

# Hip Hippotherapy Hooray

By Margaret Pernicone

Growing up in Omaha, Nebraska, mine and my brothers favorite place to play with four-legged friends was Hillside Stables. Time passes of course and we all grew up and moved East and West, but I never forgot my love for horses.

Thirteen years ago I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. A few years later I tested positively for Lyme Disease. The doctors strongly suggested that I rest, relax, stay home and above all stay out of the heat. That's nonsense I thought. So I strength trained at the gym and swam whenever possible. Ultimately the diseases took their toll and I couldn't walk unaided anymore, couldn't drive and could barely sit up straight at all.

Then I heard about Ride On. Actually, my ex-husband's wonderful wife Mary, a horsewoman herself heard about Hippotherapy and suggested that I call Gloria at Ride On. The following Wednesday my sweetie, Mike, drove me to the stables where we met JoAnn Benjamin, PT., who works at Ride On with our Hippotherapy clients, Nancy, Jean and other volunteers, rides, parents and more new found friends. I signed up for a physical therapy evaluation the following week. I was so excited I could barely sleep, one week later Joann evaluated my physical strength – "Not bad – ready to ride?" Those three little words were the most positive I had heard in years.

I slowly trudged to the mounting ramp on my handy dandy walker. "How the heck was I going to be able to get on a horse?" No problem. Jean led Kharouselle up to the platform, as I faced Joann, held onto the handle and began to sit, Kharouselle moved just a hair. "The chair moved," I shouted nervously. For years every time something I planned to sit on moved, I fell. This time, everyone including my angel Mary Laughed. I sat on the horse with confidence and Joann and Jean arranged my body until I felt safe and well balanced.

"Whenever you're ready, just let us know" urged Jean. "Ride On" I shouted, my eyes brimming with tears. With Kharouselle's first step the enormity of my smile almost broke my face.

I was in the beloved sun riding a 1,400 pound beast and I was thrilled. Proudly I discovered that my rear remembered its seat. In moments I began to remember other former attributes like better balance, posture and above all self-confidence. My future looked bright with freedom and I basked in the heady, romantic aroma that is horse.

The walk from the platform back to the car was a 400% improvement according to Mike. Of course as the love of my life and my devoted caregiver, Mike's prejudiced.

That night my body was a bit stiff and sore but in every cell I was spiritually uplifted. Thank god for Kharouselle's inspiring rhythm. Clip clop, clip clop. Here I go!