

RIDING IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

A Memoir





Riding through the Rocky Mountain Wildlife Park in Colorado was like stepping into a familiar dream. Although I had never been there before, I was greeted with all things “wild west” ... all things *like home*.

It was the first time my partner and I rode together so I was anticipating it. I rode horses growing up, so the smell of hay and hooves stomping the ground brought back familiar feelings.

My partner on the other hand, had sweaty palms that had nothing to do with the heat. He’s a city slicker about to saddle up on a horse three times his size.



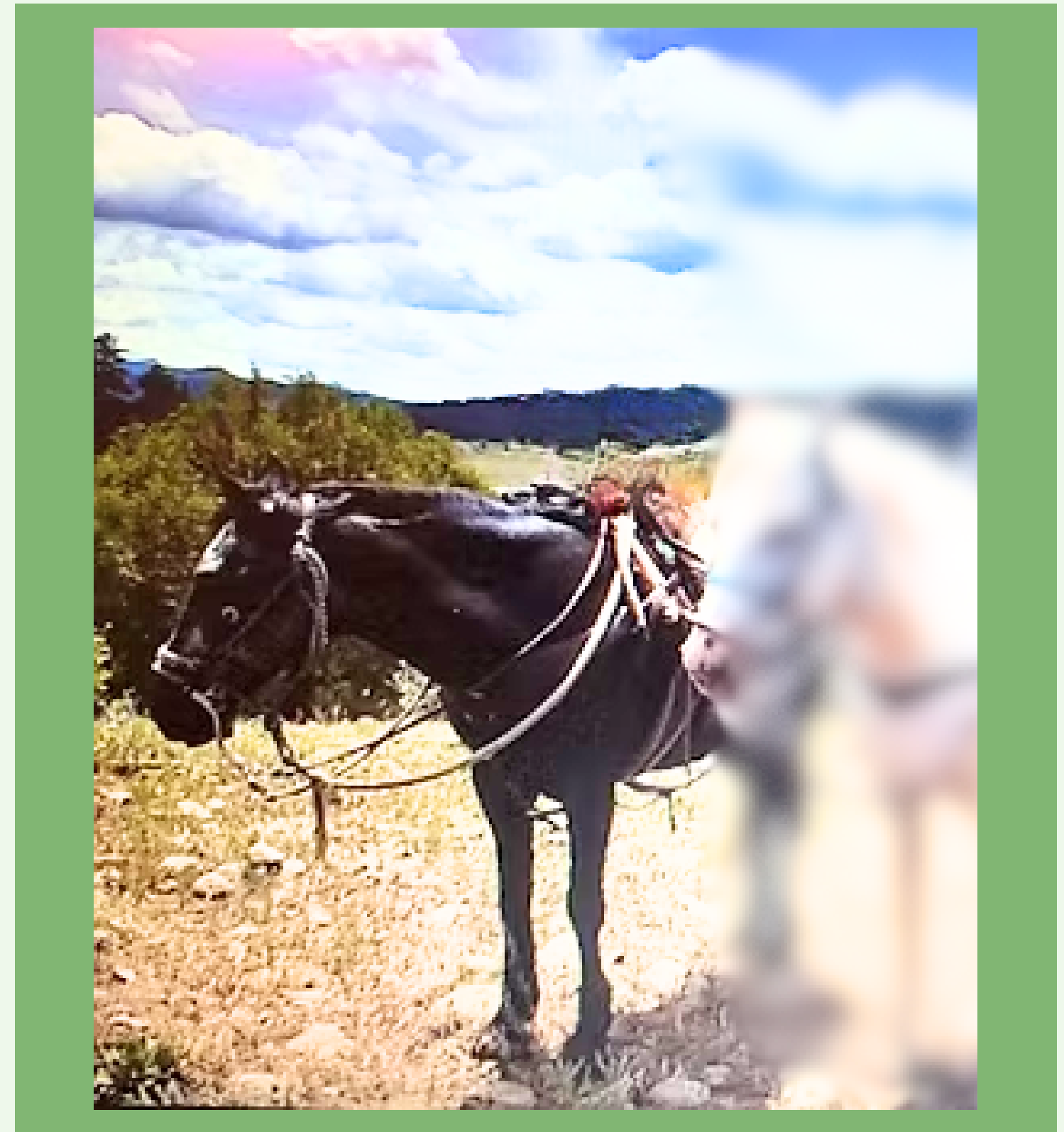
Our riding guide was a *grizzled* (bear joke) man with years of riding experience that showed when he handled the horses. He was as knowledgeable as he was personable.

My partner appreciated his patience, and I could see his initial reserve start to melt away. My partner got on his horse, held the reins like he was told and held his breath for fear of spooking the horse.



I was paired with Lucky, a painted horse with more personality than I was ready for. Lucky was *cheeky*. Every chance he got, he would brush my legs against trees, snickering like a rebel teenager. This was not my first rodeo so as the ride went on, I made it a game when I saw trees coming my way. No matter how I lead him away- he found his way ten folds.

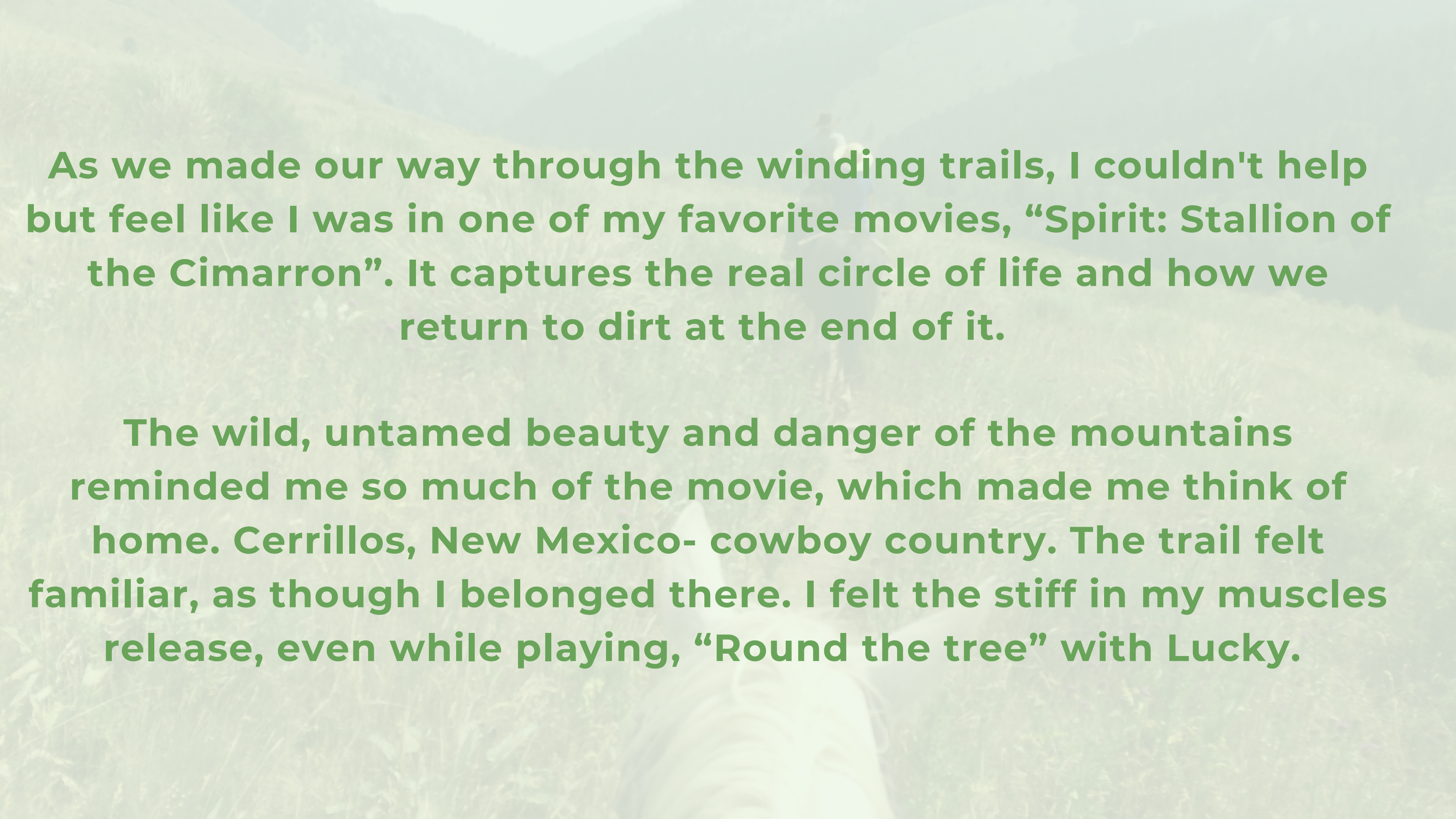
On the other hand, my partner was paired with Midnight. Now while this horse was timid and well-seasoned, he was *gassy*. Unapologetically gassy. The flatulence was relentless, so I spent most of the ride making sure I was not directly behind them.





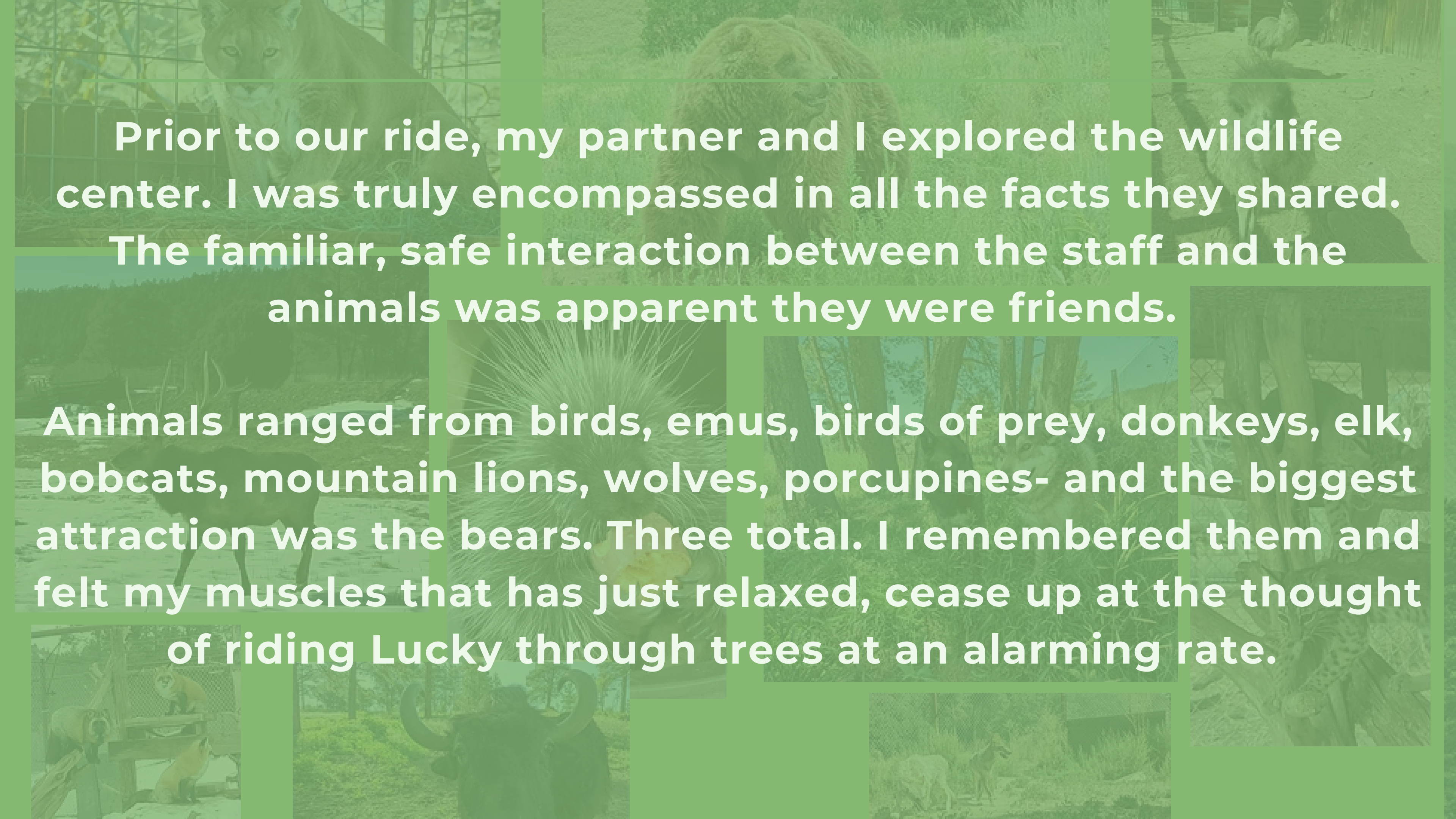
The day was hot, the sun burning my skin. A soft but brisk breeze ran through the trees. If you close your eyes, it almost sounds like the ocean. Hills right out of a painting, stretched out in every direction. The air smelled of dirt and I felt the sensation of fresh untainted oxygen.

Birds chirped in the distance, and the brave ones flapped right past me as if they knew I wasn't from there. Insects buzzed so that it made it impossible to feel anything but at peace. Old-timey peace you usually find in the western section.

A person is riding a horse on a winding trail through a mountainous landscape. The scene is hazy, suggesting a misty or overcast day. The rider is in the center of the frame, moving away from the viewer. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a soft, diffused light. The overall mood is serene and adventurous.

As we made our way through the winding trails, I couldn't help but feel like I was in one of my favorite movies, “Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron”. It captures the real circle of life and how we return to dirt at the end of it.

The wild, untamed beauty and danger of the mountains reminded me so much of the movie, which made me think of home. Cerrillos, New Mexico- cowboy country. The trail felt familiar, as though I belonged there. I felt the stiff in my muscles release, even while playing, “Round the tree” with Lucky.



Prior to our ride, my partner and I explored the wildlife center. I was truly encompassed in all the facts they shared. The familiar, safe interaction between the staff and the animals was apparent they were friends.

Animals ranged from birds, emus, birds of prey, donkeys, elk, bobcats, mountain lions, wolves, porcupines- and the biggest attraction was the bears. Three total. I remembered them and felt my muscles that has just relaxed, cease up at the thought of riding Lucky through trees at an alarming rate.

Tangent alert- upon arrival to the center, we were checking in and an old man, dressed in solid jeans, a button up shirt, and a true cowboy hat, asked my partner and I if we were married. I was a little taken but let my partner answer (which was no).

His reason for asking, was that he was expecting another pair of riders with one of the riders proposing to his girlfriend. I tried to flash a glare like lightening on the horizon at my partner, but he steadily avoided my direction. Later on, that day, I very much pointed out the pros of that plan to my beloved. We had talked about getting married recently and the romantic setting of our ride evoked thoughts of the future. The spot where we took my favorite photo is where the lucky couple's proposal took place.

Our guide led us on a small mountain side and asked us to stop. We both obliged and he got off his horse. This man appreciated tips, so he knew what he was doing next.



He led our horses to stand next to each other and asked us for our phones. He took some great pictures. My partner likes to poke fun, and grabbed my hand in a very, cheesy like fashion, much to the amusement of our photographer. This photo is one of my favorites.



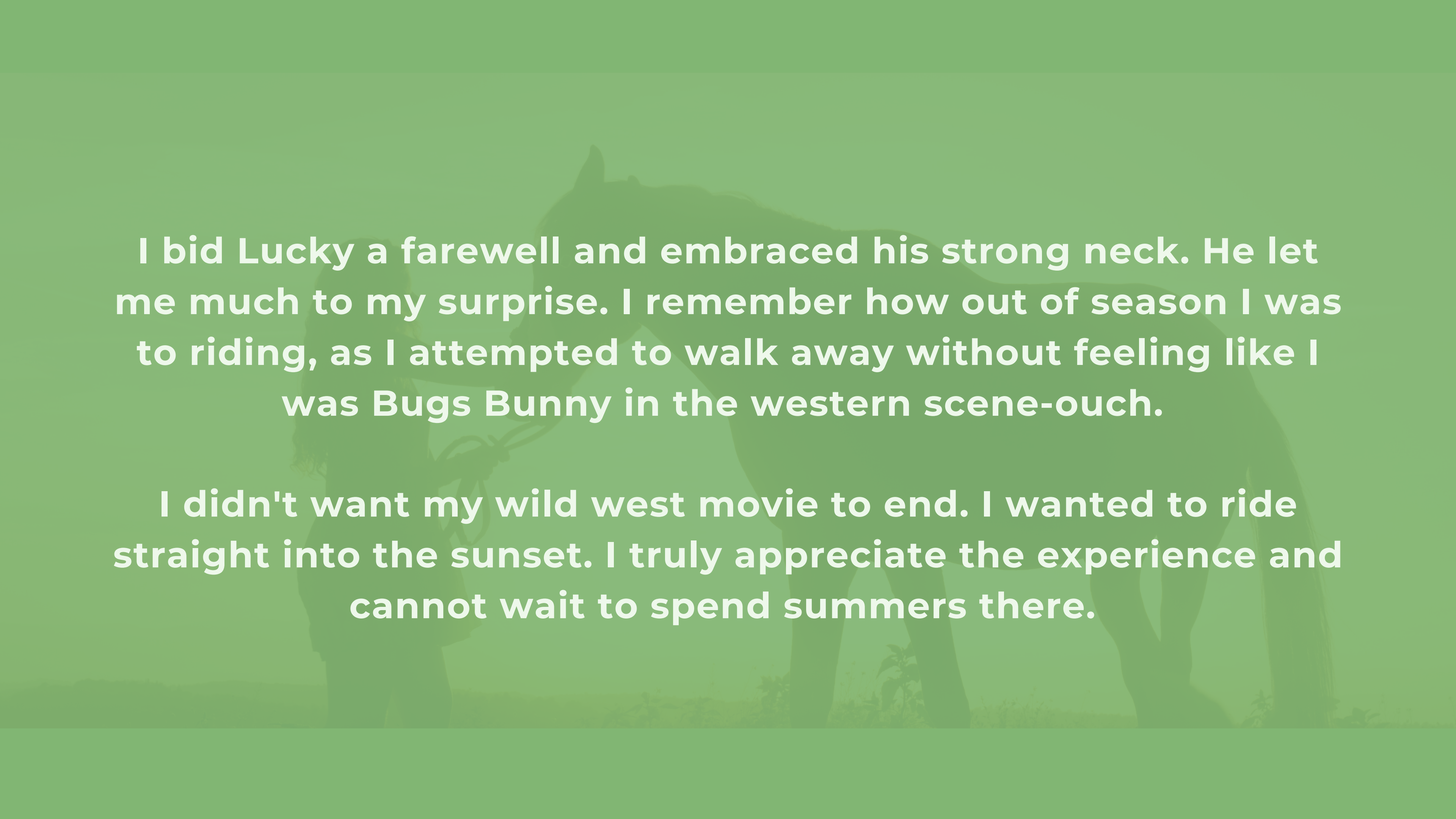
We came around more of the mountain as our riding guide told us stories. It was apparent he loved his job the way he spoke about first time riders and children being so fulfilled by the end of the ride. He did, however, indulge on his sightings of mountain lions in the area and that safe, child-like feeling quickly dissipated.



We came around the last bend of the ride and toward the stalls. Lucky's steps became slower and almost dramatic. We were out long enough, I guess. We came down to a meadow where our guide would post the horses up and we could dismount. He left Lucky and I in the meadow as he led my partner's horse to the post. Lucky was having none of it and moved quickly towards our guide. He had "middle child syndrome" and needed assurance he was still included.



My partner and I exchanged our last pleasantries with our guide. I breathed in the scene. I took off my shoes and walked bare foot grounding myself to what will become a memory. I could hear the wildflowers whisper as I made my way to Lucky.

A person is shown from the chest up, holding the head of a horse. The person's hands are on the horse's bridle. The horse's head is turned slightly to the left. The background is a solid green color. The text is overlaid on the image in white, bold font.

I bid Lucky a farewell and embraced his strong neck. He let me much to my surprise. I remember how out of season I was to riding, as I attempted to walk away without feeling like I was Bugs Bunny in the western scene-ouch.

I didn't want my wild west movie to end. I wanted to ride straight into the sunset. I truly appreciate the experience and cannot wait to spend summers there.

My partner and I went to the gift shop. I felt like a kid in a candy store. It was very, “little house on the prairie” with wood floors, log walls, taxidermy animals everywhere. I got myself some merch and bid my last goodbye to the staff. As we drove off, I promised the land I would be back.

Adopt-an-Animal

Rocky Mountain Wildlife Park is completely self-funded. The cost of daily care and habitat maintenance consume a large portion of its annual budget. Individual participation in our Adopt-an-Animal program provides additional funds for habitat improvement and enrichment programs.

Here's what you get:

\$75.00 donation: Your name on our adoption board, and adoption certificate, a factsheet on your critter, a 5x7 photo of your animal, and a year's worth of newsletters.

\$150.00 donation: All of the above plus an annual pass for a family of 4 and 2 one-time guest passes.


\$200.00+ donation: All of the above with an 8x10 photo instead and 4 more one-time guest passes.

If you would like to adopt just request an adoption form from the front desk.

Also available: Annual Pass
\$75.00 includes up to 4 family members.
\$10.00 for each additional member.

WALK THIS WAY

What if you had to track the park residents in their habitats to find them...would you know what their tracks look like? Test your tracking skills below.



Reflection

1. What is the purpose of the project you created and how do you think the piece achieves its purpose? Why did you select this memory to share? What was easy about sharing it? What was difficult?

- The purpose of this project was to share an experience regarding a positive memory, including both narration and reflection. My piece achieves its purpose by capturing and conveying sensations and sensory through storytelling. I selected my memory because it's something I often reflect on. It's a recent experience that has lasted since it took place. The easiest thing about sharing this piece was multiple avenues of information and smaller experiences taking place inside the main experience. The most difficult part was using sensory type verbiage and suggestive phrases to really convey how I felt.

2. Who is your audience (how do you know them)? What did you want them to focus on/remember from your memoir?

- My audience for this piece was my teacher and fellow classmates. I wanted my readers to focus on the experience from a firsthand perception. I also wanted them to laugh at the humor sprinkled in between heart-felt words. I hope they remember the importance of wildlife and their existence.

3. How did creating a multimodal project (compared to a purely text-based essay) impact your narrative? How do you think the multimodal elements impacted your audience in comparison to a purely text-based project?

- I think it allowed me to be more creative and shift what I was conveying with photos. I was able to help my readers create a literal picture but also keep the openness of creating images in their mind. My presentation allowed me to really submerge my reader in the experience as if it was happening at that moment.

4. What were the challenges with technology that you faced in this project? How did you overcome these challenges? What was easiest about using this technology and what did you like?

- I had limited challenges. The most challenging part was making sure text was readable. Changing the color and adding boldness was an easy fix. The easiest part was adding effects and photos! This was particularly fun for me.

5. What else would you want your instructor and other audience members to know about the project and your choices?

- This project came from the heart. I work in a government office, so I have not written anything heartfelt in a while. It's very black and white at work, so I hope my project conveyed my country girl roots in a positive manner.