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# The Horse Is Never Wrong



## Synopsis

Autism may have trouble speaking, but Asperger's won't shut up. Things aren't going well for fifteen-year-old Heather during her sophomore year of high school. Not only is she friendless, she has been recently diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) by the school psychologist. The only things Heather has to comfort her are her books and that's just not enough. After Heather begins to take riding lessons at a local stable, things begin to change. Riding horses forces Heather out of her comfort zone and teaches her about her hidden capabilities and strengths. Gradually, the label that she has been given seems less and less important. But can she continue to improve enough to become a really good rider, the kind of rider she wants to become who can communicate with her horse and teach it something meaningful? These are the types of questions people can't answer "she must ask the horse, because...THE HORSE IS NEVER WRONG.

## Book Information

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Family Issues > Special Needs

## Customer Reviews

Very well done novel - a YA novel that doesn't insult an adult's intelligence either. Clever and

well-written. The author's passion for horses and for "quirky" young people shines through, and any young person who has felt like they didn't quite fit into \*any\* kind of mold will identify with many of the characters. Pagones does a brilliant job of getting inside her heroine's head and introducing us to her life. Delightfully, she doesn't fall into the trap of making the book one of the "condition of the week" tropes that I remember from my middle school years - she has interesting, well-drawn three-dimensional characters. I would strongly recommend this book for kids 12 and up - there are a few physical scenes in the romance department (no spoilers!), and perhaps some mild language - but nothing that my eleven year old hasn't heard! Mature eleven year olds would be fine as well, I think. Really thorough on the equestrian aspects as well, so if you're a rider, you won't be disappointed either. I am looking forward to the sequel!

A charming story that is sure to entertain, and also to give young adults insight into their classmates, and teach them empathy. I read it to "preview" it for my son & see if he's mature enough for it (he's 9), and I couldn't put it down! The answer was yes - I think he can handle it, but others may want to wait another year or two, depending on their kids (it's fine for those who like other popular YA books). The novel subtly addressed bullying, "labelling," feeling disconnected in high school, friendship, being diagnosed with social or learning disorders, sexual identity (but in a very innocent way - not non-traditional "action") and self-worth. But it isn't about any of these, per se. Horse is just a great, highly readable story, and Pagones doesn't hit the reader over the head with trite insights, and she doesn't slip into the common pitfall of trying to resolve every issue. The result is the rare YA book that doesn't feel canned. Instead, there's plenty to chew on, and plenty to talk about with your kids (should you be so inclined).

The most endearing thing about this novel is that it seems to be about everyone I know and have known. Mary Pagones understands real people, real life and real horse people, bringing them to life in this gritty, compassionate and humorous story. This is the stuff of horse life...or just life. I look forward to more from this author.

This is a solid young adult novel about fifteen-year-old Heather, who's been diagnosed as being on the high functioning end of the autism spectrum. As the story opens, Heather is a little quirky and mostly asocial, but once she starts taking riding lessons, she begins to change in subtle ways, gaining confidence and self-acceptance and expanding her circle of friends, yet still remaining a unique charming girl. There's a lot of technical information here about riding, which horsey people

will enjoy, but what I liked most about the book was the realistic portrayal of teenage friendships. Heather has a bit of a romance, but unlike most YA books, she and the boy don't immediately turn into 35-year-olds embroiled in a soap opera plot. Instead, their relationship is a lot more nebulous; they fool around a little, they figure stuff out, and ultimately they take it all in stride. This is a great story for teens and even tweens, with the caveat that there's a bit of profanity throughout. It's mostly mild, except for a short section later in the book where it gets a little more PG-13 and includes some homophobic slurs during a bullying incident. I thought the language was completely appropriate to the story and characters (and also profanity doesn't really bother me), but readers who are sensitive to that for themselves or their kids might want to be aware of it.

Pagones starts her two-book (so far?) equestrian series with *The Horse is Never Wrong*, a totally non-conformist Young Adult horse story. (When I think about this book and how far we've come from *The Saddle Club* and *Thoroughbred*, I am just amazed and grateful for the gifts of independent publishing.) Narrator Heather isn't impressed with her Asberger's diagnosis -- a crutch her teachers seem to love pinning her social anxieties and occasional academic blunders upon, but which might not actually exist, since Asberger's has been folded into the Autism spectrum. All Heather knows is, everyone else is weird, and she is just doing her own thing. What's wrong with that? Heather discovers riding and riding is good for her... but it isn't a *Cinderella Goes To The Olympics* story. Heather as a character is beautifully written -- she narrates without self-pity, without (intentional) humor -- she's a just-the-facts-ma'am reporter. Her voice is unerringly true to herself. Not particularly flowery, even stilted at times, and always pretty sure something is going to go wrong. Here, Heather sums up her biggest challenge in life: dealing with herself. "I'm just going to have suck and up and deal with the me I have been given, just like I have learned not to complain about a horse's behavior. Change your behavior; it's not the horse's fault, I'm told." I got Heather. I totally understood Heather. I felt an almost alarming connection to Heather -- she took me back to ninth grade (which was not a place I particularly wanted to go, but... I did some good riding that year, and I met some cool people at the barn to make up for the people I didn't even remotely understand at my high school). All in all: *The Horse is Never Wrong* is creative, original book that challenges the traditional horse book in every way.

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