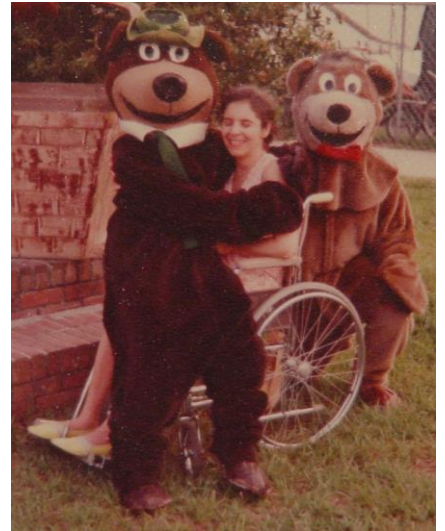


Gwen's Story...

My mother was my inspiration for the forming of Horses for Hope. She was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis when she was pregnant with me in 1963. As a child I don't remember what it was like to have a mother that could walk and do things on her own and for me. She started out using a walker then gradually had to use a wheelchair, then in her last years she spent more time in bed than in the chair. She died in July 1995.

I remember as a child that my parents gave us children (5 of us, I'm the youngest) horses and ponies. They took us to horse shows every Saturday and sometimes out of town on weekend overnight shows. My mother loved to watch us ride and now I believe that she longed so much to be free to ride herself that just watching us gave her the pleasure she would have had if she was on the horse herself. No matter how bad her day might have been she would always try to go to the shows. My father bought a camper to accommodate her needs at the shows – mom and dad were real troopers!



I feel sad now that I'm older and realize how I felt as a teen was not so good – I was embarrassed to be around a mother in a wheelchair and tried to avoid being close to her in public. People would stare at her and wonder why her hands shook or why her leg suddenly jumped off the footrest. As I grew older and started my own family and became a mom, free to run around anytime, anywhere with my children I regret those feelings I had as a teen – I know how trapped my mom must have felt. She had to rely on others to feed her, put her on the toilet and put her to bed.

We had many ups and downs as time progressed – she tried acupuncture, chiropractors, hospital after hospital, special medicines, and spiritual healing with Katherine Kulhlman. None worked – she just got worse and worse. My dad took care of her and stayed with her till the very end – he was my hero.

As the years passed I learned about a thing called Therapeutic Riding. I read articles in horse magazines and also learned about Equine Psychotherapy – one individual started a program called C.O.L.T. helping troubled teens.



I wanted to see smiles on the faces of children that were discouraged with everyday life. I wanted for those children to feel a sense of freedom on horseback that they would not otherwise feel in a cold wheelchair. I wanted to help those who felt helpless because of abuse in their lives – I wanted them to know there is love out there and horses can give them that feeling. I sure got it on my sad days – my horse always seemed to know when I was a little down and he seemed so loving.

I began toying with the idea of starting a center to help all types of individuals using horses. The idea just stayed an idea for many years because I just didn't know how to nor did I have the means to start such a business.

One day in helping Eric gain experience with horses I spoke of my idea – then off it went through him, his wife, Maryann, and my best riding buddy Dawn. We brainstormed one evening about it and then "Horses for Hope" was born. I am very grateful to Dawn for introducing Eric to me – without that meeting my idea would probably still be just an idea.