

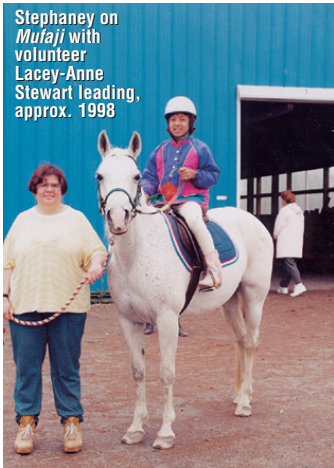


SPECIAL ATHLETES

The joy experienced by the able-bodied rider pales in comparison to the wonders & benefits achieved by therapeutic riding programs. The GaitPost is pleased to offer space to profile our special athletes, their horses, therapists and accomplishments.

Stephaney Schneider

Submitted by Max Read, B.A., CTRI



Stephaney on *Mufaji* with volunteer Lacey-Anne Stewart leading, approx. 1998

Stephaney Schneider started riding at the Richmond Therapeutic Equestrian Society in 1997 at age 7. She has cerebral palsy so her right side is weaker and less coordinated. She also has epilepsy and episodes of accelerated pulse which further impede her ability to function. Stephaney is also crazy about horses.

At RTES, all instructors are fully certified by the Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association. This ensures that riders receive the greatest benefit from the program. Initially Stephaney rode with a leader and two sidewalkers for support. She worked on equalizing her weight so she could sit squarely on the horse's back, a task made difficult by her affected right side. She rode in a backpad and surcingle until she

learned to keep centered without the help of stirrups.

Then she switched to a saddle and began to learn to use the reins. While it would be easier for Stephaney to neck rein just using her stronger left hand, this would not provide the same therapeutic benefit as using both hands does. She had to learn to relax her left side and strengthen and improve control on her right side. The reins were attached to the horse's cavesson, and only moved to the bit once she was able to use both hands evenly.

Now Stephaney gets her horse ready for class and rides independently. She can do rising trot on the correct diagonal, and has had her first (brief and accidental!) experience of canter. Soon, she hopes to start learning to canter properly and after that... who knows?

Stephaney's parents, Lee Schneider and Pat Sheoratan, said this about her therapeutic riding: "Stephaney's riding has improved both her gait and her balance noticeably. Her right arm and hand have become stronger and more functional. Riding is a strong motivator for her to try to strengthen her right side so she can do all horse-related activities better. Stephaney looks forward to each riding lesson with anticipation and excitement. Her multiple conditions are quite debilitating at times, but she has told us often, "When I am on Jasper I forget all my problems. It makes me proud."

Richmond Therapeutic Equestrian Society needs volunteers, so more spaces can be opened up for riders! Call 604-241-7837, Fax 604-241-7858, E-mail rtes@telus.net or visit their web site at www.vcn.bc.ca/rtes



Stephaney on *Jasper*, completely independent, December 2002.

Photos courtesy: RTES