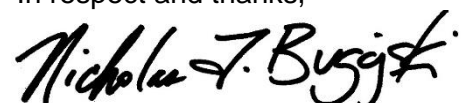


To the leaders and, more importantly, my new friends at Operation Horses and Heroes –

I wanted to send you a quick note to thank you for the unbelievable experience I had with your program. In May 2018, I had the honor of attending the Operation Horses and Heroes program at Coyote Creek Stables in St. John's, Michigan. If I had to put one word to my experience that weekend, that word would be **inspirational**. The word *inspire* comes from the latin, *inspirare*, which literally means “to breathe into.” Participating in this program literally breathed new life into me, and helped make me a stronger, more resilient man, husband, father, and friend. Participating in this program truly inspired me to be the best man possible for the people I serve and interact with, and the wife and children I so dearly love. Very few people and organizations possess the ability to inspire, and Operation Horses and Heroes is most definitely on the top of my list. To be honest, I was very hesitant to attend this program for several reasons. One reason is that no Veteran or good Soldier wants to show weakness or vulnerability in front of others. The beauty of this program is that you are among others who are too experiencing the burdens of life, others who have your same experiences and struggles, and others who are sharing in this very welcoming, inspirational experience. This helps create a comfortable environment where you want to grow and share, a warm, openhearted environment that fosters communication, reflection, and learning. This isn't forced by Mr. Paulsen or Mrs. Parker, or the other leaders of the organization ... it is something that comes out beautifully and naturally as a result of this transformative experience. Another reason for my hesitation, and my main concern, was that, as a Chicago-native, a “city-boy,” I had zero experience with horses. Much to my amazement, and despite some very minor initial qualms on my part, I found interacting with the horses to come almost naturally and my comfort level rose hour by hour and day by day. Over the course of the weekend, I never once rode a horse ... every well thought out piece of this program involved exercises that involved interacting with the horses at ground level. It helped me personally grow and was extremely therapeutic. I cannot put into words what that “therapy” with the horses was, but I can say that it changed me for the better. That “therapy,” that growth, came on many levels outside interactions with the horses. It came from the love and care that Mr. Paulsen and Mrs. Parker and the other organization leaders gave to participants. It came from the one-on-one interactions with my fellow Veterans. It came from the many volunteers who helped support this great program with amazing food and even more amazing fellowship. It came from the assurance that I did not have to worry about one thing the entire weekend, including food and lodging, and just immerse myself in the experience with the horses, my fellow participants, and the organization leaders. This is a world-class program led by Veterans for Veterans. I highly recommend others to participate in the program so that they, too, can walk away with the same inspiration I did. Thank you for making me a better man, father, husband, and leader. Thank you for what you do for our Veterans and their Families. As Winston Churchill said, “never was so much owed by so many to so few.” Thank you Operation Horses and Heroes for honoring those few, the less than 1% who have done and continue to do the heavy lifting in defense of our great Nation.

In respect and thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicholas J. Bugajski". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.