Teen thrilled to be back in the saddle

Brenda Harris has an affinity with her horse, Squirt. The young stallion, abnormally small at birth, defeated his odds of survival. "He and I make a good pair—we both proved people wrong," said Brenda.

In May, the 18-year-old from Fostoria, Kan.,

came close to losing her life. Brenda had inherited a condition known as familial adenomatous polyposis, causing polyps to form in her large intestine and colon. Surgery was performed at Stormont Vail Healthcare in Topeka to remove the polyps, but Brenda's body developed a sepsis infection and her organs began shutting down. The infection attacked both her legs, which had to be amputated from the knee down to save her life.

As Brenda emerged from her medically-induced coma,

the horse lover and former high school athlete learned of the loss of her limbs. "It was a hard blow," admitted Brenda. The breathing tube was barely out of her mouth when Brenda asked the doctor, "Will I be able to ride again?" Together with her family, Brenda chose Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital to help her regain independence.

When Brenda admitted on Oct. 13, the left side of her body was weak from nerve and muscle damage caused by the sepsis, and she relied on a cather. Brenda made goals to wean off the catheter, relearn to walk and return to horseback riding. Within three

weeks, the determined teen tackled the first goal and became catheter free. "It seemed more of a struggle to get control of my bladder than trying to walk," shared Brenda.

Outfitted with her new prosthetics, Brenda began an intense schedule of physical and occupational

therapy. Slowly, she adapted to a new style of walking and dreamed of riding. Recreational Therapist Linda Ohnoutka, collaborated with Windsong Equitherapy, a local non-profit organization dedicated to providing high quality therapeutic riding activities. The organization helped assess what resources or adjustments Brenda might need to resume riding. Her therapists scheduled an outing to Windsong for the young horsewoman. The day Brenda was back in the saddle is one she'll never forget. "Honestly,

it felt better to be up on a horse again than it did to walk!" exclaimed Brenda.

By Nov. 17, Brenda rejoined her family back in Kansas She hopes to pursue a degree in equine therapy to share her love of horses with people with special needs. "I just want them to experience the freedom of riding," said Brenda. "And I'll tell them how I started over and how it felt getting back on that horse again."



Brenda Harris listens to instructions from a Windsong Equitherapy staff member (right) as Madonna therapists Linda Ohnoutka (left) and Heidi Beardslee look on.

