



Heartland Equine Therapeutic Riding Academy

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www.betra.org

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“Hi” is a part of every language known to man and yet there are those among us who struggle to form this simple word. This past summer I was privileged to work with someone whose challenges ran much deeper. This experience affected both myself and others in an incredible fashion. *I hope that you'll take a moment to read on about a courageous young boy and his amazing journey on horseback.*

Nick began life as a healthy and happy baby boy. Tragically, at 2 ½, Nick contracted the debilitating and sometimes deadly bacteria, E. coli. The ensuing illness ultimately led to a complication called Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS). HUS caused many of Nick's organs to fail, including his heart. Nick slipped into cardiac arrest a number of times, and as a result, suffered a severe brain injury due to lack of oxygen. The extent of Nick's brain injury was so extensive it left him a quadriplegic. Nick's parents have taken every measure possible to improve his life through a variety of physical and occupational therapy programs aimed at building up his frail body.

In June of 2004, Nick's journey brought him to the **HETRA** program to allow him to participate in a hippotherapy program. At the start of Nick's therapy he was physically unable to hold his head upright or remain in a sitting position without significant assistance. Nick did not speak and had very tight muscles throughout his body. HETRA therapists worked diligently to increase Nick's flexibility by positioning him on his back and stomach atop a wedge cushion on his horse. Nick would cry during these initial sessions, however by the end of each session the muscles in his arms and legs had relaxed significantly. Nick's progress was remarkable and he was soon sitting astride his mount with the assistance of a back rider. (see photo below)

Five months later, **Nick no longer cries during his therapy sessions.** Instead, this little boy laughs and giggles as he circles the arena. He's able to hold his head up by himself for short periods of time and can turn his head from side to side following the directions of the volunteer or therapist nearby. Nick continues to experience relaxation in his arms and legs. He even puckers his lips to try to blow bubbles while on the horse.



*“The horse was his, if only for a moment...”
A passage from the journal of Samuel Dennison in reference to
Tribes of the Great Plains. (1891)*

No one imagined that Nick would experience such an unbelievable rate of progress. Each week brings a new surprise for those of us who work with him, and never do his improvements cease to amaze us. One day in October, I was preparing to help Nick mount his horse when I heard a clear little voice from behind say “hi”. I turned quickly and did a double take when I discovered that the voice belonged to Nick. His life’s milestone became mine. This one word represents so many of the incredible achievements made possible by the horses and people of HETRA.



Nick’s mother credits much of the progress to his therapy at HETRA. Not only has Nick made great physical strides but he also appears to be a much happier child . His mother notes his excitement as he laughs and smiles in the parking lot upon arrival at the barn. Nick’s speech continues to slowly improve as well.



Now comes the difficult part. Imagine for a moment that you’ve decided to bring a life changing therapy to dozens of special needs people. The expense of equipment, veterinary care, horse feed, farrier care, insurance, utilities, and supplies are never ending. In order to keep the program affordable for our students, HETRA uses donations to supplement up to 50% of the cost of each session. We also offer full or partial scholarships for those who need them. It sounds overwhelming, and frankly at times it is. Many worried nights are spent wondering just how much further we can stretch our limited funds. Your assistance is critical as these very special students and their families continue to benefit from these uniquely amazing animals. Participation in HETRA helps a child reach his or her goals and showcases their ABILITIES! **Your financial assistance initiates your family into the HETRA team..... a team that is making a difference in many special students’ lives!**

Warm Wishes in this Holiday Season,

Edye Godden
HETRA Occupational Therapist

“We’ve met so many wonderful, energetic people that volunteer their precious time to help our son and others like him. The therapy sessions have also given us the opportunity to meet other incredible parents of special needs children. We can’t begin to express how grateful we are that we found HETRA. HETRA has opened our eyes to non-traditional therapy and we consider HETRA to be an amazing organization.” *Quote from Nick’s Mom*