

## Sarah & Cole's Story

Sarah and Cole were born 3 ½ months early, together weighing less than 3 lbs. Cole spent 4 ½ months in the hospital, and Sarah 9 ½ months. Various therapists became involved with the kids soon after each came home to assist with challenges related to their prematurity and developmental delays.

When Sarah and Cole were two, one of the therapists told me about Freedom Farm and they had their first lesson before they were three. At the time, Sarah had a hyper-sensitive nervous system which left her hesitant to touch anything unfamiliar and she simply could not tolerate some things. At her first lesson at the Farm, Sarah would only touch the horse with the very tip of one finger, but she did get on the horse and ride. Cole was completely non-verbal when he began riding (until the age of five) and he became frustrated easily with being unable to communicate his thoughts. In the beginning, the goals for their riding experience were to gain strength and balance, as well as work on sensory issues.



Over time, the lessons became so much more. Susie incorporated horse skills into the lessons, as well as cognitive skills, like following directions, letter identification (later on, reading) and turn-taking. But the Farm is so much more... It is Susie and her unconditional love, knowledge and acceptance. It is the staff who do all the behind the scenes magic. It is the volunteers who take time out of their lives to guide, protect, and cheer on my children. And, of course, the animals...there are cats, a dog,

and goats, all of which receive attention when we are at the Farm. Lastly, the horses... the beautiful, amazing, Hooved Angels. The horses have a way of making my children calmer, more focused, and happy.

Sarah and Cole just celebrated their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday and continue to ride at Freedom Farm. Sarah will now pet her horse with her palm and wrap her arm around her horse in a big hug. Cole not only gives his horse verbal instructions, but he carries on conversations with others at the Farm.



They both have received various diagnoses over the years, but at the Farm a rider is not defined by their diagnosis. Sarah and Cole have not only gained riding skills, but they have overcome challenges and they have gained freedom. Freedom from fear, and freedom from silence. They are learning, working hard, yet also experiencing love, friendship and pure joy, and really, isn't that something that everyone wants out of life.

By Sarah & Cole's mom, Kathy