

Gospel Hour

Engineer Husband Saves Wife's Jumper With Unique Invention

For some horse owners, giving up is simply not an option. Christina and Dennis Reguli of Murfreesboro, Tennessee are two of them. Determined to save the horse they loved, they found themselves following an unexpected path.



*Gospel Hour
after many years
of retirement with
Christina and
Dennis*

A New Partnership

In late 1997, Christina purchased a show jumper named Gospel Hour. She was making the move from hunters to jumpers, and her trainer felt this was just the horse to ease the transition. Perhaps not a horse for the long term, he said, but an ideal horse to show for a season and then sell at a profit. "He didn't understand yet that the door into my barn is one way only," she recounts with a laugh. "I'm not good at selling horses—they stay with me forever."

At first, Christina didn't even want the horse with the unusual name. "I didn't think he had any personality and I had seen him misbehave with another rider." But she started to ride him anyway with her trainer's encouragement, and the result was a relationship that came together so well those around them could practically hear them click. "His personality just blossomed. I'd hear this deep 'whuh huh huh huh' whenever I walked into the barn. When I walked into his stall, he'd use his head to pull me into his chest. It was his way of giving me a hug," she remembers.

The two seemed to be off to a flying start. At their first outing, an "A" show at Brownland Farms in Franklin, Tennessee, the pair took third. "It was like a dream come true. He jumped four feet and it was just effortless. I just remember feeling his power. It was so amazing," Christina says. "And we were just starting to learn together."

Signs of Trouble

Unfortunately, what looked to be a promising competitive partnership was cut short. At the end of their first competitive season together, after just one more show together, the 17 hand warm-blood/thoroughbred cross developed lameness issues.

He was just slightly "off" in his hind end, but it was enough to worry his owner. Christina's veterinarian suspected EPM (Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis, a disease of the central nervous system.) When treated for this, Gospel Hour improved and went back into work, only to

develop a front-end lameness. Further investigation revealed an old injury, a bone chip that had migrated to the suspensory. Next came surgery at Lexington, Kentucky's prestigious Rood & Riddle Equine Hospital to remove it. Sadly, during his recovery Gospel Hour developed a severe case of laminitis and their vet told Christina and her husband Dennis that it was time to let him go. He recommended euthanasia.

Christina and Dennis agonized over a decision that so many horse owners have struggled with regarding laminitis. "Gospel had this tremendous will to live. He just was not going to give up," she remembers. "My vet said later that he'd never seen a horse with a heart so big." When X-rays revealed the damage – the hoof side walls were literally caving in – their determination would soon be tested.

Initial Recovery

Gospel's laminitis was so unusual, that Christina's veterinarian, Dr. Mark Wooten, along with her farrier, Danny Dunson, together drove almost six hours just to seek advice from an equine podiatrist located in Kentucky. Their consultation was with Dr. Ric Redden, based in Versailles, Kentucky, who recommended a course of treatment. Upon returning from their trip, together they resectioned the hoof and provided corrective shoeing to support and protect it. Additionally, the tendon was cut surgically to provide additional relief. Gospel Hour would spend more than two months at Dr. Wooten's local clinic before finally coming home just before

Thanksgiving in 1998. Staffers even threw him a going away party and cookout the day he left for home. By then, Gospel was able to be gently hand walked and was recovering well.

Christina was now feeling confident that the care Gospel Hour received was paying off. His recovery seemed assured and she happily retired him to their newly purchased farm. He was comfortable and that was all she wanted. "I didn't care about riding him," she says. "I just loved him and wanted him with me."

Her husband Dennis, she adds, had also fallen under

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the big horse's spell. "Dennis was not a horse person but he certainly connected with Gospel. They became best friends," Christina says. "He would take Gospel for a walk each night when he got home from work. Gospel would get so excited that he'd wait for Dennis at the gate, twisting his head and making what we called his funny 'begging face.'" Each evening, Dennis would be greeted with the same deep 'whuh huh huh huh huh' from Gospel that Christina had been greeted with for so long.

New Challenges

Gospel's journey wasn't quite over, however. After several years of retirement spent relaxing in his pasture at their farm, by now a small boarding facility, Gospel began to limp again. X-rays revealed that the coffin bone, located inside the foot and held in place by surrounding tissue, was being pulled down – probably because of scar tissue that had built up over time around the site of the incision when the tendon was cut. After everything she had been through with this horse, this was unbelievable news, but she wasn't prepared to give up yet.

"I talked to everybody to try to find a solution. I became obsessed with my research and bought books and poured over them. I borrowed my trainer's therapeutic ultrasound machine when I heard about it and tried it, combined with a series of stretches. But nothing was improving his condition. We couldn't get Gospel Hour stabilized and comfortable," she explains.

"Finally, I heard about light therapy and started researching this unusual treatment. When you have tissue that's damaged, those cells are starved for energy. The energy from the light starts the healing process more quickly than the body can on its own," Christina explains. "It sounded promising, but it was also very expensive. When I considered purchasing one, I found that a small LED (light-emitting diode) device alone was \$1,500. The device was a mere one and a half inches in diameter, and that was just too much money to experiment with."

Husband and Mouse Pad to the Rescue

"I was explaining my plight to a girlfriend, when my husband Dennis overheard me discussing the lack of availability and affordability for this light technology. Being an engineer, Dennis suddenly volunteered that perhaps he could custom-design some kind of light therapy for Gospel." With much anticipation, Christina watched as Dennis persevered studying all the research and information she had collected. After just a few days of detailed emailed questions and answers about esoteric but important topics like the appropriate wavelength and the proper beam angle for the LED, Dennis reported that he could with confidence make her what she needed. He placed an order for the LEDs and neoprene needed to construct his own light therapy pad.

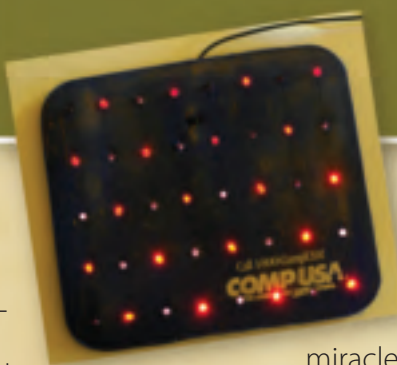
At this point, both the Regulis knew they were racing against time. If Gospel Hour's coffin bone pulled down far enough to puncture the sole of the hoof, there would be no way to save him. Their vet told them regretfully that there were no treatments left to try. Once again, he recommended euthanasia.

"When the neoprene didn't come in on time, Dennis couldn't wait any longer. He took his computer's mouse pad off his desk, wired it with the LEDs, and used duct tape to cover the wires to then wrap around Gospel Hour's leg. The neoprene came in within a few days, but we didn't feel we had time to waste," Christina remembers.

Hope Returns

What came next, she says, felt like a miracle. Twice a day, Christina treated Gospel with her "husband-invented light pad" wrapped around his leg. She moved the pad up and down the leg, front and back, treating each spot for five minutes at a time and praying that this new therapy was having some effect on the tendon. While she focused most of her attention on the old incision site where the scar tissue had built up, she decided to treat the whole leg. There was nothing, she felt, to lose with this approach.

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As the weeks went by, she thought Gospel was improving, but she wasn't sure. After one month, she took Gospel to see the vet, and surprisingly Gospel's new x-rays revealed something that the vet couldn't believe. The coffin bone was retreating and returning already 5 degrees from his last visit! Completely baffled, the vet couldn't imagine what Christina was doing with Gospel. With such great news, she and Gospel happily returned home where Christina continued her treatments. "Within a few months, the coffin bone was back where it should have been. We were thrilled," she says. And so Gospel was here to stay, and their fledgling company, Equine Light Therapy was born.

Giving Back

"It didn't occur to us that this unique therapy might grow into a viable business. In the beginning people would call us and ask for 'one of Gospel's light pads.' They had heard about our success and wanted to see if it would help their own beloved horse or dog. And that's how it began," Christina says.

After their prototype went through a fair amount of testing, they began manufacturing and marketing their first version of the light therapy pads in 2005. They consider the product a tribute to the horse they love but also a way to give back to the horse community. "We felt that we were being gently pushed in this direction; that this was what we were supposed to do. Our mission is to help as many animals as we can." In order to keep costs down, they market the product themselves, selling direct by mail, via the Internet, and at trade shows.

"I truly believe Gospel Hour came into our lives to teach. My vet claims they have saved a hundred or more horses because of what they learned from Gospel. In fact, they eventually added a special wing of their clinic to treat severe laminitic cases. That's a wonderful legacy. And it was certainly a journey we went on together. You start on something like this and you just don't know where it's going to lead. It's like it was meant to be." 🐾

Editors Note:

After this article was completed, we were saddened to learn that Gospel Hour began to suffer additional health complications and had to be euthanized. We extend our sympathy to Christina and Dennis Reguli, but also our congratulations for all they were able to do for their treasured horse – and other horses – with their invention. Gospel Hour lived to be 23 years old.



Above: Gospel Hour jumping with Christina's trainer David Q. Wright



Left: The first manufactured version of the Equine Light Therapy pad.

Far Left: The Mouse Pad prototype version of the Light Pad well used by many animals

Below: The clinic's staff threw a special party when Gospel finally went home.

All photos courtesy of www.equinelighttherapy.com

