

American Girl®

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The **All-Animal** Issue!

Grrreat **Moneymakers**

Amelia's Pet Project

Free Paper Dogs!



Minky

Gentle Friends



Buffy

Read on to see how two special animals help humans with a gentle touch, a cold nose, and a warm heart.

Joyriding

When Emily and Minky first met, Emily's muscles were so tense she had a hard time giving her new horse friend a pat on the nose. Emily Shanahan, 11, has cerebral palsy, a disability that makes it hard for her to control her muscles. She gets around using a wheelchair. But this Ohio girl has always loved horses. "Just being in the stable petting a horse is very soothing," she says. During that first visit, Emily cuddled with her new horse for 45 minutes straight. The two have been buddies ever since.

Emily needs help to ride Minky—she does something called "bridge riding." One person leads Minky while others walk on each side of the horse and Emily rides. Riding is a form of

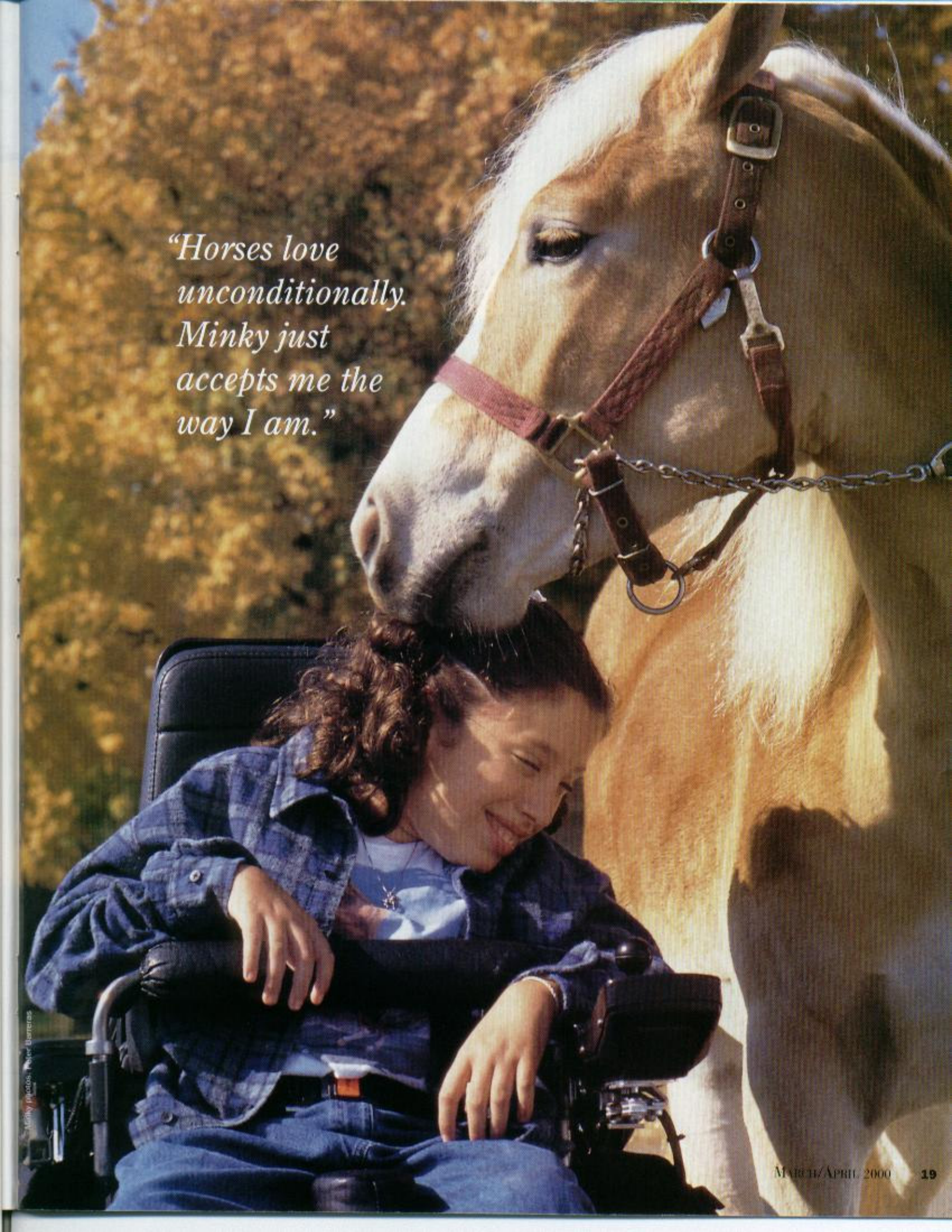


Emily practices bridge riding.

physical therapy for Emily. "It's a good stretch for my tight muscles," she explains. When Emily's on horseback, her hips and back do many of the same things they would do if she were walking. Horse therapy sessions always leave Emily very relaxed and happy. Even better, riding is just plain fun.

"When I'm riding," Emily says, "it doesn't even seem like therapy!"

Emily loves to be on horseback. She enjoys using something other than her wheelchair to get around. In the saddle, Emily sits at the same level as all other riders. She's not down in her chair while everyone else is standing. In exchange for friendship, care, and a pat on the nose, Minky gives Emily a sense of freedom she can't find anywhere else.

A young girl with curly brown hair, wearing a blue plaid shirt and jeans, is seated in a wheelchair. She is smiling and looking towards a light-colored horse with a white blaze on its face. The horse is leaning its head down to kiss her on the cheek. The horse is wearing a brown leather halter with a metal chain. The background consists of out-of-focus trees with yellow and orange autumn leaves. The scene is captured in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

*"Horses love
unconditionally.
Minky just
accepts me the
way I am."*