



## **Such an Incredible Sound** by Patty Kitza

My daughter was born on February 8, 1985. She was born two months prematurely and had an intercranial bleed shortly after birth. Her original prognosis was disheartening but I knew with love she would thrive. She had been seen by a pediatric neurologist when she was about three months old and shortly after was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Her deficits were to include deafness, blindness, no fine motor skills and minimal gross motor function. They also added that the area of her brain which incurred the bleed effected speech. The likeliness of her speaking should not be a reality.

With lots of love and encouragement, Cassie took her first steps on Christmas Day in 1988, shortly before her fourth birthday. What a Christmas present to receive! I couldn't have asked for anything more. As the years have passed, Cassie has developed quite a personality. She's very outgoing, helpful and could melt your heart with her smile. Her gross and fine motor skills have developed far more than the original estimation. Still she hadn't been verbal.

When Cassie was about five years old, I heard about TREC. Imagine horseback riding for special needs people who would not otherwise experience the freedom of sitting on such an animal. I was told that riding could provide better muscle strength and coordination for the rider and build a more confident person. I almost gave up after being on a waiting list for several years. Then I received a call that there was an opening and class would begin in a week!

Besides Cassie's love of horses, she has blossomed into an even more confident young woman. Since starting her lessons her movements have become less rigid. Her muscles are less static including the muscles in her face. One night, after getting Cassie settled for the night, I went into the living room to watch television. While watching the news, I heard a faint voice say "Ma!" I thought...well since it's just Cass and I home, and she's not verbal maybe it was a cat crying outside. A few moments later I heard the voice again, this time a little louder. Could it be my daughter? She is 17 years old and never really spoke although she has been vocal! I cautiously went into her bedroom to see if everything was all right, and also satisfy my curiosity, was Cassie calling me?

When I entered her room, Cassie was sitting cross-legged on her bed with a big smile on her face. I asked her if she called me. Her response was a nod of the head -yes. Then I asked her if she needed anything and her response was a nod of the head - no. My last question was did you call me? She said "yeah". I hugged her so hard and I cried. My daughter was finally speaking! This was a moment I would treasure forever. Now her enunciation is not perfect and there is some slurring, but she has been speaking more. She

has named the horses she has ridden. First there was PJ whom she had an incredible bond, then Buzz her personal favorite. It's such an incredible sound. Imagine your children speaking. You take that for granted. Most of Cassie's achievements, small or large, have had an awesome impact on me. Remembering the doctor's diagnosis, I firmly believe that with love and encouragement she has beaten some of the odds. With the gentle stride of the horses, their strong muscles helping my daughter's spastic muscles, my daughter has shown an increase in communication.

I owe a lot of Cassie's achievements to TREC. The volunteers are great and the horses are the best "physical therapists" I have met. Thank you TREC!