

A Walk Through The Woods **By Pete Dillingham**

The sun was slowly working its way to the horizon when I rode into the woods. The fifty acres of hiking trails had been calling out to me for months to explore and work. Pressures of the previous week had taken their toll. Horseback riding is not only fun, but also it's a great way to solve problems and give balance to the marathon paces of everyday life. What I had expected to be a relaxing ride turned out quite different.

As my mare, (Calamity Jane), and I stepped into the plush forest I felt heaven beneath my hooves. Before me lay a maze of trails that promised countless rides, adventures and hours of exploring. The trail I picked up roughly moved toward the sunset and the opposite side of the forest. The summer floral, an occasional whippoorwill, and the relaxing rhythm of "Calam's" strides were the "makings" for an outstanding ride.

Calamity Jane and I had been together since she was a yearling. In our six-year partnership, this beautiful bay and I had put "tons" of miles on the trail. We were both still "wet behind the ears", we loved adventure, each had a type "A" personality, and both of us were flat out "full of ourselves". When we finally stepped out of the woods, I was taken back.....the sun had set and dusk had begun. We were in trouble.

I quickly turned Calam into a darkening forest in a futile attempt to race daylight to our barn. Within minutes I was stopped in total darkness. I could not see my hand front of my face. The immortality of my youth faded to fear. Suddenly I felt a methodical stride beneath my saddle as Calamity chose to move forward through the confusing network of paths. I had no choice, other than to hang on....occasionally being frightened by a passing leaf or twig moving across my face. We eventually surfaced on the homeward side of the forest.....at the exact trail we had entered at!

1. There was valuable knowledge and wisdom that came out of that ride: I learned that horses see a heck of a lot better at night than we do. I have had many "dark" rides since.
2. Calamity must have crossed about a dozen trail junctions and chose the correct path home. A horse's memory is outstanding and this knowledge has made me a better trainer.
3. Until the moment we were stalled in the dark, I thought I had all the answers, but that experience started teaching me to listen to and respect my horse's instincts and abilities.

Our lives are like that beautiful fifty-acre forest. Our feet travel on paths that come to many junctions and we must decide which trail to take. Occasionally we choose the wrong route and find ourselves engulfed in total darkness. We are robbed of our abilities to pick out our own course....we are trapped in a world of confusion and fear. It's at these moments of vulnerability, that a Spiritual Hand reaches out and can guide us to the light....if we have the faith to follow.