

Terri's Story

Terri came to Sunrise EquiTherapy in 2004 at the age of 44. A year earlier she was close to dying after she suffered a stroke and an aneurism that left her right side paralyzed. Terri hung on and after she had stabilized was dismissed from the hospital to Madonna Rehabilitation Center in Lincoln. After weeks of therapy and no progress made in her condition Terri was moved to a nursing home in Crete, Nebraska. Can you imagine at the age of 43 living in a nursing home?

The staff at the nursing home tried their best, but Terri was slipping away. She had a feeding tube, her right side was curled and contorted, she refused to try any rehabilitation exercises no matter how limited, she cried and told everyone she wanted to die. There was nothing to live for. Family members tried their best and finally remembered Terri rode horses when she was younger and loved it. Maybe not all was lost.

Terri was asked if she would like to try to ride again. With a tear trickling down her face she replied, "Yes." Strength came to Terri from within her soul. The feeding tube was removed, the wheelchair exchanged for a walker, the curled side of her body was relaxing and she no longer wanted to die. She wanted to RIDE.



Terri arrived at the facility in a walker with a gait belt around her waist, used by the staff that accompanied her, to assist with balance. Her hands were bruised and scarred from all the intravenous injections that were used to keep her alive. Her speech was slurred, but a special black Arabian horse, with a white marking on his forehead, named Rajati could understand her. It took five people to help her mount from the wheelchair ramp and keep balanced while mounted, but she was riding again and she smiled!

Now she had a reason to live. Within 12 weeks of riding Terri had gained the strength to leave the walker behind and no longer needed all the volunteers to help her. She could groom and tack up Rajati, mount from a mounting block, ride independently at a walk and trot for over a half hour. She was also exercising her mind by learning all about Arabian horses, memorizing the steps to grooming and parts of the tack plus remembering the barrel racing pattern. Terri gave and continues to give demonstrations at various events and share her story with the media. *The Arabian Horse Times*, an international publication, included her story of recovery.



After riding with the program for two years Terri had progressed enough to move from the nursing home to assisted living another one of her goals had been met. Terri continued pushing herself not only in riding but exercising during the week to keep up her strength, volunteering to sharpen her memory and even renewing her ability to crochet.



In the spring of 2009, Julie Wood, Executive Director and founder of Sunrise EquiTherapy was hired by the University of NE, Lincoln to teach the first class of its kind entitled Introduction to Equine Assisted Therapy. Terri spoke to the class about her life changing illness and how a black Arabian gave her life. She inspired everyone as she gave a riding demonstration for the class. “Miracles do happen,” she stated as she dismounted.

In the fall of 2009 another miracle happened. Terri emailed this to Director Julie Wood:

“You would never believe what is going on in my life now! I am so excited!!!!!! I have finally reached more of my goals....to be on my own. Another goal achieved....that makes 2 of them!!!! (being on her own meant moving into an independent living arrangement or an apartment of her own) Wanted to tell you cause horse therapy has played such a big part of this....had it not been for horse therapy I would still be in bed praying to die....

Thank you for giving me my life back! Terri”

Now, six years later, Terri finally has a bathroom she doesn't have to share, a shower all to herself, a full kitchen, living room, bedroom with a real bed not a hospital bed, enough closet space for everything, a pantry, linen closet, book shelves and windows and her own keys!! But one draw back was all of her possessions were given away or lost during her period of recovery.

With the Sunrise garage sale beginning to take shape it was decided to invite Terri to go “shopping” for anything she needed compliments of Sunrise and of course those who donated for the sale. Terri loved picking out things, things that will be hers and only hers that included chairs, a kitchen table, plates, glasses, a rocking chair, pillows, corning ware, a crock pot, pictures, lamps, a dresser, cookbooks, etc. Many other items, some new, were given to Terri by those people who have followed her story or read about her needs on the Sunrise mass email list. She received gift cards as well as \$100 bill from a special Sunrise friend. Sunrise volunteers moved her new and almost new items to her apartment. Terri greeted us with tears of happiness and hugs.

In response to all this Terri wrote:

“Julie! Thank you so much for letting me go over to the garage sale....I have almost everything to furnish my apartment...

**You know when I said my Prayers last night I thanked God cause Sunrise gave me back my life....a better life....thanks to Rajati....and now Sunrise is still there helping me to get ready to move into an apartment....something they (meaning her doctors and therapists) didn't think I would ever accomplish!!!!
Thank you!
Hugs, Terri”**



Update:

Rajati has been retired but his special bond with Terri will never fade. She goes to visit him and gives carrots and hugs. He hugs her back, wrapping his neck around her as he closes his eyes and remembers the good times. Yes, horses even know they have healed a body, mind, and spirit.



Rajati has turned ***"Small Steps Into Confident Strides"*** for Sunrise rider, Terri Koster