

Fantasy Through Wild Horses, Faith, Grit And Determination: A True Off-Grid Fairytale At The Flying L Ranch

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(PHOTO: Flying L. Ranch)

There is a resonance to fairy-like creatures and environments that ignite peace and healing. Yet, most don't leave the hems of imagination. Wild horses, if you can get close enough to have an encounter, have an even more profound effect. Unbridled nature has a healing modality that all people seek, leaving the hustle and bustle of the cities behind. It's what the Lares family, Michael, his wife Nicole, and their children - Lara and Dylan - so desperately needed. At the time, they did not know how it would come.

"One day, my wife just looked at me with desperation in her eyes and said, 'I can't be here anymore,'" recalls Michael Lares. "So, we started looking for land in more arid areas out West. We had to move because she couldn't take the pain. Too many weather changes. At first, Canada didn't seem realistic - we had so many responsibilities in the US. But in 2010, when I retired early to try and make the change, we made the decision to move to Nemiah Valley, 3500 miles away."

In the heart of British Columbia, somewhere between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, lies Nemiah Valley, a sterling miracle of nature and home to abundant wildlife, vibrant azure lakes, and the Xeni Gwet'in, one of Canada's indigenous communities. So, in 2011, a family of four city-born Americans stepped into that wild, pristine landscape, settled in the serene Coast Mountains, and never left.

But was this the oasis? Could it save her? The dream? To find a peaceful ranch nestled in the wilderness surrounded by bountiful wildlife and nature. The reality? It was the most gorgeous area they had ever laid their eyes on. But it came with culture shock, bitter -40° winters, and non-discriminating natural events against them and their animals. At first, there was little to no connection with the outside world and the predators were something they had not figured into the equation. It was everything they didn't know they wanted but needed.

Having to dig deep as a family was the means to survival. The learning curve was steep with arduous demands on everyone to care not only for each other but also for the animals and the ranch. However, the healing power of their environment and lifestyle proved to reward the move.

After realizing the therapeutic properties of horses and the wilderness, the desire to share the family's magical experience was born. In 2020, the Flying L Ranch was featured in the Canadian docu-series, *The Wild Ones*, known as *Breaking Wild* worldwide. To share their peaceful life with more people, the family is present and active on social media platforms. It's important to note that the Lares family is dedicated to sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly parts of Nemiah Valley. From serene morning walks surrounded by horses and foals being born to daunting videos of beautiful animals getting hurt in the wild, Flying L Ranch is dedicated to sharing the truth.

Their story is full of highs and lows. 13 years now on the ranch, Nicole has experienced tremendous healing, the children are grown, and their home, the Flying L Ranch, is now a full-fledged sanctuary for not only their own horses but the Qayus - wild horses, one of Nemiah Valley's many natural treasures. They have amassed several hundred thousand followers and subscribers via their social media platforms, rallying support for various projects and aspects of horse care and therapy that only a few short years ago were impossible to achieve. Working side by side with the very Cowboys who taught them the ways of their people and the Qayus - wild horses. The Qayus have galloped the breathtaking mountain ranges, valleys, and meadows for centuries, forming a profound bond with the indigenous community, the Xeni Gwet'in. To honor these unicorn-like creatures, the Flying L Ranch focuses on helping the local Qayus with the Xeni Gwet'in ranchers and cowboys.

To help with managing wild horses during summer, the Lareses hire experienced wranglers from all over the globe. Despite seasonal assistance, hundreds of hectares of their ranch stretched by Chilko Lake are nurtured by all members of the Lares family all year round. "We are the Flying L Ranch, and the ranch is us," says Michael. "Our family bond is the essence of the ranch, keeping us sane in more difficult moments of off-grid living."



(PHOTO: Flying L. Ranch)

"It's tricky living off-grid while trying to have a presence in the modern online world. At first, we had to drive three hours to the nearest town just to upload and publish Instagram posts or YouTube videos. It was such an upside down business model but something I felt compelled me to do so. I believe in the therapeutic power of these videos, so we did whatever we had to do to share our lives with the world. I've always considered myself a philanthropist, and this is my way of giving back to communities," Michael shares. "I think more people should romanticize this primordial way of living in nature. Nature will humble you. But it doesn't discriminate,

doesn't care who you are, how much money you make, or where you're from. When you're living amongst the elements, you're just as vulnerable as the birds and horses out here. You are one with them and must respect their way and not consider yourself superior. I believe only in nature you can find the real beauty and the meaning of life."

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