

I started riding in 1990, My first solo ride was on my nieces quarter horse mare "Destiny" . That night well drifting off to sleep i could still feel the motion of galloping in my muscles.

I rode as a member of The Calgary regional trail riders for quite a few years. Participating in activities such as trail ride, parades. I ran couple fund raising rides for the cancer society and children's hospital. I compete in competitive long distance trail riding as well as hunter and jumper divisions. I'm an Equine Canada certified english instructor of beginners with the jump component; and a qualified Equine assisted learning facilitator.

I think the first time i heard of Opening Gaits or OG as we call it was an add in the horses all magazine. Also i pasted green Briar twice a day on my way to work and there was a small sign on the fence. So one day in 2001 I stopped in and found out about volunteering.

I started as all volunteers do tacking, leading side walking. I found out as lots of our volunteers do that i thought i was there to donate to the program but i took away far more then i gave. sometimes during the week just when you need it a funny OG moment pops into mind. The riders in the opening gaits program all face extraordinary challenges on a daily basis. I could see it being easy for parents and care givers just to plunk the kids in front of a tv. Put the parents keep the program going because they fight for activities that their kids can participate in. What we do at OG is remove the barriers so that anyone you wants to; or who can benefit from horse back riding can. Horses are the heart of the OG program. Horse back riding is both a recreational activity and a sport. I used to say that it was miraculous seeing the difference that one of riding a week for six weeks made in the core strength of say a rider with Cp. but now after over ten years it has become my expectation. Lots of times i wondered if the riders really got anything out of it. But then i remembered that horses work their own special magic. plus it was lots of fun. It's incredible when you see that big smile on a riders face when they trot.

when OG looked for an assistant instructor i put my hand up. I eventually started Instructing as well as fund raising and public speaking. One of my highlights with the program was accepting the animal volunteer award of the year on behalf of Catfish a long time OG go to horse owned by Hazel Bennett, at the Calgary Heart Of Leadership awards April 2012

One of the amazing things that happens for persons with physical or mental challenges is that they get to check their disability at the door. Once our riders are on the horse you can't tell who spends all day in a wheel chair. Who is blind. Most OG riders live pretty structured lives. But once they are mounted suddenly they are in charge of a very large animal. With the help of a lead and side walkers. At OG we try to keep it about recreation. Lots of OG riders are in school or different programs their days can be stressful. So we keep it relaxed and let the horses do what they do. Which for a rider that does spend their days in a wheel chair is to move the hips and pelvis in a motion that mimics the walk. which helps relief constipation. Other benefits of horse back riding for all riders are improved core strength, balance. Riding is also a great way strengthen social and motor skills. One mother told me that her daughter did not start to walk until after she started riding.

I like to say that the only thing for certain about therapeutic riding is that nothing is for certain. What works for one rider one week may not work the next. the great thing about this is that it really challenges my imagination as an instructor. Each week OG volunteers are asked to use their imaginations. You have to be pretty silly sometimes to get a reaction for a rider with down syndrome. Opening Gaits is well known for our connection to kids. What is not so well known is that a lot of those kids have been in the program for years and they are not kids anymore. OG also helps adult riders pursue their passion for riding to.