

POWER OF MULES

The American Mule and Bluegrass Festival created everlasting memories and brightened the lives of veterans through love of mules and music.

By Marty Gordon, organizer of the American Mule and Bluegrass Festival

As the 2021 American Mule and Bluegrass Festival, held in Shelbyville, September 13-18, was approaching its end, the final prayer was announced on the intercom by Clancy Burk. In his prayer, he stated that the festival would not be measured by money or number of attendees. He prayed that one soul would show up that needs God's help. After the Star-Spangled Banner was played, my staff and I began to prepare for the activities scheduled for the last of five days and nights of the festival. It would be an action-packed day, including concerts, mule shows and mule/draft horse pulling competition.

Mid-morning, a man driving a truck pulling a trailer with two quarter horses in it, stopped in the road near the barn office. A friend of mine and my wife, Lorri Gordon, talked to the young man, Aaron Hudson, thirty-seven, a marine veteran from Vernon, Alabama. He appeared intoxicated and confused. He could not explain why he was there. He said he felt God had directed him to this place for help. He handed over his keys, and we put his horses in stalls. Police and paramedics arrived to check his medical condition and ensure he was not a threat to himself and others. Aaron's blood pressure was extremely high, so they recommended he go to the hospital. Halfway to the hospital, he insisted he had to go back to the festival. The paramedics returned to the festival and stayed close by to observe his ac-



*Mr. JB Stubblefield with "Diamonds in Your Pocket"
(Lorri Gordon's champion quarter mule)*

tions and response to others. Unknown to us at the time, Aaron had left Vernon early that morning to be at a cattle sorting event at Clearview Farms, south of Shelbyville, earlier that day. However, he left the event without ever unloading his horses and drove to the Walking Horse Celebration grounds, where the American Mule and Bluegrass Festival was going on. Aaron was very emotional and open for prayer. As the nightly concert ended, Aaron returned to his truck and spent the night there.

The next morning, I approached him in his truck and asked if he wanted to help me take stage props down. He was willing to help me do whatever was

needed.

Another day of work and a day of rest led to the meeting with Donovan Chapman, a veteran and accomplished singer-songwriter. Donovan works with Freedom Sing USA, a nonprofit based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, pairing professional songwriters with veterans, active military, and their families to help them tell their stories through song.

Donovan was picking his dogs up at our dog boarding kennel. Donovan took time to encourage Aaron to go to the Veterans Hospital in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, for medical attention and detoxification. Aaron agreed, and I took him to the hospital on the following day.

Aaron was apprehensive at first but knew he needed help. Six days later, the hospital released him. I picked him up to bring him back to Shelbyville. He loaded his horses up and went back to Vernon.

It turned out Aaron and I would meet again.

On October 25th, I received a call from a friend asking me to allow a 103-year-old man to come to my Gordonview Farm in Shelbyville, to see one of our mules before he dies. Soon after that, his daughter, Pam, contacted me, and we set up a meeting on November 3rd, for Mr. JB Stubblefield, a decorated WWII veteran, to come to the farm and see our mules.

I wanted to make the event special and commemorate it with a song. Meeting Donovan had allowed me to establish a relationship with Freedom Sings USA.

Freedom Sings USA scheduled Don Goodman, professional songwriter from Nashville, Tennessee, to meet Mr. Stubblefield at Gordonview Farm. When the day arrived, friends and family members were as anxious to meet Mr. Stubblefield as he was to meet our mules.

Aaron joined us for the meeting as well. He came back from Vernon to meet Mr. Stubblefield and Don Goodman. We hooked up the wagon team, Jack, and Jill, and made a few rounds for Mr. Stubblefield to evaluate. He recalled many days long ago, plowing with mules before he joined the army. My wife brought out her champion quarter mule, Diamonds in Your Pocket. Mr. Stubblefield laid his hand on Diamond's nose. It was a connection that we all felt deep inside our hearts as we witnessed Mr. Stubblefield smile like meeting an old, long-lost friend. Diamond's soft eyes and lowered head reciprocated the feeling. With family



From left, Marty Gordon, Danny Davis wagon master, Aaron Hudson, Don Goodman, and JB Stubblefield seated

members, friends, and mules, it was an unforgettable meeting. Mr. Stubblefield echoed my feelings and a quote from my grandfather, who said long ago that “most people underestimate the value of a good mule.”

Through the grace of God, good mules have brought a thirty-seven-year-old veteran that needed help to me and a 103-year-old decorated veteran wanting to see good mules in his final days. Relationships are everything and I feel

so blessed and honored to be a part of these two veterans' lives now. Freedom Sings USA and Gordonview Farm will host the JB Stubblefield 104 Wagon Train September 26-28, 2022, when we plan to hold the second American Mule and Bluegrass Festival in Shelbyville. Aaron will give his testimony in a song during the festival. This is an event you will not want to miss. Come out and support our veterans. God bless.

**Make plans now to attend the
2nd Annual American Mule and
Bluegrass Festival
September 27 - October 1, 2022**

**Contact Marty Ray Gordon with
any questions - 931-703-7975**

