

Anything is Possible

Overcoming the Impossible



Taylor and Paula.
Photo by Wayne Spurgeon

By Dani Moritz

It could have been just another Saturday morning. It should have been a nice day at the barn for a weekend ride. But, what it became was a nightmare. The events that transpired that day turned into a heart-wrenching tale – but also an amazing story of courage and a valiant fight for survival. That day, a little girl and her mare proved that when there is faith, hope and love, anything is possible.

A couple of years ago, Canadian Taylor Spurgeon turned her 14.2 hand Quarter Horse/Standardbred mare, Paula, out in the pasture just as she always did. But, something happened that was far from the usual. A few minutes after turning her mare out, Taylor heard screams coming from the pasture. Within seconds, a chill crept down Taylor's spine, her heart rate spiked and she felt a sharp pain in her chest.

As she ran out to check on her beloved Paula, her eyes focused on a sight she'll never forget. Paula was trapped – caught beneath the wooden fence. And even after the barn owner dismantled the plank, the mare remained there – completely still and afraid.

When the emergency vet arrived, he confirmed Taylor's worst fears. He told Taylor and her dad that Paula wouldn't make it. He said those words nobody wants to hear: "It's best to put her down."

Taylor knew he was wrong. Paula was too strong, too loved and she was not ready to die. Taylor knew her best friend wasn't going anywhere and the look in Paula's eyes inspired Taylor to fight for the little mare's life. So Taylor brushed away her tears, stood tall and embarked on a journey that would change both Taylor and Paula's lives forever.

The Will to Survive

The vet diagnosed Paula with a severe spinal cord injury and told Taylor her mare was too dangerous to be around. She was going to try to get up

Continued on page 70

Sidelines Magazine recently partnered with Tucci, makers of beautiful handcrafted riding boots, to host the "Anything Is Possible" contest, in which the winner would receive a custom pair of Tucci boots. The entries ranged from touching to inspiring to amazing – but one entry, sent in by a 16-year-old girl in Canada named Taylor Spurgeon was all of that – and more! Taylor's remarkable story won the contest and we hope after you read about her journey, you will take the time to watch her YouTube video titled "1 Year Since the Tragic Accident of 11/19/2011 – We're Gonna Fly Away From Here." You can also watch the video on the Sidelines website. Word of warning on the video – you might sob like a baby! Please enjoy the story of this amazing young lady and her very lucky horse. And thank you to Tucci for sponsoring the contest – Taylor we hope you love your new Tucci boots, you are a very deserving winner! *Editor's Note: A second entry was equally inspiring, and the amazing people at Tucci selected both entries as winners. The second winner, who will also receive a pair of boots, will be featured in the next issue of Sidelines.*



and, in the process she would likely injure herself and anyone around her. He also warned Taylor that if Paula wasn't showing signs of improvement soon, she would have no choice but to let her go. He doubted she would ever stand again – let alone walk.

The frightened, still mare was moved back to the barn with an ATV and a slab of wood. Taylor never left her side. "I stayed with Paula the whole day and so did my friend and my dad," said Taylor. "We slept over at the barn while Paula was still in the stall and she couldn't stand up."

That night, at about 12:30 a.m., the little mare gathered all the strength she had and attempted to stand – but her legs shook violently and she fell back down shortly after. An hour later, she stood again – and this time she stayed up.

In that moment, she proved to Taylor she could do it. Paula had the will to survive.

A Long Struggle

Even after several weeks of improvement and daily hand walking, the vets still didn't foresee a positive outcome. They told Taylor her horse too unstable, too dangerous. She was hopeless.

"She was unstable, but she wasn't dangerous," countered Taylor. "You'd have to watch out walking her around, but she had no signs of being in pain. She really just needed someone to take the time to recover her."

And Taylor did just that. She gave her best friend the gift of time and patience. She even gave up horseback riding to spend more time rehabilitating Paula. Together, they graduated from hand walking indoors, to lunging and even being turned out outside. Little by little, Paula was gaining her strength back. Soon, she was galloping around the fields, enjoying the life everyone said she couldn't have.

Still, Paula was not 100 percent healed. "She would fall down a bit but I still just thought she needed to get more muscle and she would get over it," Taylor said. "Everyone said she would be in a stall for the rest of her life, because she was so unstable."

And yet, Paula was now walking, trotting and cantering. She had already beat the odds. Hopeless was not the adjective to describe her.

Taylor also enlisted the help of a chiropractor – who lifted her spirits and worked miracles on Paula. One day she told Taylor something Taylor never expected to hear. She said, "I think this horse will be able to be ridden. You just have to work at it to get to that point."

It's hard for Taylor to explain just how happy that made her. This was the same horse that everyone told her she needed to put down – that would never walk again, let alone be ridden. "I was just happy that my horse was still alive," she said.

Achieving the Impossible

Six months after the accident, Taylor did the impossible. She sat on Paula for the very first time.

As she slipped her right leg into the stirrup and Paula turned her head to see her best friend sitting there, tears rushed down Taylor's cheeks and she collapsed onto Paula's neck, hugging her tightly.

Slowly, Taylor began riding Paula more and more – building strength, balance and stamina. Taylor admits Paula was a bit unstable and she was crazy to keep going, but she did anyway. "I truly believed the more I rode, the stronger she would get," Taylor said.

However, even she did not realize how far she and Paula would go. "From that point on, I would just slowly sit on her some days and just walk her around," she said. I didn't think it would become a habit because I had given up riding. It wasn't important. What was important was Paula."



Taylor and Paula are now jumping again – proving anything is possible!

Photo courtesy of Taylor Spurgeon

Today, Taylor and Paula are not just walking, trotting or cantering. They are back jumping, galloping in the field and doing everything everyone said they would never do.

"If you really want something, you have to have determination to move forward and not give up," she said. "Paula's accident taught me that you have to keep trying no matter how hard it is."

In the end, the young girl with an incredible spirit and the little mare with a brave heart defied the odds. Despite everyone saying they wouldn't, they did. With dedication, courage and strength, together they learned that with a little faith and a lot of love anything is possible.

Taylor would like to thank her parents for their support. She would especially like to thank her dad for being such a huge part of Paula's recovery and believing in Paula the entire time.

About the writer: Dani Moritz is a graduate of William Woods University with majors in Equine General Studies and Communications and is currently pursuing a Masters In Strategic Leadership at Stephens College. She is assistant editor and distribution manager for Sidelines Magazine and the proud owner of a beautiful Paint/Arabian mare named September. She is also the 2012 American Horse Publications Student Award winner.



Taylor and Paula sharing a moment of peace.

Photo by Wayne Spurgeon