

YODER SAYS...

Let me introduce myself: I am a Percheron cross draft pony from the green fields of Ohio. I was named Yoder by the team at Hold Your Horses because when they came to get me they enjoyed breakfast in a restaurant called Mrs. Yoder's. These people here like their food a lot. We have that in common.

I never met Yosi, who used to write this column. I get to live in his stall, though, and I can feel that he was a good soul.

I come from a background of farm work. Arriving at Hold Your Horses opened my eyes to—well—everything. I mostly had blinders on when I worked in Ohio, so suddenly there is just a lot more to see. I got used to this big dirt room they call an arena. I mean, for the cats it's just a giant litterbox but for the rest of us we get pretty busy in here. When I first arrived the staff long-lined me, lead me around, and rode on my back. I stepped over poles and then marched outdoors to climb up and down hills. Soon I started feeling better and moving better. They use these words like straightness, symmetry, suppleness, rhythm and self-carriage. (I pulled a carriage once, but self-carriage?) They said "more impulsion," work on "transitions," and "help him flex at the pole." That last one is funny I think. But the words were followed with actions that started to make sense in my body.

Therapy horse is my job title. I help with occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech-language pathology, and psychotherapy sessions. Hippotherapy is a funny word. For me it's standing quietly at the mounting block so little unsteady people can climb aboard or be lifted onto my back. Then I start moving in all the ways they taught me (and a bit of my own of course because it's fun). Some of the little people on my back need more help than others to stay upright. Some get distracted or excited. I move faster or slower. I change directions. I can feel it helping.

Connecting is also part of my job. I meet people with big sad hearts or angry faces or empty looking eyes. They come and brush me or lead me or just watch me. I try to connect with them. There is always familiar staff around to reassure me that everything is okay so I don't try too hard. I think these people need to feel the earth on their feet and the wind on their faces and my mane in their fingers.

Professionals have a lot of words to describe all of this. Professionals know the words and use them to make things clear for doctors and families and insurance companies...and lawyers. Words are important on paper so people get paid money for food (mine and theirs!). I know spoken words can keep people safe too. And safety, well, that word is pretty important.

For me it's not the words though. It's the action. People can say and write all the big words they want but I can feel when the actions match the words and when they don't. I like this new job. I still have a lot to learn and that is okay.

~ Thanks for reading. I will try to write more words soon. Love, Yoder ◀



YODER

THE THERAPY PONY, FEATURED COLUMNIST

You can email me through
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(Please write Yoder Says in the subject line)

