



Photo by Anne Scott-(Far left: Katherine Crouse, Middle: Victoria Ware, Far right: Abby Scott)

Caring Connections: Therapeutic Riding Inspires TWU Students

Our featured alumni, in this issue of the ***TWU New Grad Connection Newsletter***, is Katherine Laura Crouse a recent TWU graduate with a General Studies degree with concentrations in English and Sociology in May of 2010. We contacted Katherine and asked her a few questions about her reasons for choosing TWU and her various experiences as a student.

With a big smile, Katherine told us: “I chose TWU because it had the feel of a close knit college while still offering online classes, a variety of degree programs, and endless activities to participate in.” Katherine pursued her degree online while at TWU and got to know her professors over blackboard, instead of face to face in a traditional classroom setting. She revealed that her “favorite thing about TWU is how

welcoming and supportive the professors are to online students. I was worried that I would feel left out due to my online courses, but all of my professors stayed in constant communication with me, offered to help with anything I needed and gave their online classes just as much attention as a face to face class would have gotten.”

Like most students entering college for the first time, Katherine was not sure about picking a particular degree and decided to major in General Studies because “it allowed me to complete a degree program while keeping my options open. I would advise anyone in the General Studies department to take the opportunity to take classes that truly interest them. A General Studies degree offers a lot of options once you reach graduation, and taking different

electives while still in school helps to narrow down what you really want to do.”

Later we caught up with Katherine at her workplace: Spirit Horse Therapeutic Riding Center, where she is a Certified Equine-Assisted Healthcare Instructor.

Katherine’s next step in her journey at TWU began when she took a job at Spirit Horse, a therapeutic equestrian center located in Corinth. Spirit Horse is a non-profit located in Corinth that uses interaction with horse to help people with disabilities reach their full potential. Katherine gives horseback riding lessons to approximately 25 children a week, all of whom have a disability, ranging from autism to a speech delay.

“Spirit Horse is the inspiration that has made me want to pursue a Master's in Family Sciences at TWU and then acquire my Special Education teaching degree. My passion is working with children with special needs”, Katherine said lighting up at the memory. “I had never been around people with disabilities before I came to work at Spirit Horse, though I had a background in horses.

Seeing these kids and their parents every day amazes me! The kids work so incredibly hard to achieve things that most people can do without even thinking, and their persistence and heart are incredible to me! The parents are amazing as well, as their children take a lot of time and effort and I can only imagine how devastating it must be to watch your child struggle to speak or



walk, or other things that come naturally to most people.

It was because of the children at Spirit Horse that Katherine decided to teach Apical Education, “so that I can be that person in the children's lives who does believe in them and who encourages them to do things that others think are impossible due to their disabilities”, Katherine told us, her eyes snapping with passion.

“Probably the most important thing that Spirit Horse has taught me is to never give up on these



children! I have learned that if I expect these kids to be able to do things like wear helmets, or be able to ride the horse, they are much more likely to do so then if I look at them and think, oh, this child has autism, or CP, or whatever, and he will never be able to walk or ride, etc.”

A specific example of how her work at Spirit Horse has changed a child’s outlook on life, is the story of Abby Scott, a ray of sunshine with fiery red hair that is as bright her smile, who regularly rides at Spirit Horse once a week with Katherine as her instructor.

Abby is three years old, and has a condition known as "Proximal Femoral Focal Deficiency" or "Congenital Femoral Deficiency" - which means she has a short thigh bone, a deformed hip and missing ligaments in her knee. Despite her condition, Abby is a thriving, happy little girl, who loves caring for and riding her white pony, Peter Pan and of



Abby: Cover girl of North Texas Child

course, loves her instructor Miss Katherine. With each lesson that Abby attends, her balance improves and her already fearless attitude goes forward with leaps and bounds.

This is the kind of positive impact that Katherine loves to give as a therapeutic riding instructor and is what fuels her passion to continue to pursue her Master's degree.



Katherine is not the only TWU student to be inspired by working with special needs children to pursue a collegiate degree:

Victoria Ware, a senior at TWU, also began her journey to become a physical



Abby, Victoria, and Katherine getting ready to ride.

therapist because of her time volunteering at Windridge Therapeutic Equestrian Center of East Texas, in Diana.

"It was because of the wonderful staff at Windridge and seeing the amazing changes in the children's lives each day from riding, that I was inspired to attend TWU and pursue a degree in kinesiology and obtain a doctorate's in physical therapy", she said happily. "I am nearly finished with my bachelor's degree and intend to go to graduate school for physical therapy soon after, it will be a long and challenging process, but getting the opportunity to bring joy to the lives of children with special needs and their parents, is what keeps me going." I hope to someday specialize in hippotherapy and work full time at an equestrian therapy center like Katherine, but for now, I am content to volunteer my time at various therapeutic equestrian centers while I go to school at TWU.", Victoria told us determinedly.





As the little group set off down the trails, it was plain to see in the infectious joy on Abby's face, that both Victoria's and Katherine's efforts will never be in vain.

For more information about the mission of Spirit Horse or if you would like to learn how to become a volunteer, please visit: <http://spirithorsetherapy.com/>

Katherine and Victoria not only share a love for TWU but also a passionate desire to impact the lives of children with special needs, and TWU is instrumental in helping them pursue their dreams. "TWU was my first choice in deciding which school to attend based on its stellar reputation for providing budding physical therapists with the best education possible. Having a vast knowledge about the world of physical therapy is definitely what I need in order to truly make a positive impact on a child's life," Victoria said, grinning. "I am thankful for my time at TWU and thankful for people like Katherine who are continuing to inspire others to choose a career of compassion and giving. I want to start each day at work smiling, and end each day smiling, knowing that I made a difference in someone else's life!", Victoria said, as she adjusted Abby's helmet.



When Katherine is not at work or studying, she likes to ride her Quarter horse, Missy.



Victoria, leading "Chlofeau" in a ride class at Windridge Therapeutic Equestrian