost. My pathway of success had been sidelined by one of failure and disappointment. My destructive behaviors had taken my privilege of continued education away from me and had put a damper on my once bright future.*

*A phrase in my quote states that "midway upon the journey of our life..." and I think that this should be taken literally. The word "midway" is the most applicable to my past predicament. At that part of my life I was at my midpoint. Today I am only in the now. I don't have to live for the past and I don't have to live for the future. Now, all that I have to do is live for the present and the rest will take care of itself. It is due to this that I can take my life one day at a time. For this I am grateful, and it is because I am a grateful person today that I am able to value things such as the privilege of education and my family. Hollis M.*



It is indeed rewarding to be able to help these fine young men rediscover their innate talents and encourage them to follow their hearts and dreams to find their passion in life. While parents and students are thankful for the gift of healing and academic success realized at the ranch, the staff is equally thankful for the gift of working with the students and their families.

### Galloping to Freedom



**Seth W.**

The turbulent body of my mare was charged with electrical energy as we galloped down the sandy wash and out into the fading sunlight. The crisp November air bit fiercely into my face, adrenaline and excitement making the cold a distant afterthought. I was having a great time, far better than I had ever expected when I had first come to In Balance. Thoroughly exhilarated, I slowed my horse down to a calming trot and turned to face the sun as it disappeared from view. This five-day long horse trip stood out unique against the monotony of Ranch life, a well-deserved respite from the demanding rigors of treatment. At first I was apprehensive to this interruption to my schoolwork, but this trip gave me much

more than academic acumen. The hours spent riding my horse and relaxing beside the fire were hours spent fulfilling desires for a greater sense of freedom, a greater sense of autonomy from the forces that have controlled my life since before I even entered treatment. I gave back to the horses by caring for them after trail rides; my mare definitely deserved the hay she wolfed down after the experience she gave me. Each night I drifted off to sleep, tired yet content, and hungry for more. I felt prepared to fully conquer any obstacles that stood in my way of getting my life back on track.



## A Friday Ritual



### Brian W.

“Break!” is yelled by Mr. David Black, a teacher here at In Balance. Students file out of classrooms and pick through the metal hotel tray that is the snack container. It is the last hour before lunch. There is a sort of organized chaos of bodies chatting and grabbing chairs off of stacks. Students place chairs near friends; it looks like a huge conglomeration of red cushions and polo shirts. Somebody calls “ears” (the way attention is asked for here) and the regular Friday ritual begins.

Every Friday, students get the opportunity to research, discuss and debate issues surrounding current events in the state, the country, and the world. Armed with a note written by either Mr. Mike Dorman or Mr. Black, students get on the internet and research about whatever has gone on in the world since the last Friday.

The other option for research is a week's worth of Tucson Star newspapers. Mr. Dorman also brings in the Sunday edition of the New York Times. Although the Ranch is far from other people, it is not cut off from the world, and it is made sure that the students aren't living in the Dark Ages of news when they leave the Ranch.

Once "ears" is called, the room falls silent. Students who researched a current event take turns speaking at a podium that bears the symbols of all three aspects of the In Balance recovery program. Everything from sports rankings and statistics to congressional politics is shared. After a student shares, the topic becomes open for questions and the questions more times than not turn into a debate of morals. Recently, a discussion about the Ft. Worth shootings, performed by a man who happened to be Muslim, turned into a discussion about the stigma of fear and hate toward Muslims and how the wars in the Middle East have created this misperception. In this process, the topic is stripped of its face value and a discussion begins about how it affects us here at the Ranch.

Personally, I benefit from Fridays' current events discussions because they offer me a chance to keep up with what's going on in the world around me. Although I avidly read Newsweek and Time, it's nice to use resources such as the internet and newspapers to keep up with the world. The discussions are mentally stimulating and I usually form informed opinions and develop new points of view. I look forward to Friday's current events mostly because of the opportunity to browse internet news sites and peruse newspapers for things that interest me. At home, one of the few healthy habits I had was an interest in news and politics, and I enjoy being able to develop and

grow this interest while here at the Ranch. In general, any healthy interests that students have here at the Ranch are encouraged and provided for by the Ranch.

Overall, the Friday current events class is a divergence from the weekly school schedule that helps students stay in touch with the world around them, helping them grow their perspective and understanding.

### 5K Run



### Nate R.

We all woke up excited, anxious to begin the long drive to Tucson. We sat in the dining room eating breakfast, making sure to eat light so as not to hinder our performances in the upcoming race. It had been just over a month since the notice was posted on the school board announcing the upcoming race, and we were all more than ready to put our training to the test. We were ready to show our peers and ourselves just what we were capable of.

The excitement faded slightly, however, when we realized we were woken up an hour too early. Despite our early rise, we remained in

high spirits, the discussion at the tables remained on the same topic—the race ahead.

The car ride was uneventful, but as we began to see city exit signs, we started to regain the energy that we had displayed earlier in the day.

We took time before the run to check out the school grounds, admiring the mountain backdrop and the impressive (if a bit run-down) campus. We also took the opportunity to observe our fellow runners, taking note of the people we thought would be vying for the top spots.

We got our race bibs from Lynda, who was volunteering at packet pick-up. She let us know that we could look forward to a free breakfast and also a post-race massage when we finished.

As the clock counted down the minutes until the race, we stretched our car-weary legs. The five minute countdown began. Ugo was also getting ready to run the race with us.

As a group we inched closer and closer to the starting line, excited and ready to run. The clock hit five minutes, and we were off! Around the track, out the school gates, and down the path to the street, I ran alongside my friend, Aaron, and we wordlessly passed several of our fellow runners (and were ourselves passed by several in turn). We passed the one-mile mark, and felt confident in our abilities as we kept a brisk pace without tiring.

The turnaround came, and we began the final stretch back toward the school and the finish line, Aaron taking off ahead of me as I slowed to compensate for my difficulty breathing the dusty air. I kept my pace steady as I neared the school, and as I made the final turn I picked up speed and entered the track arena once again. With finishers on the sidelines cheering, I

watched the two runners ahead of me cross the finish line, and then it was my turn.

My time was good, and I was glad to see how much my training had paid off—I felt like I could have run a hundred more miles. I cheered as the rest of our group finished in turn, and we all left Tucson feeling accomplished and grateful to have been given the opportunity to run.