

Haste and waste

It's been 20 years since I've been so careless. Sure, I've had an accident within that span of time, but I was never the one at fault.

I'd been rushing around — my usual weekend mode of operation — trying to get prepared for the upcoming week. The house was finally clean, and it was time to restock inventory.

So on Sunday morning at approximately 11:30 a.m., I packed my car for an errand run. I grabbed my canvas grocery bags, the family's weekly list of necessities and wants and a few items that didn't make the final cut and needed to return to the store.



COMMON GROUND

STEPHANIE JADRNICKEK

I turned the ignition, checked my mirrors and threw the car in reverse — but I didn't make it very far.

In my rear-view mirror, I could plainly see the usual obstacles:

my daughter's Honda Civic and my husband's truck. But what I didn't consider was that my daughter's friend had spent the night after prom and her tiny Chevy Spark was still parked in our driveway, inconspicuously hidden by the breadth of the truck.

So once I'd cleared the Civic and the truck, I habitually shifted my eyes to a side-view mirror and kept on cruising.

There's nothing quite like the sound of metal crushing metal to make your heart drop into your stomach. At the moment of impact, it occurred to me that we had an extra car in the driveway.

I jumped out of the car to assess the damage. The left end of my back bumper had scraped the Chevy's right front corner. Damage to my vehicle was minimal. A bit of paint had been scraped off the bumper — no big deal. But the other car didn't look so good. The small white Spark now wore several bright red stripes.

Realizing I had added another huge task to my plate, I did what any reasonable person would do — I sobbed. After the initial emotional response, I sucked it up and got to work fixing what I had broken. First, I notified the parents. They were unbelievably understanding, and I assured them that our insurance company would handle everything and apologized profusely.

On the bright side, both cars could be driven and no one was hurt. In my experience, it's much easier to fix cars than people. So on the car accident spectrum, this incident ranked fairly low.

The insurance companies have already sorted out the affair — it didn't take my provider long to fess up to liability considering no one was driving the other car. And appraisals are already in motion for repairs.

After I'd handled the phone calls, I went on with my day to gather food for the family. However, I proceeded at a much slower pace.

Merging onto Interstate 85, I used every bit of care and caution I could summon, feeling grateful my hasty pace had been slowed before I even left the driveway.

STEPHANIE JADRNICKEK is an award-winning columnist and feature writer. She may be reached at stephanie@upstatetoday.com.

Raising hope through horses



Volunteer Bryan Hawkins, left, trainer Jessica Fry and volunteer Michael Stevenson guide Dylan Holcombe around the arena on Scout.

REX BROWN | THE JOURNAL

BY **STEPHANIE JADRNICKEK**
THE JOURNAL

IF YOU GO ...

What: Hope Through Horses
When: May 6; 6-10 p.m.
Where: Brews on the Alley
Cost: Free admission
For more information, call (864) 991-9163 or visit wildheartsequinetherapy.org

SENECA — Dylan Holcombe had never sat on a horse before. But when the 4-year-old climbed into the saddle at Wild Hearts Equine Therapy Center, it was if he'd been riding all his life.

Dylan has nonverbal autism — he understands speech, but can't verbally express himself.

"He can direct you to what he wants, but he can't verbally say what he wants," Dylan's mother, Sara Holcombe, said. "He babbles like a little child babbles before they start talking, but it isn't clear. This can change, though, and his babbling is a good sign. He's talking, just not to the point where we can understand him."

Dylan had attended speech therapy sessions every week since he was 2 years old, but he hated it. Sitting inside a room and following commands frustrated him. And when every session started ending in tears, Holcombe knew it was nonproductive.

That's when she heard about equine therapy. Her friend's daughter had been visiting Wild Hearts as a member of a Special Olympics equestrian team and was thriving. Inspired, Holcombe decided to try a different approach to Dylan's therapy.

"He took to it immediately. He wasn't scared of anything — he sat up on the horse like a little man,"

Holcombe said. "I try to stay open-minded because I want the best for Dylan. I want him to have every opportunity."

Dylan goes to Wild Hearts once a week and looks forward to every session. Wild Hearts works with people with physical disabilities, emotional trauma and behavioral or social issues, such as at-risk youth. The center also welcomes veterans with physical disabilities, PTSD and traumatic brain injuries.

As a professional horse trainer and riding instructor, Jessica Fry has had a lifelong hope of providing therapy through horses. She's pioneered a therapy approach that gives her clients the opportunity to train rescued horses.

Fry said Wild Hearts now has 14 clients. The proceeds from last year's Hope Through Horses benefit helped the center expand, adding another instructor, an arena and a pony named Cinnamon. The pony was donated, but the vet and farrier care require funds.

Wild Hearts will host its second annual Hope Through Horses benefit from 6-10 p.m. May 6 at Brews on the Alley. Admis-

sion is free, and the event will feature live music by Left Lane, a bluegrass band. Vangel's Bistro will serve dinner available for purchase, and numerous silent auction and raffle prizes from local businesses will benefit the center.

Every dollar raised is worth it when Fry sees her clients' progress. She said when Dylan first came to Wild Hearts he was very flaccid on the horse — he had no balance.

"He is almost able to sit up straight by himself on the horse now," she said. "And since he's nonverbal, any type of communication is impressive. When he wants to make the horse go now, he'll grunt or make a movement. It's awesome to watch."

Holcombe said the primary reason for bringing Dylan to Wild Hearts was to help him develop his speech. And his instructor, Karen Buccino, told Holcombe that Dylan has told the horse to "go," which makes Holcombe proud.

She also brought Dylan to the center to build his core strength — he sometimes has a hard time climbing stairs. And Tuesday, Buccino fastened a large

belt around Dylan's waist to help him support himself on horseback.

Besides his improvements in speech, core strength and learning the value of responsibility, Dylan has also found refuge in the peaceful tranquility at Wild Hearts.

"I think it's calming for him. Last week I got pictures of him rubbing the horse's chest," Holcombe said. "Just being out here where it's so beautiful. And the way they work with Dylan, they'll ride and then they'll let him go chase chickens and then they'll come back and ride a little bit more — they just go with the flow."

Holcombe recommends this type of therapy for many people, not only those on the spectrum.

"It'd be great for somebody who has PTSD or depression," she said. "It's great therapy to be out here on the farm. It doesn't feel like therapy — it's fun and relaxing."

Whether it's a child with autism, ADHD or limited mobility, or a combat veteran with PTSD, Fry said each person benefits from their connection with a horse.

"Horses do this amazing thing for people — they give immediate feedback," Fry said. "You have to be completely in the moment when you're with a horse."

For more information, call (864) 991-9163 or visit wildheartsequinetherapy.org.

stephanie@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6686



PLEASE REMEMBER TO THANK THESE PARTNERS

