

Therapy horses visit with Malibu tots



Mini Therapy Horse's Liberty Belle, held by (left to right) Victoria Netanel visits with Miles, Marly and Lilia Carlson Sept. 20 at Malibu Library. Maile Mason/22nd Century Media

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Amidst playful pandemonium at Malibu Library's Preschool/Family Storytime on Tuesday, Sept. 20, children of all ages were delighted by a very special visit from Liberty Belle, a precious horse from Mini Therapy Horses.

Two-year-old Maisy Ryan was thrilled to see, touch and observe the wee little pony in front of her. When asked how she liked the tiny horse, Maisy smiled coyly and pointed, joyfully exclaiming "horsy!"

Maisy's delighted mom, Sarah Ryan, said, "I've grown up with horses so I am very excited to be here where they let the kids pet these special horses. They are so beautiful."

Maisy stood by her mom's side, entranced by the horse, her small, sweet face full of joy.

Little Liberty Belle, a miniature horse weighing in at only 140 pounds, delighted kids of all ages by simply being in their presence.

When Liberty Belle played the keyboard with her mouth, she delighted and surprised. The room went quiet, but just for a moment. The surprised little ones gasped and shouted. Tiny tots in diapers who were not old enough to form a sentence pointed and laughed.

“Kids get very excited when they see the horses,” said Victoria Netanel, owner of Mini Therapy Horses. “This small horse is magical to them. They see her and then they can read about the horse in their books. It’s an incredible experience for them.”

Curious toddlers ask the most adorable, precious questions.

“Can the horse jump on a trampoline?” a delighted little cherub queried.

“Can she stand on her front legs too?” another asked.

No, but clearly this little horse can love you, an adult responded.

At Malibu Library’s storytime, Liberty Belle sat patiently. Very patiently. She was amazingly good natured as the inquisitive toddlers happily pet her. She was gently pulled on and tugged on. She showed off her unicorn head dress and her beautifully adorned fur and lovely hoofs. She even got a dental examination from one curious customer.

It was hard to tell who was enjoying the experience more, the children or Liberty Belle.

“I love Liberty Belle. I want her! I want to feed her carrots and apples! I enjoyed reading the books about the horses, especially ‘Good Night Knight,’” said 7-year-old William Snyder.

The horses at Mini Therapy Horses bring a lot of love to many children and to adults as well. At the storytime, the children read books and did arts and crafts, occasionally looking over at Liberty Belle to make sure their four-legged friend was enjoying herself as much as they were.

Mothers and caretakers looked on happily as the children came back to Liberty Belle again and again to check her out, to pet her, to coo with her, and to hug her.

There is something so very reassuring about the bonding between man, including the littlest of us, and a horse. It is an inter-species connection of love, trust and delight.

Liberty Belle and the other miniature therapy horses at Mini Therapy Horses also do heavy lifting in Malibu and beyond.

“The horses at Mini Therapy Horses also volunteer to provide therapy and comfort for children who are being helped by the L.A. Sheriff’s Department when they have experienced trauma or have been removed from an abusive environment,” Netanel explained.

This is the mission and vision of Mini Therapy Horses.

Even at his tender age, Snyder seemed to fully understand the importance of the horses and what they can provide to humans.

“Having the little horses for therapy makes everyone feel better,” he said. “They don’t have to be so worried.”