



A HORSE FOR BRIN

By Anjie Kokan



“God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.” .. Genesis 1:24, NIV



Brindley Kokan and his equine friend.

I can't tell you how many times I had said that my son, Brindley, should try horse-back-riding therapy. This fall, I learned that my poet friend, Linda Konichek's daughter, Wendy, had just merged her farm with her mother's farm in Eagle, and she was interested in giving therapeutic riding lessons to people with special needs.

Given that Brindley's current home therapist had extensive experience with riding therapy and children with special needs, Liz Partridge was thrilled to be a part of this, too. And together, Liz and Wendy teamed up to give it a try with Brindley.

Wendy sums up her philosophy of therapeutic riding for special needs riders, "Such riders may face unusual challenges in their daily lives, but that should not stop them from becoming empowered at whatever they choose in life."

Brindley, who is now ten, has severe autism and limited speech. It was my hope that riding a horse would motivate Brindley to speak more, learn new responsibilities, and practice some social skills. I had no doubt in my mind that this would be an awesome experience for him, given the fact that the few times he had been on a horse, his smile was always lit with a special joy.



Brindley grooming Cha-heeta.

In preparing for our first trip to Jericho Creek Farm, Liz wrote a social story for Brindley that we read to him a few times, so that he knew what to expect from

the experience. This helped reduce Brindley's anxiety, which often accompanies his excitement.

Our first encounter with Jericho Creek Farm was positive for all of us. Brindley always loved farms, and upon arriving at Jericho, our hike to the barn included Brindley's noticing the horses that ventured out to the end of their fences to see what was going on. Jericho has about thirty horses that are spread out over the property. Wendy welcomed us into the barn and introduced us to Jericho's Magic Lady, a.k.a. "Cha-heeta", a white and speckled Morab horse, with a gentle disposition.

Liz showed Brindley how to brush Cha-heeta, and he got to know her a little before taking his first ride. After some brushing, Brindley put on his helmet and walked to the arena with Liz, Wendy and Cha-heeta. My husband helped Brindley on the horse, and the two of us watched while Liz and Wendy led Cha-



Brin riding with his support team, Liz & Wendy.

heeta around the arena and taught Brindley the commands, "Walk on!" and "Whoa!" so he could learn how to make the horse go and stop. His face was filled with happiness and pride.

Brindley has completed four lessons now, and I can't tell

you, between the two of us, who looks forward to the Thursday lessons more. Brindley has learned to brush his horse, and to thank both Cha-heeta and Wendy when the lessons are done. He has learned to put the helmet and saddle away, and he always gives Cha-heeta a treat at the end of the lesson. Brin now takes that responsibility one step further, by cutting the apples and packing them for Cha-heeta before we leave the house.

Brindley's retention of the new vocabulary he has learned has been one-hundred-percent. Spontaneous language has occurred at the farm, not only concerning Cha-heeta, but also about the kittens who live in the barn. One day Brindley indicated we should take one of the kittens home when he spontaneously said, "Orange cat, Mama home." Brindley has initiated conversations at school and on the bus about the "white horse," and how it is the day to "ride Cha-heeta." He has taken an interest in sharing his new world with others and I can't be more thrilled.

While there are many more benefits than what I have mentioned, due to horse-back riding and hippo therapy, I am very inspired by our experience, and the few things that have been gained so far are only a glimpse on what is yet to come. This experience has been an added blessing in our journey through the world of autism, the world Brindley now rides through on the "white horse" that will be teaching him many things. If you ever thought about giving horses a try for any child, I encourage you to do so. The animals God has created for us have the ability to touch hearts and enhance lives. What a wonderful world, indeed!

To learn more about riding therapy at Jericho Creek Farms, go to www.jerichocreekfarms.com or www.horsepowerhealingcenter.com