

THE PLAID HORSE MAGAZINE

# Equitation With Tourette's: A Young Rider's Story



**BY BLOG EDITOR LAUREN MAULDIN**

Horse lovers come in all shapes, sizes and personalities to boot, but there's one thing every equestrian will agree on – riding is a *hard* sport. We have to juggle our time, precious (and ever depleting) funds, and that's before we even talk about how difficult it is to convince a 1200lb animal that keeping an even pace after the

jump *is actually* a pretty good idea after all. This can be a sport of struggle for riders with no handicaps, but what if you walked into the ring knowing that your body could involuntarily tic at any time during your course? For Georgia pony rider Rayna Lipsky, that's her every day.

Rayna, a nine-year-old that got into horses because she loves animals, started riding in horse summer camp when she was six. Born with limited hearing in her left ear, she learned to compensate in the show ring by watching what other riders did in flat classes. Her trainer repeats directions multiple times so Rayna can make sure she hears correctly, and recently she's been fitted for a hearing aid. Despite her difficulties hearing, Rayna is an A & B student and on the honor role in school.

In May of 2017, Rayna was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome. This Neurodevelopmental condition causes involuntary, repetitive movements and vocalizations called tics. While some tics are not very noticeable, others are severe and painful.

Even while managing her tics, Rayna always has a smile on her face while riding her pony, Pocket Aces aka "Annie." Even though her tics are present while hacking, most of them miraculously disappear when she starts to jump.

Rayna's hard work both learning to ride and managing her Tourette's have paid off in the show ring this year. She was GHJA year-end Reserve Champion for 11 & Under Equitation – a great feat considering how hard she has to control her tics while equitating. But that wasn't the greatest award Rayna won this year. She was also honored with inaugural Cheryl & Co Sportmanship Award.

"Rayna is an 'all inclusive' child. Her support of riders is universal," Cheryl Sims said of the young rider. At shows, Rayna supports competitors of all ages whether it's helping a younger rider memorize their course or running to grab a crop for someone who needs one – even if they're not in her barn.

"She would bring the younger children into the office to help them retrieve their Championship ribbons and prizes, and would explain what they needed to do all the while congratulating them," Cheryl said. This kindness wasn't only extended to the friends that she rode with. Rayna might not even have known the rider until she saw them win their class, but quickly became their fan and supporter. That's the kind of sportsmanship and friendship we all need at shows, no matter how old we are.

Rayna's positive attitude and tenacity will continue to serve her well in life, and currently help her bound through any obstacles that her disabilities might put before her. "Most do not know of her Tourette's or her hearing issues, so they do not see her overcoming anything. They just see a happy non-judgmental friend who is always there to help with a smile on her face," Cheryl said. For me, that's exactly the kind of friend I like to have inside or out of the show ring – Tourette's and all.

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**About the Author:** Lauren holds an MFA in creative nonfiction from the University of California Riverside, and is a lifelong rider and writer. Beyond equestrian journalism, she explores body positivity, mental health and addiction through personal narrative. She enjoys showing on the local hunter/jumper circuit in Austin, Texas.