

Love for Therapeutic Riding - Making a Difference

By Elizabeth Bishop Later

<http://www.ouryardfarmhome.com/sea-island-footprints-blog>



When I was a little girl I was just like every other little girl. I loved horses. I didn't have one, so I pretended that things that could be straddled were horses - the arm of the sofa, my large doll house crafted by my father, or an aptly named construction horse. The idea of riding a horse fueled my imagination and I could fancy myself galloping on my noble steed, hair blowing in the wind, the two of us connected through that special bond that only a little girl can have with a horse.

The summer we were ten years old my cousin, Angie, and I were visiting a restored farm in Pocatigo near Yemassee. We were allowed to hand feed a mare in a corral and I was, quite honestly, in horse heaven. She was so gentle and loving; so appreciative of the food we were giving her. I looked into her big brown eyes and felt that we were really connecting, that horse and me.

And then, for no apparent reason, that horse reached over and bit me on the neck.

I want to be clear about this. This was no gentle nibble or playful flutter of her whiskery lips. This was a full-on chomp designed to inflict maximum harm. Fortunately, I saw her coming out of the corner of my eye and was able to draw back slightly so I wasn't seriously injured (although from the sound of my cousin's screams you would have thought I'd been killed). When the dust settled and the damage was assessed I was found to have two injuries. The first was a giant horse hickey, which I soon recovered from. But the other more serious injury was a fear of horses that I have never recovered from. I still love the idea of horses but I always prefer to have a little distance between us.

I gave up the dream of being a horse person.



But Denise Bishop hasn't given up her life-long love affair with horses even though I know she's been bitten, stepped on, kicked, shoved, and generally roughed up by many horses on many occasions.

And thank goodness for her tenacity, because that love for horses has compelled her to become involved with therapeutic riding, through which she has made an enormous difference in the lives of many people with special needs and their families. In 2009, after several years of involvement with Heroes on Horseback, she started Love for Therapeutic Riding, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to use horseback riding to provide unique therapeutic techniques for people with special needs.

Working from her Sunshine Stables on the Yard Farm on St. Helena Island, and using a completely volunteer staff (even the certified instructors volunteer their time), Denise uses trained horses to provide a unique approach to therapy. This therapy enables people with conditions such as Autism, Cerebral Palsy, and Attention Deficit Disorder to improve their balance, coordination, and posture. Information about the physical benefits of this therapy can be found at <http://www.lovefortherapeuticriding.org/why.asp>.



The horses seem to sense that great care must be taken with these special riders and, even though safety precautions are always in place, the horses are gentle, perceptive, and calm while working. And while the physical benefits of this therapy cannot be oversold, there is certainly something equally therapeutic about the bond that forms between the horse and its uncommon rider. Self-esteem and

confidence grows and children who have perhaps experienced social misfortune because of their disabilities find that they are immediately accepted by the large, gentle animals. Sir Winston Churchill said it best: "There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man".



Of course, we must include Duke the Donkey in this narrative. Rescued from a shelter where he was abandoned in the middle of the night, Duke is every bit a part of the loving culture at Sunshine Stables; a long-suffering soul who can make you feel better just by letting you love on his big, fuzzy donkey ears. While Duke doesn't provide therapeutic rides, he

offers his own brand of curative interaction that lets you know he's present and attentive to whatever needs you have that he can help with.



Denise is always looking for people who have a love for horses and a desire to make a difference to volunteer with her. If you're interested in volunteering time or making a donation, you can visit the organization's website: www.lovefortherapeuticriding.org or email her at love4tr@islc.net.

Elizabeth