

# The Heart Horse

*No love is as powerful as the one between a little boy and his horse.*

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Photography by Galloping Dreams Photography



Finding that once-in-a-lifetime horse is something that many dream of but few are lucky enough to experience firsthand. For Katie Nolte of Richville, Minnesota, “once in a lifetime,” came in the form of a Craigslist ad for a jet-black filly that won the then-22-year-old’s heart.

The young horsewoman purchased Sonny’s Black Brandy, a 2009 black solid filly by MJ Hancock Bud (QH) and out of Max’s Brandy Two Sox, for \$200. Katie’s first horse of her own, “Abby” was a feisty foal whose extreme curiosity often got her into trouble, Katie says.

“Once, my husband and I were cleaning up one of the pastures and Abby’s curiosity led her to the middle of a brush pile, where she ended up stuck; I had to help free her,” Katie recalled.

When Katie’s first child, Cord, was born, the new mother sensed that the same curiosity that helped

Abby win her heart also burned inside of her son—eventually, that shared sense of wonder made Abby and Cord an inseparable pair. Curious of one another, they instantly became best friends, Katie says.

On several occasions, Katie frantically searched for her spunky, escape-artist toddler, only to find

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him happily sitting on the ground in the sunshine next to Abby, hugging her legs, or toddling through the pasture with his four-legged friend in tow.

Abby is 18 months older than Cord, so Katie says the duo was able to grow up and experience life together. Abby’s curiosity seemed to develop into motherly instincts when it came to her pint-size best friend.

“One day, Cord started to slide off Abby while he was riding, so she reached around and pushed him back in the saddle with her nose,” Katie said.

On other occasions, Cord would trot alongside Abby, tracking a bit too close to her legs—the mare, however, would mindfully take her steps, making sure she didn’t knock

over her young handler.

The youngsters even competed at their first show together: Abby just age 3, and Cord at 18 months. With Katie’s assistance, the pair competed in lead-line walk-trot classes. Bystanders were amazed a 3-year-old could serve as a rock-solid mount for such a young rider, but the mare won them over with each careful step she took, ensuring her tiny pilot remained safe and secure in the saddle.

“I can’t think of a more perfect pairing of horse and child,” Katie said. “These two love each other so much, and it shows when they are together.”

But Cord and Abby’s relationship was not without trial. One afternoon, while Katie was photographing a Youth rodeo, her hus-



band, Chance, frantically brought her news that seemed like it might shatter the picturesque partnership between the boy and his horse. Abby had kicked the family’s skid loader, and Chance was sure her leg was broken. Thoughts of life without Abby—and the impact that might have on her 5-year-old son—flooded Katie’s mind as she raced to the farm.

Back at home, Chance and Katie carefully loaded Abby into the trailer and silently drove to the veterinarian. Despite how much they tried to avoid it, their minds wandered to the worst-case scenario.

Abby’s diagnosis was not good—she had shattered her shinbone, severed her suspensory ligament and fractured her cannon bone—but the veterinarian was confident the mare could recover and live happily and comfortably once healed.

After weeks of diligent veterinary care, Abby was sent home to recover with detailed instructions handed over to her caretakers and

weeks of stall rest still ahead. The Noltzes loaded Abby into the trailer with a glimmer of hope in their eyes, knowing Cord would be waiting to see his precious partner when they returned.

Immediately, Cord made sure he was involved in Abby’s healing process; he wanted to care for Abby the way she had cared for him, Katie says. After several long weeks of stall rest, Cord began hand-walking Abby. Following Cord like a puppy, Abby carefully placed her feet to ensure his safety with each step, just as before.

Now fully recovered, Abby’s living a life of luxury—she still gets daily attention from Cord, even though he has a new riding horse, and she even serves as an equine model for Katie’s photography business. Ever present is the mare’s sensible, caring personality.

“Buying Abby was the best \$200 I ever spent,” Katie said. “There will never be another one like her; she is my heart horse.”

