

# Breast Cancer Survivor Gives Back

By Alissa Hof

Quarter Horse advocate and equine veterinary technician Kerri Burke had just purchased private health insurance when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in October 2013. Her insurance company initially denied her financial support for treatments, claiming the cancer was a pre-existing condition. As Kerri's medical bills began piling up, she increasingly felt that financially cancer would be the end for her.

Kerri has been a lifelong horsewoman. At age 7 she began participating in as many aspects of the sport as she could, including 4-H, cutting, Western pleasure, hunter under saddle, dressage and jumping. Kerri turned her love of horses into a career in 1999, when she

started working as a surgery technician at the Woodland Run Equine Veterinary Facility, where she stayed until fall 2013. She also opened a nonprofit organization called Re-ride Quarter Horse Adoption Program in 2010 to rehabilitate and rehome unwanted Quarter Horses. "I wanted to give back to the horses that gave so much," she says. Since the start of this program, Kerri has rehomed over 100 Quarter Horses in a variety of disciplines.

After being diagnosed with Stage II invasive ductal carcinoma and learning that her insurance company would not provide assistance, Kerri began looking for programs

within the horse industry that help equestrians in need. She found the Equestrian Aid Foundation. Six-time Olympic dressage rider Robert Dover helped found the nonprofit program, whose mission is to provide grant-based assistance to people from all riding disciplines, equine professions or horse backgrounds suffering from a catastrophic injury or illness. The foundation's goal is to empower its recipients to overcome adversity and continue to have horses in their lives both during and after their treatment. The organization has provided more than \$2.6 million in need-based grants, and 2016 marks its 20th anniversary aiding horsepeople.

Like clockwork, the Equestrian Aid Foundation sent Kerri money every month to assist with medical bills as well as day-to-day living. In addition, at Christmas the organization's board of directors sent Kerri cards that contained gift cards to all different kinds of stores. "It was a very heartfelt and warm thing to do that was totally unexpected and made such a big difference," Kerri says.

Still frustrated with her health insurance company, Kerri threatened a lawsuit and the company began to pay for her cancer treatments going forward. But she will be forever thankful for the Equestrian Aid Foundation for its help. After surviving breast cancer, Kerri decided to work full time at both Re-ride Quarter Horse Adoption and Hatfield Performance Horses, where she is in charge of horse rehabilitation.

She has adopted one of the horses from Re-ride Quarter Horse Adoption. This past June the pair competed at the AQHA Level 1 (Novice) Amateur Hunter Under Saddle Championships in Raleigh, North Carolina, where they placed sixth out of 114 entries. In addition, a few of the Quarter Horses that have been adopted from Kerri's program have gone to the All American Quarter Horse Congress and finished in the top 10 over fences.

Kerri also started the Riding Thru It Program at her facility to address the challenges faced by many cancer patients and their families. Through grooming, care and riding, the program uses horses to improve cancer patients' and survivors' health and overall quality of life in a non-clinical environment. The program does not require any previous experience with horses, as it is customized to each participant's comfort level and physical abilities.

Horses were Kerri's therapy during her battle with cancer and she wants others to experience just how healing horses can be. "The horses have so much to give and they're so good for the physical therapy and the emotional side of things," she says. Kerri advises cancer patients in the equine community not to give up and especially not to give up on riding. She urges, "Don't give up what you love to do. You shouldn't do that for anything." 🐾

For more information about the Equestrian Aid Foundation visit [www.equestrianaidfoundation.org](http://www.equestrianaidfoundation.org). For more on Re-ride Quarter Horse Adoption, go to [www.reridequarterhorseadoption.com](http://www.reridequarterhorseadoption.com).



Kerri and her rescued Quarter Horse, On In Five

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