

Joey is Autistic

This week I went to a UTEP Miners Women's basketball game. Everyone looked like they were having a great time. I was not. I wore headphones to block out the screaming but I could still hear it. As I looked around the gym I could see so many details that others do not. This causes my brain to work too hard. I try not to see all the people getting up and down, yelling, the bold colors, cheerleaders, band playing instruments, and huge screens lit up with words, numbers and more people. I hope no one talks to me, because then I'd be required to say something. I don't want to be here, I want to go home.

Sometimes I go to restaurants with my family and there are TV screens playing music or sports events, and a speaker playing music and people talking too loud around us. Why does it have to be so loud? Why do we have to wait so long for the food? Why do we have to wait so long for the bill? The food usually isn't what I prefer. I don't like to try new things. Can I be sure that salt and pepper shaker is clean? Did anyone drop this fork? I refuse to use public bathrooms, so we need to hurry. I don't want to be here, I want to go home.

School is tolerable, until last week when the whole class schedule changed for four days. This is not right. They changed my teachers, the order of the classes. I lost it. They said I went ballistic, whatever that is. My mom came in the next day and the Principal allowed me to stay on my regular schedule. Why do I have to lose it before they realize what I need? Why do they make me do repetitive math equations I already know how to do? Why do they make me go outside and hang out with kids on the playground? I'd rather be in the building on a computer. I don't need friends. I don't need their opinions or criticisms. I prefer to be alone. I don't want to be here, I want to go home.

There is a place I like to be, besides my room. Equine therapy is a program that teaches me to ride and control a horse. The steady, horse hoof rhythm relaxes me. The cool breeze blends with warm sunshine and heals me. I love to watch the wind play with his mane. The

horse is guided by a flick of my wrist on the reins. The smells of the saddle almost explode in my nose. I take deep breaths. The horse seems relaxed, too. We are one. No background noises, just the sound of his hoofs on the dirt. In this paddock, no expectations required, no one telling me what to do or say. No one saying I'm not normal. I want to be here, do I have to go home?

