

At Least



My first thought after my MS diagnosis was: “At least I can still ride horses.”

I had just turned 21, was studying hard to get into veterinary school, and I couldn’t feel my body from the waist down. I missed three exams, homework assignments and countless hours of sleep. Every step was pins and needles racing up my legs, but I knew that I could still ride horses.

I knew that I could still ride horses because years before, I had worked with children and adults with disabilities who were using horseback riding as part of their therapy. People using walkers, wheelchairs, canes—all of them could get on a horse and ride.

I had been riding horses for years and was riding in my university’s equestrian club program. My number one go to mount was a big yellow puppy of a horse named Taxi. He was sweet and as bombproof as they come, but he had no idea where his butt was. We kind of had that in common at that point.

I told my instructor that I needed an easy ride (I neglected to tell her that this was the day after yet another MRI and a spinal tap), and she paired me with Taxi. We went flawlessly through the maneuvers, transitioning from one to the next seamlessly. I caught her staring at us at one point and stopped to ask if something was wrong.

“I’ve never seen him move like that before. Not that quickly.”

I was riding, and I couldn’t feel my legs. My big, beautiful partner was taking care of me,

filling in the gaps, and letting me feel in control of not only my body, but the 1500lb one moving seamlessly at my direction.

Horses gave me peace. They gave me freedom. They honestly restored my hope that I could do anything that I set my mind to.

I owe a huge part of my success as a veterinarian to an inability to feel parts of my body when I get stressed and to the soft muzzles that gave me a boost when I needed it most.