

Girl and Horse Reunited After Being Separated by Tennessee Wildfire

A four-year-old girl with autism has been reunited with her therapy Mini Horse after catastrophic fires in Tennessee.

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When disasters hit and residents are told to evacuate, horses and other large animals are often left behind due to lack of transportation or no options for a safe place to take them to. It's a heartbreaking scenario that one family in Sevier County, Tennessee, faced during the recent wildfires there.

Izzy Carroll is a four-year-old girl from Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Her family was forced to evacuate and left Heaven, Izzy's Miniature Horse, behind. Heaven is more than just a beloved family pet; the chestnut mare is a therapy animal for Izzy, who has a nonverbal form of autism, and the potential loss was heartbreaking.

When the family was able to return to their home and assess the damage, they saw devastating destruction, but heard a hopeful sound.

"We just heard this scream," said Alisa Carroll, Izzy's mother, in an interview with WBIR. "I could just see my whole family take off running that way. She was there."

Heaven had survived the fires, but not without sustaining some injuries. She had severe burns on her face and around her mouth and it was clear that she would need veterinary attention. But traffic in the area was still restricted and the Carroll's didn't have a way to transport her out of the mountains.

Here's where the power of social media comes in.

Alisa had seen a post on Facebook about Brian Minton, a man from the area who was offering to help animals in the aftermath of the fires. Despite the challenging roads, Minton was able to drive his truck and trailer to the Carroll's home to rescue Heaven. Her face was too burned for a halter, so she was left loose in the trailer, but safely made the journey down the mountain.

Heaven spent the first few days recovering at Douglas Lakeview Riding Stables and is continuing her recovery. Fortunately, the Mini Horse is going to be fine. A friend of the family created a Facebook group to provide updates on Heaven's condition and the family's recovery efforts. There is also a GoFundMe page to help the family as they begin to rebuild their lives after the fire that took almost everything.

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