

Saskatoon

## 'He loves being an artist': Sask. teen teaches horse to paint

'Now, if I get the paint bottles out of my locker, he gets excited,' says Ella Wall



[Pratyush Dayal](#) · CBC News · Posted: Nov 16, 2023 6:00 AM CST | Last Updated: 1 hour ago



Ella Wall helps take care of Tuff, a thoroughbred near Borden, Sask., and when she is not riding him, they paint together. (Pratyush Dayal/CBC)

Tuff, an off-track Kentucky-born thoroughbred horse, stands with his snout above a half-painted canvas in a stable near Borden, Sask., about 50 kilometres northwest of Saskatoon.

"He chooses his colours. I hold it out to him. If he touches it with his nose, I take that as a yes," said Ella Wall, the 17-year-old holding the canvas.

Once Tuff chooses a colour, Wall puts it on the canvas, then covers it with plastic so the horse doesn't try to eat it. She then puts camelina oil, a joint supplement that Tuff likes the taste of, on top of the plastic.

"That makes it like a reward. He licks the top cover like the plastic layer and smashes the paint around."

She repeats the process a few times, with a few colours, then peels the plastic layer off, leaving a painting made of abstract patterns.



After seeing a trend on TikTok where horses use their snout or tongue to paint, Ella Wall has had Tuff do three dozen paintings. (Pratyush Dayal/CBC)

Wall found the idea on Tik Tok. So far she has had Tuff paint three dozen pieces and sells them for \$25 to \$60, with the money going toward Tuff's Care.

She has received great responses so far, including some happy tears. One kind gentleman online even donated \$200 toward a winter blanket for Tuff, Wall said.

"Now, if I get the paint bottles out of my locker, he gets excited. He knows that he gets to paint. He loves being an artist."

Tuff is "very opinionated," Wall said, and will not spread paint if it's a colour he didn't choose.

Wall said Tuff is one of her best friends and their bond has only grown since she first met him.

### **A unique relationship**

Breanna Dielschneider owns Tuff along with Road to Serenity Farm, the horseriding school where he lives.

Dielschneider brought Tuff in five years ago after an injury ended his racing career.

Tuff is sensitive and "not a horse for everybody," Dielschneider said. Somehow, Wall was able to navigate the quirks.

"Ella was drawn to Tuff many years ago and she became Tuff's person."



Despite Tuff being sensitive and 'not a horse for everybody,' Breanna Dielschneider, right, says Ella Wall is able to navigate his quirks. (Pratyush Dayal/CBC)

Beyond all the care Wall provides Tuff, Dielschneider said she loves the unique relationship the duo share. She said Wall, who has Tourette syndrome, gets as much from it as Tuff does.

"Sometimes with Ella's Tourette, she's unable to speak and so Tuff allows her to speak again. She'll come out and all of a sudden be like, 'yay, I can talk again' and he just unlocks so much in Ella," Dielschneider said.

"It's such a great relationship, a great connection, and they're just there for each other," she said.

Dielschneider said Wall has even been able to ride Tuff bareback, something extremely difficult with a horse like him.

"It's a magical relationship. That's what it turned out to be with Tuff and Ella, and they just help each other so much."

- **Horses get asthma, too, but environmental shifts, access to hay are causing more problems, Sask. prof says**
- **Here's one family's story of how a war horse ended up on their farm near Essex**

### 'We do everything together': Wall



Ella Wall says Tuff is her best friend. She says they feel comfortable with each other. (Pratyush Dayal/CBC)

Tuff was raised to race, so has a lot of nervous habits including biting, head bobbing and being skittish when someone gets into his personal space, Wall said.

"The first time I met him, I was doing liberty [a type of training] with him. He was just very nervous. He was running around and wouldn't settle, like now he's just settling. A few years ago he just didn't feel safe," she said.

"Now, we do everything together.... He's had a chance to realize that people aren't always just going to make him go run until he drops."

Wall said their painting sessions help her decompress.



"I don't have a job. I don't do any school clubs. I spend all of my time here with him. So it just gives us something to do out of the everyday stretches and riding in circles," she said.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/meet-ella-and-her-horse-tuff-that-paints-1.7029376>

If you have ever witnessed full-blown Tourette's Syndrome, you know the exasperation of those afflicted. How welcome to have someone who doesn't know or care, even if a horse. I get a kick out of how Ella has to put plastic over the canvas to keep Tuff from chomping it up!



Ginger, buckskin beauty. Notice the lovely feet, slender but strong legs, the conformity, the bright eyes. Her only fault was being a bit spoiled. She was part of our "chore team" with her mother Kate, a character, an old Metis pony who was smarter than me. TJB

Old farm boy who grew up on the back of a horse, when I have come across "neurodiverse" students, usually on the Autism Spectrum, I have ended up approaching them like I do a skittish horse. Don't come on strong, keep proximity but a respectful, safe distance, and before long, you have a horse/ ASD kid sidling up beside you. Then make clear you mean no harm, and let them welcome you into their space and trust. If you have ever had the privilege of watching a horse whisperer, I think you will realize how differently "different" creatures "think" or rather, don't, in making sense of their world. TJB