



## 2019 - June - Gallagher

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Gallagher is an Appendix Quarter horse, which means he is half American Quarter Horse and half Thoroughbred. He is thirty years young and has served at True Vine Equestrian Center for the past seventeen years. In Hebrews 12:1 it says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” This passage is directed to us and our walk with God, but Gallagher’s life also demonstrates this passage. He has never won the Olympics or ran the Kentucky Derby, but he is a winner in the race that was marked out for him. When measuring true greatness, the Lord has used him to impact people of all ages and from many walks of life, and it is this impact on people that outweighs any of the trophies and contests a horse could ever win.

Gallagher’s story—like mine and many of yours—is not without trials and sufferings. The trials and sufferings that come into our life produce perseverance, character and hope (Romans 5:3-4). As you read Gallagher’s story perhaps you will see similarities and identify with your journey. The first part is fictional based on facts from Gallagher’s registration papers and phone calls made to previous owners.

Gallagher’s story began March 17, 1989 on a misty morning in Export, Pennsylvania. Everyone in the Galko family were waiting for Bell to foal. It was Megan’s turn to feed the horses that morning, and she had sleepily rolled out of bed, wishing for one more hour of sleep. When Megan arrived in the barn, there was a stir and nicker coming from Bell’s stall. Rubbing the sleep out of her eyes, Megan peeked in at Bell. She jumped with surprise, when she saw a wet and wobbly little bay foal. Bell’s foaling date wasn’t for two more weeks! Moments later Megan burst through the kitchen door, “Mom,” she exclaimed, “Bell had her baby last night!”

“What!” Megan’s mom was as surprised as Megan. “Is it a colt or filly?” she asked, turning the stove off. Breakfast making would have to be put on hold. “I don’t know,” Megan answered, “I didn’t take the time to look!” Megan’s mom slipped into her coat and barn boots, “Go wake your dad and Jake up,” she ordered. Everyone headed out to the barn and soon after the whole family was by Bell’s side checking on the new arrival. “It’s a colt!” Meghan’s mom announced. He was bay, with one short white sock and a star on his face. Bell licked him with pride and pushed him toward his first meal. “What shall we name him?” Megan’s brother Jake asked excitedly.

By the end of the week the family decided on a name for Bell’s colt. Arts Galway Bay was his official, registered name, but they all decided to call him Galway for short.

Galway grew into a handsome two-year old and his training under saddle began. By the end of the summer Galway was ready for his first show. He received a third place in the two year old class. So, his

show career began. Over the next four years Galway was shown English and Western. He was high point western pleasure horse in 4-H. Meghan also began teaching Galway to jump.

In the spring of 1995 Meghan decided to sell Galway. He was six years old now with a promising future on the show circuit. A horse with his breeding, experience and training would bring at least \$10,000. Meghan planned on using the money toward collage.

Mary lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She had been searching for a horse to compete with. She was willing to pay for a horse that would win. Mary had seen Galway at a show the previous year. When she found out he was for sale, she jumped at the chance to purchase him. Mary fell in love with Galway. She boarded him at a local stable with an indoor arena where many other people showed. Galway was schooled by the trainer and Mary began taking lessons on him. He was beautiful and she loved riding him. Galway began show season with a bang. Every weekend Mary was placing high at the shows. Galway began to shake his head slightly about at the end of the show season. The trainer punished him, thinking he wasn't listening but the problem only got worse. Winter set in and Mary noticed that Galway's head bobbing had stopped. Mary was relieved. Over the next two years Galway began throwing his head more and more during the summer. He would ride fine for an hour but by the end of an all-day show he was stressed and became jumpy. Mary no longer placed and became discouraged. She decided to have the trainer at her barn work with Galway. He tried different bits, tie downs and all sorts of training aids. Some of them made Galway miserable! The conclusion was that he was ring sour. He had turned into a problem, so if she wanted to continue to win at shows, she should sell Galway and get another horse.

Galway's next home was also in Ann Arbor. He was sold in August of 1998 to Janet. Janet, his new owner, just wanted a horse to ride. She knew Galway had some problems but thought with rest he would improve. After all, he was only nine years old. Janet was hopeful to teach him to stop shaking his head. The next spring Janet began riding Galway. She worked full time and only had time to ride him lightly two or three times a week after work. Some days she had a great ride, but other days he would throw his head up and down, making it almost impossible to ride him. Each year Galway became worse. A tie down didn't help. Different trainers worked with him. No one could train this head throwing behavior out of him. No one could figure out why he rode well in the fall and winter and worse in the summer. Janet decided to sell Galway after he bucked her off. She had tried everything and he was only getting worse. Who would want a horse with such an awful behavior? In 2004, one of the trainers who worked at the barn where she boarded Galway offered to take him to the Shipshewana horse auction on the day after Thanksgiving. It was one of their biggest sales with a lot of buyers. There was no guarantee he would bring a good price but at least someone else would own him.

The remainder of Galway's story is based on true facts after he was purchased at an auction by the Ertz family.

Fourteen year old Emilia was so excited to be getting a horse of her own. She had been taking lessons and with a gift from her grandparents, she finally had enough money to buy a horse. It was the Black Friday horse action in Shipshewana, Indiana. Emilia was overwhelmed looking at the rows and rows of

horses for sale. She was there with her mom and dad, and Jeanette, her riding instructor. Several people were riding their horses in the aisle way of the auction barn showing the perspective buyers how their horse rode. The search was narrowed down to two geldings. Both seemed very solid and show ready. Jeanette advised them to bid on the younger one. They asked the seller questions, and they didn't say anything about some of the problems Galway had been having with his previous owner.

The bidding was starting and it was time to find a seat. Galway soon entered the sale ring. The bidding began. Several hands flew up. As the price got higher, it was down to one other buyer. Sold for \$1,900.00, the auctioneer looked at the top bidder, the Ertz family! Emilia was so excited she could hardly contain herself!

Emilia decided to call her new horse Gallagher and soon grew to love this big, gentle gelding. His odd behavior soon appeared. Gallagher's head shaking escalated into extreme head throwing, which often ended with his whole front end jumping and then bucking. "You need to get after him!" some would tell Emilia. Other well-meaning advice flew Emilia's way. Other people tried to ride him out of this behavior. The equine dentist checked his teeth to see if it was an issue with the bit. One day when his head shaking antics lead to more bucking, Emilia fell off and broke her arm. Tears streamed down her face not only from the pain of a broken arm but of discouragement. Her dream of a horse of her own had become a dream of fear and pain. What is wrong with this big beautiful horse she had grown to love?

During Emilia's recovery she continued to spend time with Gallagher grooming and caring for him. When her arm healed she began to ride again. Emilia saddled and bridled her beloved horse. As Vickie, another riding instructor, watched her, her heart ached. They prayed for safety and wisdom to know what to do. Gallagher stood perfectly while he was groomed and saddled. Emilia and Vickie decided it would be best to lounge him before she rode. "You know," Vickie said to Emilia as she began lounging Gallagher, "If we can't figure out what is going on, it isn't worth you getting hurt again. You may have to consider selling him and buying a safer horse." Vickie prayed and asked God to protect Emilia and help her make the right decision. So far, so good. Gallagher trotted around Emilia like a well-trained horse. After about five minutes, his head began to jerk as if a bug hit him in the nose only there were no bugs flying around his face. More head nodding. "Emilia, let's take his saddle off and see what happens," Vickie said. Emilia sent Gallagher out again. "Trot," she said. Gallagher willingly responded. His head shaking increased. "Let's try taking the bridle off," Vickie said. Emilia took off the bridle and again began to have Gallagher circle her. Now his whole head was going up and down. Vickie studied Gallagher. It was like he had no control over his behavior. "I don't think he can help it," she told Emilia, "I don't think he is a bad horse." Suddenly Vickie remembered her friend Lori who had a horse who'd had similar problems. Lori had purchased a nose net and could now ride her horse. "I wonder if he has a headshaking disorder," she told Emilia. During the same week, Emilia's mom came across an article in a magazine about headshaking disorder in horses.

Here are Emilia's own words: *"Gallagher is a great horse. Ever since we bought him at the Shipshewana horse auction he's done nothing but improved behaviorally. However, during one spring in my second year of ownership of him he started tossing his head while I would ride him. We had already had the*

*chiropractor out to check his back and make sure the saddle fit and having bought a new saddle that fit him properly, had assumed we would be able to work him fine, but his condition lead us towards a different path. At first the head tossing was only slight and usually on at faster gates like the canter, but it only continued to get worse. Eventually he would thrust the entire front half of his body in the air as if jumping an invisible fence. He soon became completely unrideable..... We switched and mixed different bridles and bits and none of them seemed to help improve his condition at all. We finally decided this problem must be uncontrollable since even when we punished him and his face totally seemed to show that he was trying to please, he still was unable to stop his reaction. As winter came he acted a little better about it and I was able to ride him a lot more, usually in the evenings without too much trouble but as the spring came again this year he started acting up again. I could not ride him at all because his condition was so bad and I resorted to groundwork all the time. I lunged and round penned and practiced showmanship but he would still show signs of this condition..... As I was about to give up, praying every single day for some kind of miracle so I would not have to sell my beloved horse, my mom found a website that was all about headshaking. Just reading the descriptions we could all feel the excitement in the air as every single symptom seemed to match Gallagher perfectly, almost as if they had used him as a model for their article. Near the end of the webpage, there was a link to the nose net by Equilibrium so my mom ordered it immediately since we assumed this was our last hope. As soon as it arrived I brought it out to the barn to try it. First I tried to work him in the round pen without the nose net and immediately after I put it on you could just see a calmer expression that seemed to take over the pain and frustration you could see before and to my disbelief, he did not shake his head one time. I decided it was time to ride him and even though I sat up there just waiting for the tiniest little sign that his head shaking was not completely blocked. The head shaking did not come. Every single day I thank God that I have found this nose net and that my horse has been a complete wonder to ride ever since.”*

Emilia showed Gallagher in 4H, went trail riding, and just had fun in the riding arena. They formed a strong bond. When Emilia went off to college, her mom, Jane became Gallagher’s new rider. Jane also rode Gallagher in True Vine’s drill team under the direction of Jeanette VanVleck for a few years. True Vine has used him in many programs and he’s been ridden by many able-bodied and special needs children and adults. He’s known for being a bit on the lazy side, but he is trustworthy horse to put beginner riders on and knows enough to teach even advanced riders new things. Although Gallagher is getting older and can’t run around as much as he used to, he still has plenty of energy to boss around his pasture mates and he still has a lot of personality—he loves getting his tail scratched! For years he’s carried people around, showing them how horses respond to the cues of the riders—just like God “cues” people to respond to Him.

True Vine Equestrian Center would like to say thank you to the Emilia, and her parents, Jane and Anthony Ertz, for the many years they have allowed Gallagher be part of our equine team, pointing people of all ages and abilities to the Lord Jesus Christ!



Gallaher impacting lives for three generations!

Jane Brady-Ertz and granddaughter riding Gallagher November 2018.