

The Legend of The Lady and Little Girl on the White Horse



A short story written by James DeCarli



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Have you been fortunate enough to have seen the Lady and Little Girl on the White Horse?

There are many legends and stories told of Griffith Park in Los Angeles. Some legends are often real-life stories told from person to person, generation to generation of family descendants who lived in and around Griffith Park, the Riverside Rancho and along the banks of the Los Angeles River from as far back as the late 1700's. This was before Griffith Park and Glendale were named, but at that time Glendale was first named La Zanja (known as the ditch), which later became known as Rancho de los Verdugos or Rancho San Rafael. The stories of from family descendants often change over time. Sometimes, they seem to take a life of their own and can show up through your own life experience. And thus, we start a new legend for future generations.

Just like for those who ride in Griffith Park, and have been fortunate enough to hear the footsteps of a horse ridden by a lady with her little girl at night, with a soft sound of the little girl's soft giggle. But not to be afraid, because if these are ghosts, a ghost can be a spirit, an angel that watches over you, and legends say, it can even bring you good luck. Sometimes these are legends. Sometimes true, sometimes not. But sometimes it comes alive in your own life experience and can bring you passion and the joy in life.



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A few years ago, late in October, we rode our horses to the top of Griffith Park trails. It was our annual sunset and night ride. We always pack a small snack and watch the sunset during this time of year, then ride back after sunset.



Photo (Griffith Park): Jim DeCarli

This particular evening was most interesting. It began with a typical, beautiful Autumn sunset, with the sky painted of brilliant colors of deep orange, yellow and blue above, with a view to the ocean and city lights below. The view was enhanced by a soft cool, crisp Autumn breeze coming from the north, a Santa Ana condition common for this time of year. What made this night more than typical that usual, was what happened a few moments after the sun set into darkness.

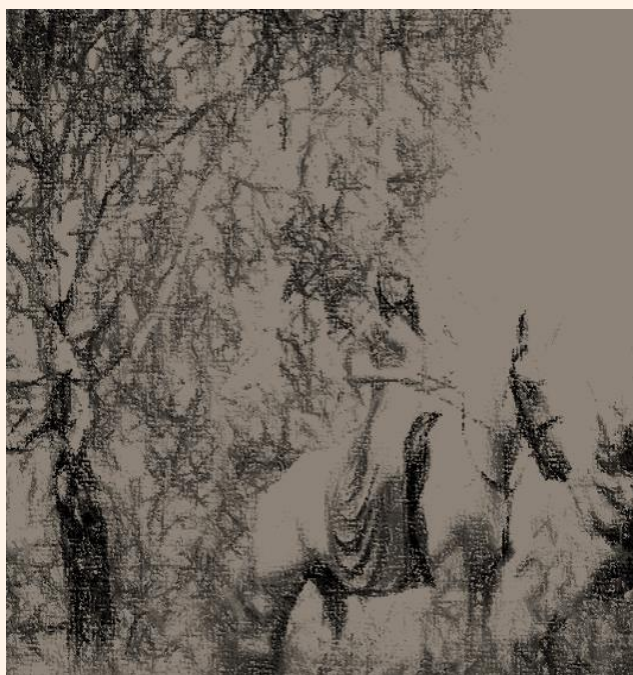


Photo (edited) pexels.com

As the colors faded and darkness approached, we heard the sound of footsteps of a horse riding up. We turned, and saw a rider riding up on a magnificent white horse with a child about 6-years of age. They both had what seemed like, light colored dresses with long flowing sleeves. The lady had dark hair, braided on each side and the little girl with dark long curly hair, that shined from the light of the moon.



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They both greeted us by saying “It sure is a beauty isn’t it?”. We agreed, and asked, do you ride here at this time often? The lady replied, “oh yes, every night. Especially when the full moon is out. Its beauty that takes us here”, as she padded her horse and said, “but it’s the passion that brings us back”.

She softly said, “remember to follow your passions, because your passion gives you spirit, joy and life. And anyone who rides here who follows their passion, that passion, will always bring you good luck, just like beauty here.” Then they both joyfully said “have a wonderful night” as she and the little girl rode off with the little girl waving goodbye hearing a soft giggle.



Photo (edited) pexels.com

The following Autumn, we were invited to dinner at the home of an elderly couple who lived in the Riverside Rancho. They had lived there for over 60-years and raised their children in the same home. Their home was well taken care of, but not fully updated. It mirrored like going back in time, of what seemed like an old movie.

The walls, floors and furniture were clean but well worn. It was clear they care for their home. They have stalls in their backyard, like most homes do in the Riverside Rancho, but they no longer have horses. Instead they have a medium sized dog with thick, course hair with gray on the top of its head that snugs up against you that makes you feel welcome. The backyard has a wonderful scent from the various vegetables and fruit trees throughout the property.



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In their advanced age, one could feel the couple enjoyed each others company. They had someone who cooked meals for them, for whom they call their daughter. She is not really their daughter, but rather their helper. “They make me feel like part of the family” she said. The couple were proud to show us their collection of old books, collectible figurines and photographs of horses and equestrians. After a wonderful dinner, they eagerly showed us their collection of personally autographed photographs of actors and actresses from as far back as the 1940’s, Shirley Temple, Ginger Rogers, Cary Grant, Will Rogers and others. After looking at the photographs and talking we were served home made peach cobbler that the elderly lady made herself. She had taken the pie from the oven while we were still eating dinner, in time to cool. So the home was filled with the aroma of fresh baked pie, which sparked our appetite, despite having a rather large home cooked meal.



Photo (edited) pexels.com

As we talked, the gentleman noticed we were admiring the painting above their fireplace. I inquired if either of them had painted it or if it was old. He laughed, no I am not a artist to say the least. He explained that the painting looks old because it was painted from an old photograph, of his great grandmother and her little girl riding her horse “Beauty”. Something they clearly cherished.



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They joyfully showed us the original photograph. It was kept safely, wrapped in paper and stored between the pages of a book that was stored in a small library with glass doors that squeaked when opened. The photograph was tarnished, faded, thin and very fragile.



Photo (edited): pexels.com

He told us “my mother used to tell me about this photograph”. It was a rather sad story, his wife said, but a lovely one at that. They were happy and eager to describe the story and it was clear it was dear to them both.



Photo (edited): Simon Matzinger

The gentleman explained, see, my great grandmother immigrated here with my great grandfather. They lived in a small house he built himself, in the valley below the foothills, not far from here. He sighed, and explained, it was a common occurrence during those times, fires. There were no firemen to put the fire out, not like these days. It was in the late Autumn, very dry and the weather was getting cold at night. They kept warm from their the fireplace. I was later told that my great grandfather woke of smoke. He quickly carried his little girl out to safety, along with his wife. While trying to put the fire out, the roof collapsed and that’s how my great grandfather died. Their home burnt to the ground.



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In the morning, my great grandmother and her little girl woke up after sleeping in the only structure left on the property, a small tool shed. They kept warm with an old dusty carpet and blanket. They had nothing left. No food, clothing, supplies, nothing.

Once outside, they could still smell the smoke from the fire. It was cold and damp. But my great grandmother was strong and determined. I was later told, she knew it was up to her to now care for her child. There was no time for grief. She cleaned her little girl up with melted frost and ate some partially frozen fruit that had fallen to the ground from their fruit trees, from weeks before. She planned on walking to town, miles away. She could feel it was getting close to winter because of how cold it got at night and knew it was time to go to find shelter and food, but with no money.



Photo (edited): pexels.com

The little girl asked, “mommy where is daddy?”. My great grandmother said, “daddy gave his life, to save us. He is no longer with us, but he is now part of us, he is now alive in our hearts. He loved us both very much which is why he gave his life, to save us. We must be strong. When we miss him, take a deep breath and remember, what he left us, is our life and he will always be with us”. The little girl stood up and took a deep breath. As she exhaled, with watery eyes, she smiled and said, “mommy, yes he is with us, let’s go mommy”.



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When the little girl turned around, my great grandmother heard her little girl say “beauty”, as she pointed to the most beautiful white horse. My great grandmother had never seen this horse before, nor were there neighbors anywhere nearby. She admired its elegance, calmness and beauty. But something about him made her feel more alive than she felt earlier, that things were going to be alright.

She saw the horse slowly walk to her little girl. As the little girl put out her hand out towards the horse, the horse gently bent his head down and she gently caressed the horses face with her soft hands, gave it a kiss and said, “come on mommy lets go with beauty”. At first, my great grandmother was hesitant, but the horse warmed to her rather quickly and they rode to town.



Photo (edited): pexels.com



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Once in town, at the general store, my great grandmother discovered that they needed someone to deliver groceries and supplies to many of the elderly people and families who could not make it to the store themselves during winter. So, the general store were kind enough to put them up to sleep in a small room and she began earning money with her new journey by helping the community, with the help of their new horse her little girl named “Beauty”.



Photo (edited): Johannes Plenio

When I was a little boy, I later learned this little girl, was of course, my grandmother. She told me, she believed her father was alive in her heart and she knew he loved her because he saved her life, and he also sent her “beauty”.

I was only 8-years old when my grandmother told me this story. But I clearly remember her saying, “even though your great grandfather died, he still is alive to this day, in my heart”, as she put her hand to her chest and said “he is with me every day”, as she smiled with happy tears in her eyes. I learned then about passion and life.



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My grandmother would also tell me that even though she was only 6-years old when her father died, she remembers her father putting his hand to his chest and closing his fingers gently to make a fist saying, “anything we do in life we must have passion for. Because that passion brings us life, happiness and good luck”. Then, he would kiss her and say “goodnight sweetheart, don’t let the bed bugs bite”.



Photo (edited): pexels.com

She would tell me, she did not remember much about the fire, but vividly remembers when her mother had told her to take that first deep breath the morning after the fire. She would often tell me, “I still do this today, years later and I feel my father, alive, as part of me. His happiness and life lives within me. And when “beauty” showed up I knew it was a gift from him”.

What I recall the most, is her remembers the words of her father, “whenever we have passion in life, that passion will keep us alive and most of all bring us happiness, good luck and fortune. We will live forever”. Then, the elderly gentleman put his hand gently folded to his chest and looked up at the painting, as he smiled and had tears in his eyes. It was a beautiful, intriguing, yet enlightening evening, with great food, history, a wonderful story and passion for life.



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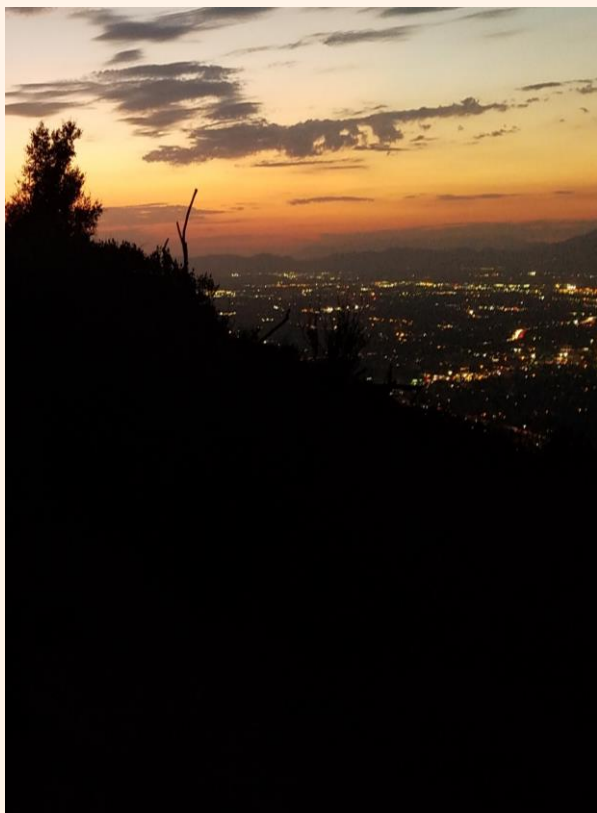


Photo (Griffith Park): Jim DeCarli

The following year, we took our annual Griffith Park trail ride to watch the Autumn sunset and night ride. It was then, that as darkness approached, it was peaceful and quiet, at the same time we looked at each other and both said “was it beauty?”. We quickly remembered the lady with the dark braided hair and little girl with the dark curly hair riding the white horse the year before saying, “its beauty that takes us here and passion that brings us back here”.

We now say to others, “remember to follow your passion, because your passion gives you spirit, joy and life. And anyone who rides here who follows their passion, that passion will always bring you good luck, just like beauty”. At that moment, we heard a distant sound of a rider, cklot, cklot, cklot, and the giggle of a little girl, just like we heard before. We just held each other’s hands, took a deep breath and smiled. We never really thought that this could be the older gentleman’s, great grandmother and grandmother (as a little girl). But nevertheless, even if this was actually a ghost, ghosts are spirits, they can be angels that bring good luck, just like the story the older gentleman described.



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Later that week, we were back at Silver Spur Stables, in the Riverside Rancho. As we entered the barn, it became quiet. We saw the horses all turning away from us, looking downward toward the end of the walkway of the barn at this small glow of light. We both took a deep breath and felt the joy in our life and passion in what we do.

So anytime you ride in Griffith Park, in the Riverside Rancho or are at Silver Spur Stables, if you see a white horse with a lady and little girl, a glowing light, or even the sound of *cklot, cklot, cklot* and the giggle of a little girl, take a deep breath and you will feel the spirit and joy in your life. And remember to follow your passions. It will always bring you good luck, and enjoy the “beauty”.



Photo (Silver Spur Stables): Jim DeCarli



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About The Author

The author, James (Jim) DeCarli, began creative writing in high school. As he went onto college and graduate schools, studying at the University of Southern California, George Washington University, and the University of Oxford, he continued enhancing his literary skills in both the political and neurological sciences. While studying at Mansfield College, University of Oxford he began applying these skills to write environmental health promotion and disease prevention materials and affiliated creative stories to capture audiences. He is currently an injury and neuroepidemiologist, a Master of Certified Health Education Specialist and Certified in Trauma Model Therapy, where his doctoral studies established a foundation for his expertise in developing behavioral programs in public health to help children, teens, new parents, and the general public, to help give them the necessary skills to make healthier choices to reduce their exposure to the risk of injury and violence, and to promote healthy lifestyles, through evidenced-based research and prevention programs for schools, hospitals, governmental agencies and organizations. He also writes short stories and children's stories to influence readers on specific topics, for educational modules relating to behavior change and healthy lifestyles.