

To whom it may concern,

My name is Mitchell L. Reno, I am a US. Army Infantry Veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom & Operation Iraqi Freedom. I am a PATH certified Therapeutic Riding Instructor, BraveHearts participant, Husband, and Father of two wonderful Sons. I was recently invited for the second time to join the BraveHearts crew on the 2nd Annual Trail to Zero ride through NYC and Washington D.C. I was honored to accompany my fellow Veterans as well as my friend, mentor, and BraveHearts' President Meggan Hill-McQueeney for such a worthy cause.

Trail to Zero 2018 was an incredible success and worthy to be called an opportunity of a lifetime. I can think of few causes better than that of riding with my brothers and sisters in service to our countries veterans. When I put it all in perspective we were riding for those who have no voice, for the veterans on the edge... all out of answers. We rode to bring awareness to this national epidemic and to honor all those who have lost their life to suicide. We rode to show our love, and to honor those mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, children, friends, comrades and communities that have lost those so dear to their hearts. We rode to say that this epidemic is not palatable, that we refuse to have our history written by a third party because our government and nation is too preoccupied with their own freedoms to fight for those who fought for theirs. We ride to show there is an answer for those who can no longer fight for themselves. I myself was an extremely at risk veteran prior to my introduction to the BraveHearts family and the American Mustang. I cannot explain the overwhelming sense of patriotism and purpose I personally felt as a combat veteran riding a symbol of our American heritage through our nation's capital, Washington D.C., as well as through our nation's first capital, New York City for my fellow comrades.

Now that I am back at home and have had some time to sit back and reflect on the truly amazing journey we embarked upon and completed with such pride, grace and dignity just two weeks ago. I am overcome with so many feelings of gratitude. I am so grateful for the staff on site at BraveHearts that made it possible for us to complete these rides in style with full bellies, clear hearts and open minds. The merchandising and marketing of the Trail to Zero brand for all our gear was world class. To the leadership that was so prevalent every day, as well as on the ride, every question being answered, coordination between agencies, barns, and individuals, daily schedules laid out for everyone, a feeling of safety and concern for not only individuals, but for horses as well. I am grateful for the quality rest and downtime, which included massage and spa treatment. Which let me tell you that most of us in the group felt like fish out of water during. I am thankful for the relaxing beach rides, which were an opportunity for all of us to reflect upon our reason for riding in Trail to Zero and in our daily lives. As well as, our love for our horses and one another, and our gratitude to God for all the many blessings that he has bestowed upon us. I am grateful for all the foundations, individual donors, and sponsors as well as the efforts of the BraveHearts staff that wrote for the grants that provided the funding for our cause. It would have truly been impossible without the generosity of all those who contributed through their works not just their words. The health and welfare for both horses and individuals was unparalleled as always. I am grateful for the Veterinarians on hand throughout the rides and on call for our horses at the barns where we boarded in multiple cities. I am so very grateful to the farriers for their wonderful shoeing of the horses so that our veterans could ride on sure-footed horses through the city streets. I am overwhelmed with the quality of the accommodations that were made for all of the BraveHearts crew in every city. I am so grateful for the NYC Mounted Unit, 18th Fire Squad in Manhattan, the NYC 6th Precinct and the Washington D.C. Motorcycle and Mounted Unit for

their friendship, direction, dedication, generosity, the care for our horses and the veterans' safe escort through the two cities. Above all, I am grateful for their patriotism shown through action and the ability of all involved to get behind our cause.

As I write this letter and think of the cold hard reality and sheer magnitude of our cause, and all the fortitude, drive and patience it takes to pull it all off, I am beyond humbled. I am humbled and overcome with emotion that so many truly care, and show that care through their laborious and monetary actions. All I have is Hope, hope that the funding will be there in the future to complete our mission. Hope that the patriotic efforts of those individuals and organizations have not been in vein. Hope, that like so many causes taken up in our Nation it doesn't just come and go like a warm winter day. I know that many share my feelings and sentiment for our cause. It is honestly a feeling of complete dread and hopelessness to conceive Trail to Zeros' non existence. I can speak to the reality of a failed mission attempt. It is one of the most demoralizing feelings of powerlessness to individuals, those persons requiring help and the group as a whole; a person could ever feel. On a personal note I have lost brothers to veteran suicide. It is raw. A raw gut wrenching and heart breaking feeling. For my family friends and comrades it was a daily reality that one day they would walk in on me dead, or get a call that I had finally committed suicide. The reality of it all is that they had become absolutely numb, and actually accepted the fact that, that call would come. That is until I met a mustang and we saved each other, giving each other a purpose through our struggles with living in new environments, trusting humans, accepting the realities of our new everyday life, and knowing we had each other. Without the interaction with that mustang, I would have surely been a statistic in the epidemic of veteran suicide. So many veterans at BraveHearts have truly become walking miracles, full of purpose, because of the interaction between them and the horse. It is an environment that promotes healthy day-to-day living, rather on the Trail, in the Round Pen, or a thousand miles away. BraveHearts is a family of horses and humans that are there for you in the worst of times and show you what the best of times look like. The horses make living in the present a real possibility and the staff help you find your unlimited potential. Horses are our answer. Trail to Zero is hope for lost Veterans. It is hope for mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers and children looking for an answer for their Veteran. Trail to Zero is a way to raise awareness to those people who have no idea it is an epidemic. Trail to Zero is a voice saying we are Veterans and our lives matter. This is why I implore you to continue your support of Trail to Zero and BraveHearts Therapeutic Riding and Educational Center. Thank you for your consideration, and support. I am truly grateful for your actions and continued service to our nation's veterans.

Sincerely yours,

Mitchell L. Reno

To whom it may concern,

I am one of the veterans that rode horses 20 miles in the Trail to Zer0 project in Washington D.C. and New York City. The project was to raise awareness about suicides among veterans, but it was so much more than that to me.

I will never forget riding a horse in front of the Whitehouse. I mean, who does that! Then the break in front of the National Monument, but the best part was at the end of the day spending time with the mounted police at their duty station. We shared stories, laughed at jokes and exchanged contact information. Things like that are monumental for veterans who deal with suicidal ideations. It's monumental for a veteran who deals with isolation. I deal with both.

I was charged and ready to go when we got to New York. Bobby D and his tour of Ground Zero will always be with me. I would not have had that experience if it had not been for this ride. His story and meeting others who were there during that horrible event seemed to expand my family. Family are strong bonds that keep the decision of suicide at bay. Seeing those individuals moving forward, regardless of that event helps me deal with my isolation. There is no therapy that offers that. Riding through Times Square, downtown, Central Park, but the best part was talking to the people, letting them know how important it is to stop suicide among our veterans.

This ride was so much more to me because I not only deal with suicidal ideologies myself, I have lost close friends to suicide. It was, and continues to be, equine therapy that saves my life. My friends were active in alternative therapies, but they were not active in equine therapy. In fact, they didn't even know about equine therapy because it was not recognized as a therapy. There is not a day that goes by I wonder if they had been introduced to equine therapy it might had made a difference. It made the difference in my life.

When Meggan Hill-McQueeney asked me to go on this ride, I knew I needed to go. I had already begun to isolate to the point I was ordering my groceries online and picking them up at "curb side." I would go to school and come home. Everything I do is online. Just because I am an active veteran or productive member doesn't mean that I am not susceptible. I need my support system to help keep me focused and on the right track. My horse is part of that. What about those who do not know or can't afford it.

We need to keep these rides going for all the reasons I have stated in this letter. I got to do things I would never have been able to do. The people that changed my life on this trip. Making as many people aware of the issue as possible so that we can get equine therapy accepted as a viable therapy. We need to keep this ride going so that those like my friends will have a chance to choose equine therapy as an alternative to ending their life.

We can't stop now! What if we are just one ride away from make all the difference? Twenty veteran lives a day and that is just those classified as suicide. Save my brother and my sister, PLEASE!

Thank you for all your help!

Trecia Rodgers

## TRAIL TO ZERO

DC-NYC September 2018

When I was asked to participate in Trail to Zero, my first thought was of several friends and co-workers that I had lost to suicide, including DPD #49 and NIU #76. Being a retired police officer, I knew several were not only veterans, but also first responders.

As I prepared for the trip I also thought of a young Army soldier and firefighter, Timmy Bowman. I had never met Timmy, however I had met his father several years ago. He and I share the same broken heart – grieving the loss of a son. I reached out to him and asked if Timmy could ride with me on our ride. I received an affirmative, and rode with a ribbon for Timmy.

I rode with two other ribbons made for Tom Reilly, Police Officer and Marine Veteran, and Toby Jennings, Sheriff Deputy and Air Force Veteran. Tom and Toby were both K9 officers and are laid to rest next to each other in our local cemetery.

Upon arriving in DC, and while dining out, our waiter learned of the ride, he had lost a very good friend by the name of Army Specialist Nolan Barham to suicide. Another rider, Seth Hardy, made another yellow ribbon and Jenny McDonald rode for Specialist Barham while in DC.

While riding through our nation's capital on horseback, a few photos were taken and sent to Timmy's father. I was thanked for honoring and remembering his son.

After the DC ride we all moved to Pennsylvania. While attending the September 11<sup>th</sup> memorial service at the Mission BBQ, I had the opportunity to meet with the Fire Chief from Whitewater, PA. The Fire Chief was also an Army Veteran, and, as he learned of our ride and our cause, he spoke of two friends he had served with that had committed suicide.

Jonathon Booker and Karl Johnson both had served in the U.S. Army in D Company 3/502 Infantry, 101<sup>st</sup> Division. Both Booker and Johnson were later honored at Ground Zero while in NYC.

As I rode through the streets of New York with the Police Department and our group of veterans, it became very clear to me that several of the veterans I was currently riding with would not be here today without the help of BraveHearts and these wonderful horses.

We had all arrived at BraveHearts through different means, and, whatever our background or branch of service, we are once again on mission, bringing the prevention and awareness of veteran suicide to the forefront.

Another photo was taken of Timmy's ribbon while at Freedom Tower/Ground Zero and sent to his father. His actual response was directed to me and will remain between two fathers, but once again he thanked me, and he explained that the photo was taken from where the world changed and Timmy's path was unknowingly started.

One of the highlights of the trip for me – and there are many – was being able to introduce our group to retired Brigadier General William Weise, USMC. His statement at the end of dinner says it best, “A fantastic group of people for a worthy cause.”

After arriving back home, I met with a firefighter friend and brother-in-law of Toby Jennings. Photos were shared and once again we were thanked for remembering.

I was personally involved in meeting different people along this trip that I had not known prior to this trip and whose lives were sadly touched forever by veteran suicide.

We must continue that ride Trail to Zero ride – to save lives. For those we have already lost, we must remember.

Respectfully Submitted,

Cpl Fred J Busby USMC

AKA “Cowboy” up!!

Hello, I wanted to take the time to share some of my thought and feelings about the incredible opportunity to be part of Trail to Zero 2018.

I am a thirteen year Air Force Veteran decorated for my actions in support of operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. After years of service and four deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan I have seen first-hand the affect the Profession of Arms can take on a person. For me personally the opportunity to ride through our nation's capital to spread such an important message was a very special mission. Last July I lost one of my Air Force brothers to suicide. Attending his funeral I learned that six other men I served with and knew personally had also taken their own lives. It was truly an honor ride with their names on ribbons in my horse's hair through the capital of the country we love and swore to defend. Being a Veteran, seeing our nation's capital and all the rich history and monuments it holds has been something I had only dreamed of. This experience has been a dream come true for me and I am grateful for the opportunity.

The trip was filled with so many highlights and emotions from proud and excited to mournful and humbling. For me watching the incredible job our horses do in an environment with so much pressure and watching our Veterans complete such a physically demanding ride is something I feel honored and proud to be a part of. To be part of a group carrying such an important message and spreading the word about the healing power of horsemanship and serving those who have served our country is an honor for me and I am humbled to be part of something so noble.

I feel it is incredibly important for Trail to Zero rides to continue each year as a way to bring attention to and spread awareness on the staggering Veteran suicide rate. 20 Veterans commit suicide each day in this country. That is 20 men or women who have served their country in the bravest way possible who are taking their own lives every single day, 20 a day, 140 a week, 560 a month, 6,720 a year. That is a staggering statistic that should bring shock, sadness, to anyone who loves America or at least enjoys Freedom. We still have a lot of work to do to get this issue the attention it deserves. I hope that we will continue to get such outstanding sponsorship and support from so many wonderful donors who see the value in our cause so we are able to continue the Mission of Trail to Zero. This isn't a problem that will go away on its own but I am faithful we can all make a difference and help save the lives of men and women who have bravely stepped forward and defended their country. It has truly been an honor and a privilege for me to be able to ride through the streets of Washington D.C. to honor my fellow veterans who have fallen victim to suicide. I am grateful to have been given this opportunity to be part of this mission that I care so deeply about, and will continue to ride until our mission is complete.

Sincerely,

Seth Hardy

Director of Horsemanship BraveHearts

Air Force Veteran

**September 20, 2018**

To Whom It May Concern:

It is difficult to find the proper words to describe the Trail to Zero ride this year. As a veteran of last year's ride, I expected to have a great ride this year, but the depth of meaning and the exhilaration involved in this year's ride was more than I anticipated. Being privileged to ride with a group of true patriots through Washington DC, in front of the Capitol building, riding down Embassy Row, and having a picture taken in front of the Washington monument, was inspiring and humbling at the same time.

To ride with 14 of my BraveHearts family and 12 New York City mounted policemen was awesome and memorable as we took pictures at the Freedom Tower and stopped traffic in Times Square. Most impressive was our stop at firehouse number 18. The reception we received from those firefighters and the throng of inquisitive people was overwhelming. I found this year's trip more emotional and meaningful due to the suicide of a Vietnam veteran from the same VFW post I attend having taken his life with no indication of stress or forewarning after leaving a meeting at that center. As a Vietnam veteran that experienced the stress of being back in the normal world three days after leaving a combat zone with little or no time to decompress, I feel a connection to these older veterans that were never appreciated for their service or tagged as "baby killers" and vilified by the anti-war movement and the general public. I was fortunate enough to have people available to help me begin to work through my aggression and then later in life to be further blessed to find the healing powers of the horse. I want to share that experience with as many veterans as possible.

It is truly disturbing to know that 20 veterans daily see themselves without any options and succumb to stress and depression. Where are the support staff and positive influences in their lives? There is little or no platform for these veterans and their plight. It is incumbent upon us as compassionate, empathetic supporters of this cause to do all in our power to shine a spotlight on this tragedy. Our ride will continue until the final number is ZERO!!

Sincerely,

**William (Bill) Mercurio**

I would like to start by saying what a truly amazing experience this trip was. I want to express my gratitude for BraveHearts and all those that made this possible. From all the simplest details to the most complex. I could not imagine the logistical planning put into this event and the execution seemed flawless. I would like to note the partnership with the NYPD was remarkable and I felt more than welcome in their city. The FDNY were also very accommodating and I am grateful for that as well. I know the horses much appreciated the water and break. This was definitely an overwhelming emotional experience all in a positive way. I was overwhelmed by the amount of love and support from complete strangers who just learned of our cause. I truly witnessed something amazing when a woman said to me she was watching the news that morning and contemplating making some poor decisions, instead she rushed down to meet up with us and thank us for what we were doing.

Coming straight from a residential PTSD program where I am daily facing my prior traumas having the opportunity to be with the horses even for a quick weekend was exactly what I needed. The mission meant more to me than I may have previously led on. There have been multiple occasions in my life where I have almost become that statistic; instead today I am fighting to bring that number to our goal of ZERO. I have lost a plethora of friends to suicide and am always asking why? How could I have helped? What could I have done? Well I now have help towards finding answers. As long as this mission continues, the hope will continue all the way to ZERO!

Michael "Sully" Sullivan

9.20.18

To whom it may concern,

My name is Jenny McDonald. I served in Iraq during the invasion as an Army Military Police Officer and prison guard, and I'm honored to have participated in both Trail to Zero 2017 and 2018. For me Trail to Zero was a glowing reminder of how lucky I am to still be here, in large part due to BraveHearts' amazing therapy horses, but it was also a gut wrenching reminder of my brothers and sisters who weren't as lucky as I in finding hope when there seemed to be none.

The biggest highlight of both the rides was the humbling outpour of support. In Washington, we were able to meet with two congressional aides to plead our case for the proven benefits of equine therapy for military Veterans. During the ride we were escorted by some amazing National Parks Mounted Officers, who took excellent care of us as we rode past some of our nation's greatest monuments and even provided us a BBQ after, knowing how tiring riding 20 miles can be.

In Manhattan, the support from both the NYPD Mounted Unit (several of whom are veterans themselves) and the public was unbelievable. I spoke to so many wonderful people from all over the world who were inspired by our cause and it has made me believe that we really can get this message of hope out there. This year we reached people on a national level through news coverage, but we need to continue to do better, and I believe we will thanks to the amazing generosity of the people who believe in this life-changing project.

Thank you,

Jenny McDonald

To whom it may concern

Trail to Zero was not only a test of my own riding skills but it opens my mind to new solutions when it comes to horsemanship and life. I was riding Chill and Chill really tested my endurance but also showed me how tense I was and how scared I was that I would not live up to Chill's needs and what he deserves. When I think of the ride and all the fears that I was able to conquer with Chill I am in a state of shock.

For the first time in 5 years, I can say I felt joy again. I was in crowds with Chill and I was happy instead of curled up scared. And the cause only reinforced my joy. We were doing something that is so much bigger than ourselves. I have lost so many brothers from suicide and the brothers I joked with, cried with, and I didn't want to remember their names from the pain, but now I want to I want their names out there and have people see the faces of the people that didn't get help so that we can further help the ones that are back.

Mitchell Allen Hedlund

*Highlights:*

- - Riding a horse (physical evidence without words) to emphasize the message
  - Riding a mustang the type of horse that saved my life from suicide
  - Riding in nature-ocean, trees, fields to gather more energy for the city time
  - Honor to be chosen to carry out this vital mission
  - Spend time learning from Meggan through the horses, leadership
  - Being a part of a team that is passionate about the cause (suicide)
  - Experiencing the impact of the message one person at a time
  - Believing that behind each person who listened there were more people who heard and beyond that more people so that it is a wave always moving
  - Making people curious so they will learn the message then action follows
  - Going to the core of possible change-DC and NYC
  - Learning new ways to reach every person to be involved with veteran suicide
  - Refueling my passion in this cause with a variation of people
  - Demonstrating that non-verbal messages are as important or more so than the verbal similar to horse/human interaction
  - Observing that a team riding to stop veteran suicide was as diverse in their lives as are the communities of people we were reaching out to (allowing for better success at communication)
  - Combining what I learned from Meggan in my PATH certification that overlapped or directly affected the way I carried out this mission from the horse, for the horse as well as the veteran-how I handle myself to get the message across with passion and professionalism
  - The horses with their variety of color and breeds can represent cross culture of veterans because suicide includes everyone and leaves out no one
  - Experiencing a different way (riding horses) to spread education get attention to an epidemic
  - Riding a horse for the cause among the people who make up this country

## Trail to Zero - Personal Thoughts

I was honored to be invited by Meggan to represent BraveHearts in the mission to bring attention to veteran suicide. I am a veteran who would have committed suicide if it were not for a mustang who saved my life. I feel that my history of this experience as a veteran validates any statements that I make and together with other veterans strengthens the cause.

Any message is stronger when it comes from someone who has had direct experience, in this case veteran suicide, be it themselves or someone they knew. I personally prefer to provide a solution to a cause that I am bringing attention to, so for veterans to unite with horses is one solution to stopping suicide. I like to let the horse speak the words and messages that we cannot and the horse reaches out to the veterans with no voice. I was so proud to ride a mustang because I believe the mustang-veteran combination provides a process above and beyond any other. I advocate for the mustangs in the holding facilities to be matched to veterans to save both the mustangs and the veterans. This solution also save the government and citizens tax money and LIVES!

### Why we should continue this ride:

- Demonstrate how horses save lives
- To save even one veteran's life and give one horse purpose
- A movement has begun and if the ride is stopped it would be a dam stopping the flow
- Any new idea is hard to measure the success so continue until it is not new
- Believe and know the ride reaches out beyond all borders
- This ride had multiple layers of outreach-horses, horse people, veterans, politicians and citizens of this country all in one ride and all in the way that needs to be addressed
- It takes time to build and develop a cause to make it stronger
- Repetition on any topic makes a big difference
- Physical message with horses and veterans is vital
- Veterans are not going to stop committing suicide need solution (horses)

September 21, 2018

To Whom It May Concern,

Attracting people's attention has become more difficult than it has ever been before because collectively our attention spans have become so short. Advertising has always been a very harsh and competitive industry with its employees perpetually working to persuade people to focus their attention toward any given target. Trail to Zero has very effectively drawn a great deal of curiosity and interest in not only BraveHearts, but the fact so many veterans commit suicide every day. Throughout our ride whenever it was possible, I heard people asking others on the ride and me, "Why are you doing this?", "Where are you going?", and "What are you doing?" countless times. As spectators observed us passing out our promotional materials that explained what we were doing and how to contact us, they requested them for themselves because they did not want to be left out. They very likely had no idea what we were passing into the crowds until what it was found its way into their hands. But the attraction to what we were doing was so strong they wanted, at least for a moment, what we were passing out. Men loading trucks, road repair crews, tourists, and others stopped to watch us or take pictures. The reason BraveHearts needs to continue to ride through New York City and Washington D.C. right around September 11 each year is because we are improving our effectiveness at spreading awareness that so many veterans are committing suicide each day, and that we have a solution to that problem! That solution is the therapy programs offered by BraveHearts. We are not only improving our own strategy, we are networking with other veteran owned organizations along the way. We have tentative plans with the manager of a BBQ restaurant owned by people who are huge proponents of veterans and first responders to get together next year.

Ben Franklin said the harder he worked the more good luck he had. That could mean he increased his chances of good fortune the more he pursued any given endeavor, or luck had nothing to do with his success because it was all a result of hard work. Either way, we have achieved a great deal of success under Megan's leadership and based on such a solid platform we should continue to work hard in order to keep collecting all our good luck. Since we are finding so many people who support us we will have more people working hard on behalf of our cause, which will ultimately lighten the load for each individual involved.

As I mentioned in my correspondence after last year's ride, BraveHearts is providing a forum for people who at least share similar if not identical concerns for veterans because they are patriotic. Unfortunately, those who have the opposite core values as us have a variety of ways to organize their people. It is my opinion that BraveHearts should continue this mission for two reasons. One, we will be one of the few organizations which represent traditional American values, and two, the support is falling in our laps. For example, the camaraderie we formed at the BBQ restaurant came naturally, and while we were eating dinner at a restaurant near Indian Head in Long Island, we were offered a donation to our organization after we all joined in to sing Happy Birthday to a man at the table next to ours. BraveHearts is engaged in activities many people support.

In conclusion, although we have achieved so much in such short time. Imagine how much more we can accomplish in the future.

Respectfully,

Ryan Ohrmundt

**Trail 2 Zero/ Washington D.C & New York City- September 2018**

Letter of Reflection and Appreciation, To Whom It May Concern, with respect.

I am going to begin with Thanks to everyone, and everything, that was touched by this mission and ride.

I am still living the dream of what I just experienced. To be a part of BraveHearts and this team ..... That is the highlight. Every day before we left, seeing the staff and volunteers, prepping the tack, making Equine 110%. Moving the Herd East and seeing the Dynamics of a group, especially Vets, was amazing for me. Some gave all/ All gave some... 2/4

I have never laughed and been free like this for a long time.

Personally for me.... It was on my "bucket-list"... Shame on me.

Last year I could not have made this ride, I was honored to be a part of the puzzle. I'm the Vet betwixt. I have found, and am understanding, that I could be the next one. But with what we do at BraveHearts, and in memory to Doc-Gunnar.

The politics and bureaucracy of where we are now, in this union, should be rode again and again and again.... It is, and will be a part of culture and humanity. I never wanted to go to New York, and then on Clayton!

And the coolest people, this ride has to be made- everyday\*

I just had another highlight! I did not ask Clayton if he had ever been in the Atlantic Ocean, or been to WA/NYC. He did not ask me either! We just did it. Lived in those moments and made awesome memories.

Now I end with so much,

At your Service, Semper-Fidelis, God / Country/ Corp and Family.

Marshall R. Wolfe (aka marsh)

September 20, 2018

To Whom it may concern,

I want to share some of my thoughts and reflections of our Trail to Zero ride this year in Washington D.C. and New York City.

Our first ride in Washington was a work of perseverance just trying to get our permits and route approved. The day before our ride we finally received the approval and the route we were hoping for. The ride itself through the Capitol was awe inspiring. To ride past the White House to the Capitol and then stop at the Washington Monument really made you proud to be an American. We were able to interact with the public at our stops and explain the facts that 20 veterans a day commit suicide. This is an epidemic that the public never hears about.

Our second ride for Trail to Zero was in New York City. The support we received from the NYPD and the NYFD was amazing they really became partners in our ride. We were interviewed on radio and had television interviews on the local Fox station and NY1. This was great help in spreading our message on veteran suicide. The ride itself through the streets of Manhattan was an incredible experience. I truly enjoyed the time we were able to spend at the Police station and the Fire House. These stops gave us the opportunity to speak to the public again about our mission. When we would stop the horses would automatically draw a huge crowd of people we could talk to and give information to about the Trail to Zero.

Personally, for me both 20-mile rides gave me so much more insight into the healing power of the horse. Watching our team of veterans interact and help each other with the horses and any work that needed to be done was a great experience. When the time came for the rides this team of veterans had so much energy and pride in their voices and the biggest smiles on their faces. I am proud to call them my Brothers and Sisters and will ride with them anywhere and at any time.

I truly hope BraveHearts will continue the Trail to Zero rides as I believe they truly show the level of horsemanship that is taught in our program. I also believe we are just beginning to scratch the surface of this epidemic on veterans' suicide and I believe BraveHearts is the organization that can carry the torch for our veterans. This will be a story that won't go away but will continue to evolve and continuing the Trail to Zero ride will become that much more important in the future for the lives of our veterans.

Sincerely,

Ken Boyd

Gold Star Farther

To Whom It May Concern,

Planning Trail to Zero was a long time coming. I remember sitting in a presentation and hearing the hurt ooze from a veteran as he discussed losing a peer and brother in war and reflecting on why he barely made it through. For some reason that day landed heavy on my heart. As I boarded a plane later that evening a veteran named Maura asked me if I wanted to do a 50-mile run for vets with her. I wondered how we could do something similar, but with horses and for veteran suicide, which impacted me so deeply earlier that day. I sent out about 15 texts asking who wanted in and everyone responded, "all in!" We formed a committee and began conversations. A couple of meetings took place at BraveHearts at the Bergmann Centre in the conference room. Quickly I saw and heard too many opinions and little consensus on small details. Momentum had stalled out. We could not even get from Harvard to Poplar Grove — our two farms — without what seemed to be a million obstacles and group dynamics interrupting the idea.

While at my daughter's soccer game, a friend called and asked if I would ever want to bring a vet or two to ride in NYC. He had just done it with a NYPD officer and thought it was most unique. My response was I wanted to plan a 20-mile ride for veteran suicide in October, so could I bring a handful of vets and ride 20 miles? His response? "I can check, but why not?"

But I took some of the insight gained, and Jeanna and I wrote to the Oberweiler Foundation in 2016 to fund a grant for a ride through NYC. Four of us rode one day in August through the streets in NYC to see if we could do 20 miles and make a route and see all it entailed. We had no police, and no permits, just a little bravery and faith in the horses. The grant funding came through and we completed the first Trail to Zero ride in NYC with 5 veterans and 3 support riders. A good friend in Chicago who ran the mounted police in Chicago opened some doors in NYC where, the week before, we were offered full support and police escorts with protection at every light for our veterans and horses. I was amazed at how NYC officers fell in love with the concept, as many of the officers also were veterans. At the end of that ride a friend and donor showed up to congratulate us on completing all 20 miles safely and pledged to support NYC if we would do it again next year. We asked Oberweiler if they would support a new city for 2018, being DC. They agreed.

A few days ago, we completed 20 miles in both cities. We hauled out 14 horses I selected and 12 veterans and a Gold Star Father to make the ride. Permits, press, marketing, attire, conditioning programs, vaccinations, securing a second horse trailer, hotels, food, and boarding were just a few of the logistics. In the end, we accomplished it safely and successfully. As I stepped on my horse at Squad 18 — a firehouse in Brooklyn who I secured to provide water and snacks — we had shipped out ahead I learned something most impactful. This firehouse lost 7 men in 9-11. A woman grabbed my arm with tears and said her dad was a vet who took his life 4 years ago. She said thank you...Earlier in a park in DC on our first water stop a gal was staring at my horse with tears also streaming down her face and said that her sister took her life. She further said, "I love this park. I come here all the time. These horses and you all have given it new meaning to me."

In conclusion, there is no way to tell how many cards I handed out or how many times I told the story of what horses can do to help people in crises. But if it helps just one person, I think it is worth all the funding, all the efforts, all the time and all the struggle. When I got tired on the trip, I would reflect and think of families hurting much worse than I. I never had the chance to serve our country, but I think for those of us who have not, now certainly is a perfect time to start making a difference in the lives of veterans. Where will this concept go? How many more people can we educate and help? That is all up

to you. We have veterans, horses, equipment and the heart but we need the financial support too to make Trail to Zero 2019 a reality.

Sincerely, Meggan

September 21, 2018

Subject: Trail to Zero

To whom it may concern:

It is hard to put in to words the impact and experience of Trail to Zero. Because Trail to Zero was not just an event, but it held its own emotion. This mission-driven movement felt like its own force riding through the streets of Washington, D.C. and New York City, and also carried through the riders out of the saddle too. The fine details of Trail to Zero may escape my memory over time, but the feeling that experience gave me will never leave my heart and soul. The mission of raising awareness for the 20-22 veterans that commit suicide a day is not talked about enough. I'm proud to be a part of a team who not only talked about it with great assurance, but exuded a solution.

Upon return many people asked me how the trip went. I think a static response of "great" or giving them highlights did not justify the impact enough. The only word that I felt could cover the emotion was fulfilled. Trail to Zero fulfilled me in ways I didn't even know I needed. Being able to see the months of planning turn into fruition gave me a great sense of pride that you could see portrayed on all our team's faces and every hoof beat of our horses.

Our horses. There is not enough positive ways for our herd to be recognized. When our team began to feel exhaustion set in, you could see the endurance pick up in our horses. When our team needed comfort along the journey, they stepped in to allow for uplifting hugs and rubs. When our team felt a disconnect, they showed us what true cohesion looked like. To say they are "just horses" is the understatement of a lifetime. They are the reason why we could carry out this grand mission with the greatest group of Veteran horsemen & women.

As someone who was not riding, but there to bear witness the effect spread on to all the onlookers who were instantly intrigued by what we were doing. The outpouring of positive support and the crowds that would culminate at each of our stops just amplified how impactful our journey was. Trail to Zero may not be a household name (yet), but it became a name to remember for hundreds of thousands of people who journeyed with us along the way, whether at the cities or following along with us online. This spreading of awareness is confirmation that our mission to get the 20-22 number down to 0 is being heard and acknowledged. The people that we met along the way who seemed to be placed in our path only by a divine source continually gave me the reassurance of the good we are doing. These serendipitous moments happened over and over again and knowing that we were placed in the path of someone who needed to hear our mission or did stuff for us to help us along the way is God's speak.

A sense of pride. A fulfilled calling. An unforgettable experience.

Sincerely,



Amber Hicks Eck  
BraveHearts Team Member

September 2018

To whom it may concern,

How do you tell someone that his or her life matters - that suicide is not the option?

With the loss of Anthony Bourdain and Kate Spade this year, suicide seems to have made a more prevalent role in the media as the stories of their life and death flooded our phones, TV, and social media and continue to make an appearance as updates and loved ones come forth to speak about them. It is a conversation, which seems to tug at each person's heart – whether they have lost a loved one to suicide or imagine the pain that a loss so abrupt and traumatic could cause. It often leaves us wondering what we could have said differently or what we should have said that we never did. It's an uncomfortable conversation to watch or listen to in the media but one that is so important to have. So then, my question becomes – how is it that it took only 2 celebrities to take their lives, within a few days of each other, to spark this conversation and reach our media but 20 veterans committing suicide a day, who have fought for our freedom, isn't headlining our outlets every day? It is a question that has had me perplexed but one that has also left me proud to be a part of an organization who has made it their priority and who is challenging society to make it theirs too.

Being on the developing/administrative end of Trail to Zero gives me a unique view as I see much of the behind the scenes work and not always the "final product." From advertising to travel, from grant writing to merchandise – there is a lot of planning that goes into the ride (a year's worth of planning). This year, I had the opportunity to be on the front line of this event being able to help and witness the impact and power of this ride. As I ran in the streets of DC alongside BraveHearts veterans and horses, with Amber, giving out cards about the ride and sharing the ride's purpose with spectators, I met so many who did not know the suicide rate for veterans is so high. The most powerful moments that I witnessed were veterans from DC coming up to BraveHearts veterans and introducing themselves, veterans thanking veterans for their service and the community coming out to witness the ride, learn about the cause and offer assistance.

Following the ride, I found myself in constant reflection from what I had witnessed and felt from the ride. One thing I found myself constantly thinking about was the veterans who participated on Trail to Zero and where they were 5 years ago, a year ago, or even a month ago and how far they have come on their journey. Although, Trail to Zero has the same purpose for all I found that it has a different meaning to many. Many veterans rode to honor those they have lost but I believe that the ride also gave them purpose and showed them that they can overcome adversity. The ride also seemed to not only give the veterans but also to give society hope, faith, drive, ownership, answers, and awareness.

To write this letter without mentioning Meggan seems unfathomable. Meggan is the backbone to this ride, the glue, the leader. The DC ride from the start presented with more of a challenge than NYC, but her perseverance never diminished, her passion for veterans and this ride is so strong that with every roadblock she pushed through and found an answer, just as she always does. Managing over 13 personalities and 14 horses would be hard for anyone, add little sleep (with no exaggeration – 20 hours a day of work) and it might sound more like impossible, but Meggan makes it look easy. She is tough but kind and truly makes it her priority to provide a safe and extremely positive experience for the veterans.

She continues to put others before herself and is a friend, leader and someone that I am more than proud to be able to assist.

One of the deepest reflections that I caught my self-reflecting upon was how many thousands of people that BraveHearts has touched in the nearly twenty years of existence and excited for what is still to come. Throughout my career at BraveHearts I have found moments wondering if this was the reason for BraveHearts – from a mother crying because her child has learned to communicate when professionals said it wasn't possible to a veteran saying that they were days away from suicide but then found BraveHearts. I have often wondered if "this is why BraveHearts is here", but the reality is that there are so many reasons, so many moments, and so much good that BraveHearts has done for the community and across the country. What Trail to Zero has brought to table is just another reason and yet another powerful message of hope, joy and unlimited possibilities because of the healing power that a horse has to offer. BraveHearts is more than a recreational activity or a form of therapy for these individuals, it is a healthy outlet filled with people who care – it is a family.

Trail to Zero has left my heart full. So, although I'm not sure that anyone will ever have the "right" words to say to a veteran or anyone who has suicidal ideations, I do believe that we can *show* veterans that we care, we can *spread* awareness to our community, and we can *restore* their faith by giving them a solution that other veterans can attest to -- I believe BraveHearts has done just that, if not more, with Trail to Zero. I believe that while on this trail of doing these simple tasks and continuing on this path the goal of one day reaching *zero* is possible because of the many people that care.

Sincerely,

Jeanna Sorgani, CTRS