

## **MY THERAPY-SOKKI**

By SUSAN J RYZDYNSKI

Sokki does his job well. His job is to be responsible for me when I'm with him. Sokki is my horse, my "therapy". My walking has gotten better over the years, as, when I first got out of the hospital, after surgery, I had to relearn walking. My mental attitude too has gotten better over the years, as, Sokki, has allowed me a measure of independence and a feeling of being able to do "things".

Sokki's not totally docile, when he's out by himself or with other horses, they all run, roll or play. When I'm riding and want him to get up and go, all it takes is just a cue on my part and he does whatever I'm asking.

I have a few problems, I had major brain surgery 10 years ago which left me slightly off-balance and less coordinated than before. I occasionally stumble or feel weak, Sokki takes this in stride.

I also have type 1 diabetes. Sokki always tries to do what I'm asking him to do, so as, not to cause me extra energy expenditures so my blood sugar goes low.

Two years ago, I broke my leg, Several months of recuperation ensued. Sokki caused not a moment's trouble to the folks that were looking after him for me. During that time (4 months), he never got too energetic or antsy. When I was able to finally visit him again, he was very careful of my personal space. When I was finally able to ride again, he was careful not to bounce in his transitions or go too fast, until I was ready.

A year ago, I sprained my knee badly, getting on him, I still wear a brace. I was by myself in the arena. I had to hop to my car which was several hundred feet away, leading Sokki. Even though I was in intense pain, Sokki helped support me, as, I hopped. He did not go too fast or too slow, while being lead by this person hopping on one foot next to him.

### **2**

Sokki is a very aware horse. He puts aside his feelings and makes sure I come first. Sokki always makes sure he does not enter my personal space, therefore, he watches where I am and tries not to crowd me or step on me.

When out on the trail, he's not disturbed by much of anything. Dirt bikes can be right alongside him and he has no problem. Dogs, not a big deal. He takes care to place his feet for the best footing and this does not slow him down. He keeps up well with bigger horses (he's 13.2 hh). Sokki is able to make snap decisions regarding his footing and other things. I know I appreciate it!

He knows to respect my limitations, never pulls or pushes me. I've seen others with him and on him, and while he's not disrespectful, he will try to get away with more.

I owned a horse, 10 years ago, at the time of my operation. He was ok, but not real smooth. I kept having the feeling that I'd lose balance (before the surgery, I used to show, ride and train in Western Pleasure). I had to sell this horse, then I bought another horse. She spooked or got confused every time I stumbled. That did not last long. I was in-between horses for awhile, until I met Sokki and felt he could do what I needed him to do.

We do a lot of walking, tolt (like a running walk) and some training stuff. Sokki is really easy to put into his tolt, and keep in that frame. He stops easily, sidepasses and backs, on command, without fuss. You may say, well, it's cause of the rider. To a certain extent, but, Sokki also, always does his best to understand what is required, and do it.

Now, Sokki wasn't a pushbutton horse, or adapted to me, when I got him, six years ago. I customized him some and he picked up some stuff, on his own. He was born in Iceland. He has been all over the U.S. with many different riders getting introduced to riding and the smooth gaits of the Icelandic Horse.

Sokki was quite hard-mouthed at first (maybe, because he was used as a demonstrator. When I bought him, he knew just the basics. I wanted for him to learn lot's more. Because I am not very strong, I could not get him to do something with brute strength. I used techniques that I later found out were called Natural Horsemanship. Sokki learned fast, maybe because of these techniques or that he wanted so much to please me!

When I'm riding him and want to do some sidepassing, he goes either direction just great. In the beginning, when I was schooling him, I had to tap him with a riding crop to go to his left, because my right leg is so much weaker than my left. Now, with just the merest pressure of my right leg, he sidepasses perfectly.

Other less-than-mobile (bad backs) people and children have ridden him with alot of success. All since I've owned him.

Some horses respect people's limitations like Sokki, but, it seems to me that he goes out of his way to accommodate me or anyone that's on him or near him who have limitations.