

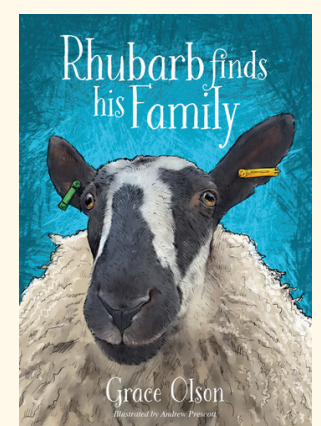
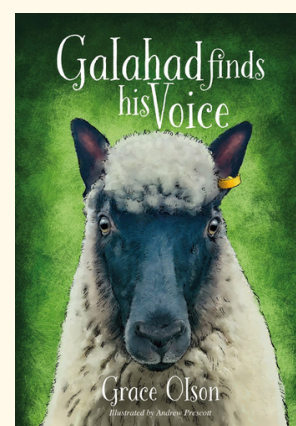
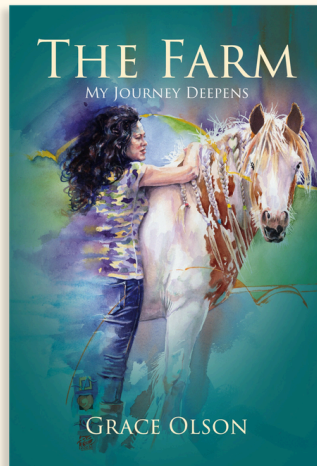
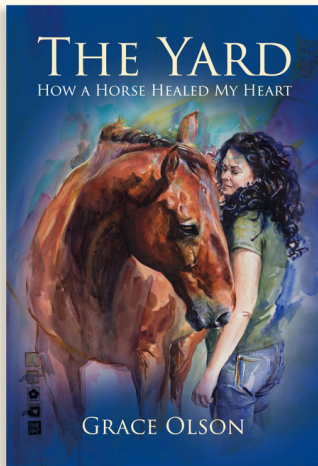
GRACE OLSON AUTHOR



"Helping others is the theme of my life. My goal is to set up a 'therapy farm' with the proceeds from my books"

Grace Olson is an author, life coach and animal lover based in Leeds, West Yorkshire. She is the writer of best-selling inspirational memoirs, "The Yard" and "The Farm" and four children's books to empower young minds. She has featured on Channel 5's "The Yorkshire Vet" with her wonderful therapy sheep.

www.graceolsonauthor.com



Your Horse, August 2026

GETTING LOST IN A GOOD story

Horse books sparked a lifelong love of horses for many of us, yet too often they've been left behind in childhood. **Grace Olson** explains why the National Year of Reading is the perfect excuse to rediscover the comfort, inspiration and escapism of equestrian books

ARE YOU SITTING comfortably? Then I shall begin... Once upon a time, when you were younger, you more than likely enjoyed reading books about young girls and boys having adventures with their ponies. For many of us, it will have been these books that planted a seed in our heart and grew into a forever love of all things equine. I know that I can, without doubt, blame the late, great Ruby Ferguson and her series of Jill books for the fact that I am now covered in mud, poo and horse hair on a daily basis — and I have a lot less money in my bank account. Thanks for that, Ruby!

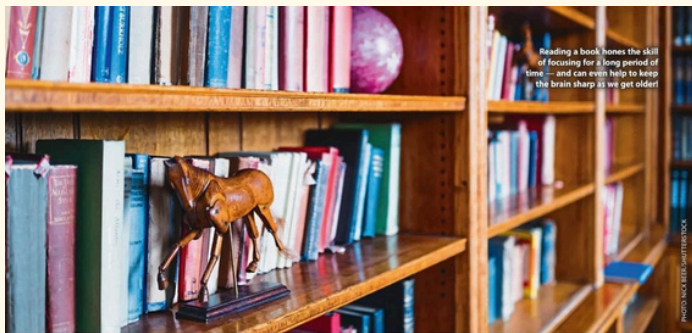
Then one day, we all grew up and most of us stopped reading so much. Why is that? I suppose adult life, with all of its dull responsibilities, will have been the first nail in the coffin for reading, then the advent of the 'magic' of the internet was the final death knell. This year combines two special things to lead us back to those happy days of reading pony stories. Firstly, it's the year of the fire horse in the Chinese calendar and secondly, it's the National Year of Reading. This is a government initiative to encourage the nation to get back into reading physical books because emerging data has revealed some worrying information about the damage caused by reading online.

The cost of scrolling

Our brains are being seriously compromised by scrolling on social media. Scrolling causes an addiction because one moment we are seeing something bland or depressing and then the next moment we see something happy which gives us a buzz. That encourages our brain to continue seeking the euphoria, wasting hours in the process.

A lot of people are also being lured into the expertly curated videos of 'perfect family lives' involving cute little ponies and other farm animals inside the home looking oh so sweet. The houses are immaculately clean, and it looks so lovely but don't be fooled — it's all a big set-up. There's no such thing as a perfect family. And let me tell you, I've had lambs in my house because of a dangerously cold spring. They poo and wee everywhere. There's nothing cute about it. It's hard work. But most people don't know that, and they suffer depression because they compare themselves to these creators who are earning a lot of money off the back of you watching their 'perfect family' videos.

Scrolling for prolonged periods of time through social media depletes the brain of its 'feel-good' hormones and neurotransmitters, which leads to anxiety, reduced motivation and reduced attention span. Even more worrying is that low levels of these 'feel-good' hormones and neurotransmitters are associated with serious physical and mental health conditions as well as disrupting sleep patterns and moods. So, what can we do to rescue ourselves from this damaging modern phenomenon? The answer is to pick up a physical book and immerse in the brain-boosting magic of reading (see box, right). E-books are not as bad as online reading, but they still encourage the brain to skim read.



7 REASONS WHY BOOKS ARE BETTER FOR THE BRAIN

Reading a physical book has many health benefits.

1 Firstly, they're a full sensory immersion. You've got the weight of the book and the texture of the pages.

2 Then there's the wonderfully soothing smell of the paper and ink — there's something so relaxing about the scent of a book.

3 Diving into a solid book takes your mind away from the outside world in a way that online reading can't do. You see, when you read online, you will still be bombarded by pop-up boxes trying to sell you utter rubbish; texts coming in (possibly from your teenage child asking for money to buy something they don't need); links to more irrelevant websites cleverly designed to make you think they're worth looking at and so on and so on. Blimey, it's exhausting to even think about it, isn't it?

4 They are so relaxing that they can help lower your blood pressure and reduce anxiety.

5 Books are also — depending on the subject — a wonderful source of inspiration which can help you transform your life.

6 Books are a calm place. They are fixed in space which is soothing to the tech-jangled mind. This fixed nature of the text triggers your brain to remember where the words on the pages actually are, which leads to an increase in your cognitive ability.

7 After a while of reading a book, you'll find that your attention is capable of focusing for longer periods, which enhances your memory and recall even more.

Yes — the humble book could help you to have a sharp mind well into your dotage!



16 YOUR HORSE, AUGUST 2026

WWW.YOURHORSE.CO.UK

WHY PONY BOOKS ARE SO IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Let's take a look at pony books and why they are so important for young readers. To begin with, they have a clever format. There's always a young person, usually a girl, who has to overcome various obstacles while being accompanied by a pony. This is demonstrating that girls can be heroes — an important thing for both girls and boys to realise — and that ponies are intrinsic to fun and adventures.

Pony books are wonderful to stimulate the imagination of young people, while simultaneously growing their ability to feel empathy. They also encourage a love of being outdoors and because

they invariably include descriptions of pony care, they instil a good work ethic. These kids usually have to get jobs to pay for their ponies, which helps young readers to understand the importance of financial independence.

Cressida Burton has written a wonderful series of contemporary pony books. Set in a boarding school on the east coast, Cressida's Ravensbay stories are cosy and comforting while still dealing with real issues for young equestrians. The great thing about these extremely well-written pony books is that they are a fun read for adults, too.



When pony books grow up

Adults who loved pony stories when they were younger, might be surprised to discover that there's such a thing as horse books for grown-ups. Because they are written from the heart, these books can be therapeutic.

For example, author Jenny Roman says her aim is to "create the nostalgic feel of yesteryear pony books but in a realistic, modern setting with adult hopes and dreams".

Our hopes and dreams need not elude us despite our age and this is what I set out to demonstrate to readers within the pages of my own horsey memoirs.

I remember reading *Your Horse* magazine in my twenties, wishing that I could afford to have a horse. Reading this magazine every month, kept my dream alive until fate brought me back into the world of equestrians in the most remarkable way.

It was lockdown that gave me the time to put pen to paper and write my first book, *The Yard - How A Horse Healed My Heart*. This book is about how horses healed my post-natal depression. Despite the gravity of the subject, *The Yard* is a transformative read, bursting with comedy and adventures on horseback within the glorious Yorkshire countryside. Most horsey people can recognise the types of experiences within the pages.

I remember feeling so nervous about publishing it, believing that not many people would be interested. Fortunately, I couldn't have been more wrong. On the day of publication, I was stunned to watch it sell out and reach the coveted number one position on Amazon.

Stories that inspire change

The Yard and its sequel, *The Farm*, are character-driven stories, full of realistic dialogue and eccentric people, relatable

issues and special horses. They are immersive and uplifting and many people have said that the books encouraged them to change their lives for the better.

These wonderful comments made me realise that reading books about being outside is healing because the brain creates all the sights, sounds and smells as if it is experiencing it and this leads to a desire to take action.

So, I'd like to encourage you to engage with the National Year of Reading. Spend less time on your mobile, visit a book shop and buy some physical books. I promise you, they will make you feel so much happier. 📖



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WWW.YOURHORSE.CO.UK

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Olson is the author of best-selling tragicomic memoirs, *The Yard* and *The Farm*, which are available from all UK bookshops and Amazon. She has also written a series of children's books and is a regular contributor on Channel 5's *The Yorkshire Vet* with her flock of therapy sheep. Her dream is to use the income from book sales to enable her to treat terminally ill people at no cost. Visit graceolsonauthor.com



My Weekly, July 2026

BEST-SELLING author!



Writing Into The Void

In a quiet, sunlit field, courage finally emerges...

My love of writing was reignited on a very extraordinary day. I looked at my horse, and she looked at me, and I just knew I had to share our story.

But would anybody be interested in reading it? I felt quite doubtful when suddenly a louder thought surprised me – why not? You don't know unless you try – and what have you got to lose?

I pondered on this as I groomed Poppy, my horse, for the umpteenth time. The sun was beaming down on my head, and the birds were fluttering in and out of the hedges. They didn't care that it was lockdown. They had no idea about Covid. They were enjoying the gloriously hot weather and getting on with their lives, but my life had come to an abrupt halt, and I needed to fill my

time, or I feared I would spiral into depression.

"I'm so lucky to have you and this wonderful field to escape to," I said to Poppy. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I buried my face into her warm, ginger neck. "You helped me find myself after post-natal depression and I really want to let the world know how special horses are."

After a while of pottering about doing not very much, but pretending that I was, I sat down on an upturned bucket and began to do what everybody did during lockdown – scrolling on Facebook. Suddenly, I stumbled upon a very jolly group dedicated to horse lovers. It lifted my spirits and made me wonder if I should set up my own page and write stories.

My doubtful side was quick to respond: Who would be interested in me? But then another thought pushed itself forward: Stop being so negative before you've even tried. Give it a go! Nothing ventured nothing gained.

I couldn't argue with that so after a few false starts I finally succeeded in setting up a blog page.

And then I realised I had to write – to nobody – into the void. I could feel my cheeks flushing red, despite being on my own. But suddenly there was that insistent voice again: Just do it, you've got nothing to lose.

I took a deep breath, wrote the beginning of my story, and then posted it. Feeling uncomfortable and expecting no response, I put my phone away and lay down in the warm, sweet grass to soak up the afternoon sun until eventually curiosity got the better of me.

A wave of disbelief washed over me. Who were all these people and how had they found my page? Another thought came forward – it didn't matter. What mattered was they had and there was a message waiting for me too.

Hi Grace, I'm an 80-year-old man and I want you to know how much joy your story has brought me. It was very funny. You remind me of a younger me. Keep writing!

Love, Alec.

In front of my eyes a few more messages appeared, all in a similar vein, from people who had enjoyed the story. I sobbed buckets. If only my mum could see this, I sighed as I thought about my beloved mum, ravaged by Alzheimer's. If she could see I'd got hundreds of followers in one afternoon she'd be so proud. Thinking about my mum and how

much she loved reading, spurred me on to go home and start writing more.

But what if nobody bothers to look again? Or what if they think this next bit is dull? These thoughts immobilised me until a surge of inner power told me, in no uncertain terms to get the heck on with it. So, I took a deep breath and posted my story and then quickly switched my phone off and distracted myself with a film.

I woke with a start several hours later, on the sofa, and wondered if I dared check my phone. My heart began thumping a rhythm as I gingerly opened Facebook and gathered myself for a huge disappointment. But what I saw was astonishing. I couldn't believe my eyes as I saw my follower count had grown to over a thousand.

Love it! I had similar experiences! Really looking forward to the next one. All the best, Alec.

I replied: Thanks so much, Alec. I really appreciate your encouragement! It means more than you know.

His reply made me smile: Happy to help!

The sun was still shining as I sat in the field a couple of weeks later. Poppy grazed nearby as I enjoyed the process of writing our story for our growing Facebook audience.

Have you considered writing a book? I think it would be great, Alec.

Me? Write a book? I wouldn't know where to start!

You've already started. And look at the thousands of followers you've gained. People are clearly enjoying your writing. Why don't you try?

Good question. Why don't I try? The answer made me feel very uneasy: I'll get rejected. But that determined little voice spoke firmly: Just write the book and then worry about that later.

The endless blue sky seemed to last forever, and the days slipped past silently as I wrote all the adventures I wished my lovely mum could read. I phoned her and told her about it, but she didn't understand. Grieving for her while she was still alive seemed to power me on through all my doubts and of course, I had the wonderful support of my new Facebook friends.

Me and Rosemary look forward to your stories so much. You're really brightening our days! I'm so glad you're writing a book.

Lots of love, Pam.

Alec continued to cheer me on: Have you got that book written yet? I hope I'll still be around to read it. I'm not getting any younger you know!

Finally, the first draft was ready and several days of stress and anxiety gobbled me up while I waited for the phone-call from the editor I'd found online. "Well, it's hilariously funny but where are you in all of this? You need to write more about why horses mean so much to you."

My hopes felt dashed. In all the effort of writing something to uplift people, I'd avoided the gritty truth about myself and my healing journey because I didn't want to be depressing.

"Don't give up," she reassured me. "It's got the comedy, now it just needs some depth. Go and be brave!"

Can I be brave? Can I really say all the things I went through? It felt so daunting, but my insistent mind forced me to sit down and rewrite the book. Fortunately, it was still golden sunshine so sitting outside in the paddock watching the horses helped me open up and write the truth about how a horse healed my heart.

When I finally finished, and with my heart in my mouth, I clicked "send" and waited to hear back from my editor. Time seemed to stand still as I anxiously waited for her reply.

"Perfect. Now it's ready to go to agents," she said.

I whooped with joy as I posted on Facebook that my book was on the way. It felt like such a milestone and with tremendous excitement I waited for all the replies to come back from prospective agents.

Sorry it's not what we're looking for.

We don't think it's for us.

No thanks.

Each rejection was like a punch in the stomach. I hung my head in shame as I admitted my failure on my Facebook page.

They're silly sods, aren't they? Why don't you self-publish? Please don't give up! Love Pam and Rosemary.

exclusive short story

I laughed, picked myself up and searched for a company who could help me self-publish.

Those strangely busy days during isolation finally came to an end as lockdown had finished and my book launch loomed. I stood frozen with fear next to my car until the sensible part of my brain almost shouted at me: Too late now, you've got to go! So, with a heavy sense of dread, I got in my car and headed to the venue – the local horse rescue centre.

Oh, blimey what an effort they've gone to, I thought, panicking. I felt hot and nauseous at the sight of all the stalls they'd set up with tea and cakes and balloons.

"Ooh, are you the author? I know I'm early, but could I buy a book?" "I'd like one too please."

"Can I have four copies?"

I was completely stunned. A queue began to form as I shakily set up my table with arms that had turned to jelly.

"We'll need to open up an emergency car park to manage this crowd! Can we use that field?" one of the staff shouted over to the manager.

Somebody brought me a chair, and I sat down to sign book after book after book, non-stop for hours for people who I'd never met but had enjoyed my stories on Facebook. It was like a dream.

I still smile when I look back on the whole adventure. All my self-doubts, the huge fear of failure. All the painful rejections. Thank goodness I didn't give up.

By Grace Olson



Grace's heartwarming memoir *The Yard: How A Horse Healed My Heart* is out now. Brown Dog Books, PB, £12.99.



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Intelligent Horsemanship, May 26

EQUINE BOOK EXTRACT
Special Feature

THE YARD

How a Horse Healed My Heart
by Grace Olson

“The fear disappeared and I felt a lot of love instead.”

During lockdown, Grace began sharing short stories on Facebook, drawing on her own life and the lessons learned through working with animals.

Grace Olson is an author, therapist and passionate about the healing power of animals. A mum of two, Grace may already be familiar to some readers through her appearances on Channel 5's *The Yorkshire Vet*, where her therapy sheep (and their calm, grounding presence) quickly became viewer favourites. Grace's writing is rooted in lived experience. Having experienced mental health struggles and depression from a young age, including post-natal depression in adulthood, it was horses who helped her find her way back to herself. Their quiet honesty, lack of judgement and ability to meet humans exactly where they are became the foundation for both her healing and her work.

During lockdown, Grace began sharing short stories on Facebook, drawing on her own life and the lessons learned through working with animals. Her popularity grew, and followers asked for a book; her debut, *The Yard – How a Horse Healed My Heart*, went on to become a number one Amazon best-seller. Warm, honest and often gently humorous, the book explores difficult emotional territory while remaining reassuringly easy to read. Now an iLM Level 5 coach, Grace is on a mission to help people feel safe enough to talk about their emotions and struggles. Her goal is to use the income from her books to help seriously ill people find inner peace with her horses and sheep, for free. We just felt someone may need to read this today.

“Now have a look at the herd and without giving it too much thought, choose three horses that you like and one that you don't.” I looked at the herd and instantly chose three that I liked. Each one reminded me of the ponies I had loved over the course of my life. Marjorie quietly collected them and led them over.

“Now the one you don't like?”

One horse stood out immediately to me. He was a large, bay sports horse that made me feel uneasy. Marjorie let the three ponies run loose into her indoor arena and then she put a headcollar on the sports horse whose name was Andy. As they walked past me, Andy stopped and put his nose on my heart very gently. “He's telling you that you don't need to be afraid,” said Julie and with that I promptly dissolved into tears.

Julie led me into the indoor arena handed me a tissue.

“Talk to me about your fears,” she said kindly, as the big horse came over and put his nose on me again.

“I wouldn't know where to start,” I sniffled. Julie remained quiet allowing me time to process my reaction and thoughts. I took a deep breath.

“I don't really know what I'm afraid of. I just feel fear. Fear of Poppy spooking and galloping and me falling off from a great height and ending up paralysed. I've never been afraid of falling off before. I don't know why I am now.”

“Come and stand next to Andy's side and put your hands on him,” said Julie, very calmly. “Now close your eyes and just feel his energy.”

I stood with my hands on Andy's warm, powerful shoulder, feeling his large muscles. His skin was soft as satin, just like Poppy's and he was very tall, just like Poppy. He stood so still and so calmly, breathing very rhythmically. I began to breathe in time with him. My fear began to melt away and was replaced by a sensation of love. Andy curved his neck around and put his large nose on my head, very gently. More tears poured out and Julie and Marjorie stood in perfect silence, holding the space.

After a while, I felt calm and no longer afraid. I could see that there was no malice in Andy and no malice in Poppy. They were

just horses but also, more than just horses. They were alive and had their own emotions and they needed to give and receive love just like I did. Time seemed to stop moving while I stood with my hands on the big horse, sharing his space as if we were one unit. Eventually it felt like whatever it was that happened had completed so I took a step back and looked around. Marjorie and Julie were quietly waiting in a very still and un-hurried manner.

“So, tell me what just happened for you,” said Julie.

Grace is on a mission to help people feel safe enough to talk about their emotions and struggles.

“Well at first I felt terrified of Andy because he reminds me of Poppy but then when I put my hands on him and allowed my mind to calm down, the feelings changed,” I replied. “The fear disappeared and I felt a lot of love instead and I knew that everything was ok.”

Julie and Marjorie smiled.

“You know, horses are just horses and they only run fast if they're scared. And to be honest, they would prefer not to waste their energy if they don't need to. You can help Poppy to be brave by tapping into the confidence within yourself,” said Julie as she led me in to the centre of the arena where the three ponies were wandering around.

Such simple, yet profound words.

“Can you tell me an example of something that you've done that involved

you being confident?” asked Julie.

“Starting my own business. I had to be confident when I first became a massage therapist. So many people thought I was too silly to be successful at anything and I decided I would show them they were wrong.”

“Excellent,” smiled Julie. “Can you tell me more about what you did?”

“Well, I began by getting a Yellow Pages and I just rang round loads of companies to see if they wanted any on-site massage for their staff. Loads of people were really rude to me but I didn't let it get me down. It just made me more determined to succeed. So I continued and ended up landing a few contracts with Nursing Homes and that's where I really learned how to be good at what I do.”

“Excellent,” nodded Julie. “Just excellent. You must have owned confidence to get those contracts?”

“Yes! I didn't think about it at the time but looking back I am amazed at my tenacity.”

“You can tap into that ability to be confident when you are riding because it's an intrinsic part of who you are. Visualise yourself as that calm, powerful and happy person. That will give Poppy confidence in you as her guide and partner when you are with her. It will make her more inclined to listen to you instead of running away if anything scary happens.”

Julie gave me a few moments to digest what she had said. I could feel it sinking into my mind as if doors were opening in my subconscious. I remembered my childhood riding lessons in which I only ever felt happiness and excitement – even if I did fall off. The ponies generally did what I asked them because I never doubted that they wouldn't.

Marjorie led Andy back to his field and then came to join us. We all sat down and observed the three ponies interacting together quietly for about half an hour to allow my mind to process, digest what I'd learned and calm down. It was very relaxing and watch...

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE? Grace's books and information about her animals can be found on her website www.graceolsonauthor.com. You can also email her at contact@graceolsonauthor.com or follow her on Facebook @theyardbygraceolson.

SPRING & SUMMER 2026
H
Intelligent Horsemanship

Posture Assessment
with Gillian Higgins

HIDDEN CONDITIONS YOU NEED TO KNOW

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TINY CHANGES FOR REAL PROGRESS

Electrotherapies
Evidence, Ethics & Real-World Application

Plus much more inside...

Chat Magazine, May 26

Healing herd

Are you feeling sheepish? My flock of baa-my therapists may be able to help

Grace Olsen, 52, Leeds, West Yorkshire

The huge horse looked me in the eye before putting his nose on my chest. His furry snout covered my snout and immediately tears prickled my eyes.

Before I could stop myself, I was bawling.

'He's letting you know you don't need to be afraid,' Sheila, who owned the horse, said kindly.

I'd gone to Sheila's remote mountain farm in Wales in 2012 for some riding tips. But now I was having an unexpected healing session – with a horse.

See, I'd suffered from PTSD and postnatal depression since the difficult birth of my daughter Florence seven years earlier, in June 2006.

When she'd started going to nursery, I'd taken up my childhood riding hobby again.

Hoped it would bring me the same joy it had when I was younger.

Though it had helped a little, it wasn't until now that something inside me switched.

As Andy the brown sport horse embraced me, I felt like the dark cloud over me was clearing.

This huge creature, being so gentle with me, made me feel relaxed and peaceful.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, all the guilt and sadness I'd been feeling since Florence's birth poured out of me.

Andy just stood there calmly, listening. When I'd finished, he curved his huge neck around me, like he was cuddling me. 'He wants to help you feel better,' Sheila said.

'He already has,' I replied. There was just something that felt so freeing about standing in nature with this loving animal.

Back at home, I tried explaining the experience to my hubby James, then 46. 'I feel like my sadness has lifted,' I said.

I already knew that equine therapy was often used to help people with anxiety and mental health issues.

And to me, it made sense. Whatever animal magic Andy had used on me that day had worked.

As a qualified massage therapist, I'd been working with terminally ill people for years.

I'd love to combine the two somehow,' I told James.

But how, without my own horse and land? So when an opportunity came up to buy Pippa – the horse I'd been riding and fallen in love with – I grabbed it.

I managed to find some fields to rent.

And in 2015, I signed up to train in equine-facilitated coaching – learning how to work with horses to help people.

My first client had been diagnosed with cancer and she was worried about how to tell her

three young children. Without any prompting, Pippa rested her head on the woman's chest as she opened up about her fears.

It was incredible to witness.

As my client list grew, I wrote a book called *The Yard: How*

a Horse Healed my Heart. But it didn't stop there. In fact, horses were just the start.

In 2022, a local farmer asked me if I'd rehome two lambs.

'They'll be handy for keeping the weeds down in the field,' I shrugged.

But I soon learnt they were so much

more than that! They were great company and I loved having my woolly pals following me around.

Then, one day, I was feeling a bit down, having fallen over with a mate.

I sat down in the field and had a little cry to myself. One of the sheep, Merlin, wandered over and sat next to me.

He looked me in the eye and then licked my forehead. And as I held on to his soft wool, I felt so comforted.

Un-baa-lievable. Though he was young, I felt like there was a wise old

man hidden underneath all his fluff. Soon after, I was holding an equine therapy session with a woman whose husband had died.

Suddenly Merlin trotted over in the field and pushed himself against her legs.

'I think Merlin wants a go at being the therapist,' I said as she bent down to cuddle him.

Then she laughed for the first time in a year.

My woolly wonder had managed to lift her spirits with one fluffy hug. Incredible!

To find out more about Grace's work and books visit graceolsonauthor.com.



You can't blast working with sheep

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TRUE-LIFE

With my book *Merlin Finds His Magic* – and its woolly hero

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Since then, my flock of sheep therapists has grown to six, and I have three horses too.

I never know who's going to step in as a four-legged therapist until I get to the field.

I'll walk around chatting to my client, and a horse or a sheep will always join us.

My ewe-nique animal therapists are certainly something special.

There really is nothing that a bit of horse power and a woolly hug can't help with.

To find out more about Grace's work and books visit graceolsonauthor.com.

Chat 15



My Weekly, April 26

It feels so bonkers that people burst out laughing!

From unexpected giggles to heartfelt conversations, Grace's unique sheep therapy is helping people feel better

You might recognise Grace Olson from Channel 5's hit TV show, *The Yorkshire Vet*, but step into her field and it soon becomes clear who the real stars are: her flock of extraordinary sheep.

In this picturesque corner of the countryside, something rather incredible is unfolding. People arrive carrying grief, anxiety or everyday worries, and leave feeling lighter, calmer and uplifted. The reason? Sheep therapy.

Grace, a qualified therapist, likes to keep things simple. Sessions begin with a conversation, but there's no rigid structure. Instead, there's open space, fresh air and the gentle presence of loving animals who are free to come and go as they please.

"None of them are forced to do

anything," she explains. "But they're so nosy that they come along."

Before long, a curious sheep will wander over, often leading to an impromptu cosy snuggle. It can feel disarming at first – but that's exactly the point.

Sheep, Grace says, exist in a naturally calm state, and that's something humans instinctively respond to. Being close to them helps the body relax, creating the conditions for deeper healing. But there's another layer too.

"There's a comedy element of being with sheep," she laughs. "It feels so bonkers that people burst out laughing – and then they start talking about the things they really need to talk about."

At the heart of it all is Merlin, Grace's first sheep and still the most intuitive of the flock. Time and again, he has shown an incredible ability to sense when someone is struggling.

"He instinctively knows when somebody is not happy," Grace says. "He'll go towards them and just stand with them."

She recalls one woman who came to the field after experiencing a devastating loss. While the other animals munched their hay, Merlin left his food and went straight to her, standing silently by her side for an hour. There was no training, no command – just instinct.

"He knew," Grace says simply. Merlin may be the star, but he's far from the only character in the flock. Berel brings something entirely different – a sense of stillness that seems to anchor those around him. Unlike Merlin, who moves between people, Berel is quite content to stand quietly, allowing

himself to be stroked and held for as long as someone needs.

"You could cuddle him forever," Grace says. "He'll just stand there like a statue."

When he's not helping to heal hearts, Berel has a bit of a naughty streak... "He is an absolute character," she admits, chuckling. "But in the therapeutic setting, he always behaves."

Then there's Rhubarb – larger than life in every sense. Mischievous, affectionate and convinced he's something other than a sheep, he brings a different kind of energy to the field.

"Rhubarb thinks he's a goat," Grace says fondly.

His antics have even caused chaos during filming for *The Yorkshire Vet*, where he once toppled a camera and chewed through microphone wires. But

in quieter moments, it's his affectionate nature that shines through – he calls out when he sees Grace and follows her everywhere.

Each sheep has their own personality, and together they create a dynamic that makes the therapy so effective. For one woman struggling with workplace bullying and low self-esteem, this made all the difference. Spending time with the sheep – who approached her, stayed close and seemed to choose her – helped her see herself differently.

"It showed her that she has value," Grace explains.

With that shift came the confidence to set boundaries and stand her ground – something she hadn't felt able to do before.

It's a transformation Grace has witnessed many times. Anxiety,

Grace with Rhubarb



Rhubarb Finds His Family is on sale now. Brown Dog Books, PB, £9.99

real life



Sheepy Stories

Grace's flock don't just help people in the field – they've also inspired a series of uplifting children's books.

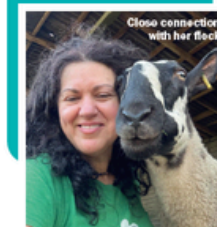
Written with younger readers in mind, her "sheepy stories" follow characters like Merlin, Berel and Rhubarb as they navigate friendship, confidence and big feelings – all wrapped in warm, engaging tales.

"I want to help kids understand they can be in charge of their thoughts," says Grace.

Grace draws on her own life experiences when writing, creating stories that gently encourage children to challenge negative thinking, build self-belief and feel more in control of their emotions.

Her latest book, *Rhubarb Finds His Family*, sees the mischievous sheep set off on a heartfelt journey to discover where he truly belongs.

For more information, visit graceolsonauthor.com.



WORDS: SIMA SOLAR IMAGES: GRACE OLSON



The Guardian, March 26

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The pet I'll never forget
Animals

This article is more than 1 month old

The pet I'll never forget: Merlin the therapy sheep

When Merlin came to live with me, his only job was to clear the weeds from my fields. But his calm, affectionate nature has made him a vital part of my therapy practice

Grace Olson
Mon 30 Mar 2026 07:00 BST

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Grace Olson and Merlin, in Eccup, West Yorkshire. Photograph: Courtesy of Grace Olson

Merlin the sheep came to me by chance four years ago. A friend of mine had a lamb she was bottle-feeding, but she couldn't look after it any more so she asked me if I could take care of it. I live in Moortown, Leeds, and rent about three hectares (seven acres) of land in Eccup, a small village nearby, where I've kept horses for about 13 years. I needed some help clearing the weeds that the horses wouldn't eat and sheep seemed like the best solution because they'll eat anything - so I said yes.

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The lamb was called Bambi and when I came to collect her, my friend offered me another lamb, Merlin. Shortly after, Bambi died and it was just Merlin left. It wasn't long until he started to show his special powers.

I've worked as an equine therapist for eight years, helping people with illness, depression and grief. My practice involves outdoor therapy and my horses are my usual assistants. My clients visit me in the field, they stroke and cuddle the animals and it eases them into a state of calmness that allows them to open up about the things they may never have been able to talk about.

After I got Merlin I realised that sheep are some of the most relaxed mammals, which makes them the perfect therapists because being near them calms people down too. Merlin in particular has a knack for it. I first saw this during a therapy session with a client who had severe depression. Merlin was just six months old at the time; he trotted up to her and pushed his body on to her leg. She laughed and bent down to cuddle him - until then this woman hadn't smiled for almost a year.

From then on, Merlin blossomed into an incredibly empathetic and sensitive animal. I never force him to interact with clients; he comes to them naturally when he can sense that they're suffering. In February last year, he left his food and ran across the snowy field to comfort a client who was grieving the death of her son.

Merlin oozes love and affection. He also has a silly side. He's playful like a cheeky labrador, and adores it when people scratch his head - he's more dog-like than dogs. I even wrote a children's book, called Merlin Finds His Magic, all about the life of the therapy sheep.

I now have six sheep on my land who help me with my work, but Merlin is the shining star of the flock.

As told to Sinéad Campbell

The Dalesman, Feb 26



Amazing Grace

Therapist tells us about her magical sheep

Meet Merlin the magical sheep... actually, you may already know him, after all, he features in the opening sequence of TV's *The Yorkshire Vet* and in several episodes. "Yes, he's something

of a star, and he knows it," laughs Grace Olson, a frequent guest on the hit show.

She's sitting in a field in Eccup, midway between Pool in Wharfedale and Kirkstall Abbey, not too far from Harewood House.

DECEMBER 2024 43

This is prime agricultural country, and on this seven-acre plot a handful of sheep graze among a motley collection of horses, each of them a rescue animal.

"It's an absolutely glorious place," says Grace as she looks to the distant horizon across the surrounding fields.

It is below these big skies that Grace uses her therapy skills acquired over the past thirty years, to help people with life-limiting conditions.

She has put aside past personal demons and devoted her life to helping others – with the assistance of her farmyard friends.

"I've been here for twelve years now, and we only ended up here because I kept messaging the lady who owned the fields. I'd leave messages on fenceposts, asking if I could use them!

"I started off by doing horse therapy whereby I treated people who were dying by introducing them to the horses.

"And then one day, purely by accident, when I was doing a therapy session with a client suffering from cancer, Merlin came across to her, and she suddenly started to smile and laugh, and that's how it happened.

"Merlin is a texel crossed with a north country mule and is nearly two and is so calm, people connect to him.

"Oncologists used to refer patients to me, although they can't officially do that anymore, because of the impact the treatment can have on their mental and physical health."

Explaining the benefits of her therapy session is difficult, accepts Grace, but she speaks of "magical moments" of "peace" and "tranquillity" during her sessions.

"People come here, they sit down with me and the sheep will come across and I will listen to them, and the presence of the sheep seems to help them open up and talk about things which they would otherwise feel unable to do, they suddenly start to unburden themselves.

"I try and help people sort out their lives, and the presence of the sheep, which they will cuddle, seems to help, they encourage people relax."

Grace, who has written several children's story books featuring her therapy sheep, goes on: "It is such a magical time seeing people with the sheep when they're receiving therapy, and there's a really deep connection and real honesty.

"Helping others is the theme of my life. I have been a therapist for the past thirty years, helping people with a wide range of problems. My goal is to set up a therapy farm with the proceeds from my books where I can hopefully treat terminally ill people for free.

"The animals are free to come and go and it's really quite surreal. A specific animal will know when to come. Sometimes it might be one of the horses or the sheep, or all of them. We just let it happen quite naturally.

"I can't really describe it, but when people are dying it's almost like something has opened up within them that makes unusual phenomena happen. It becomes the most wonderful, magical, bizarre experience."



44 DECEMBER 2024

Telegraph & Argos Weekend Magazine, Jan 26

www.graceolsonauthor.com

Chat Magazine, Jan 26

Healing herd

Feeling sheepish? My flock of baa-my therapists can help

Grace Olson, 52, Leeds, West Yorkshire

TRUE-LIFE

With my book Merlin Finds His Magic - and its woolly hero

You can't bleed working with sheep

Me and my pals have close-knit bond

Sheep joy: A hug with Teddy the lamb

Chat The original real-life mag

WIN A HOLIDAY TO TURKEY

18 PUZZLES

45 CASH PRIZES

MONSTER HIDDEN IN MY HOME
I'd no idea he was waiting to pounce

**WHAT WAS GROWING INSIDE ME?!
A cyst? A baby? Not quite...**

NO REGRETS
I let my teen swap school for TikTok

BAA-RMY BUT BRILL
My sheep's a therapist

SUPERMARKET STEALS
22 BARGAIN BUYS
TROLLEY-TASTIC!

Reunited in the morgue
FIRST MY EX TOOK OUR BOY THEN HE KILLED HIM
I fought for years to get my son home - instead he died in utter terror

GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Positive News Magazine, Jan 26



The Yorkshire Post, Jan 26

12 THE YORKSHIRE POST
Monday January 19 2026

Focus | Education on M



GOING BY THE BOOK: Grace Olson's sheep-themed stories have a wellbeing message; inset, with Yorkshire Vet star Julian Norton.

Following Grace's sheep to get the young reading

Steve Teale
NEWS CORRESPONDENT

GRACE Olson, Yorkshire vet star and 'sheep therapist', has penned a series of children's books to empower young minds for the 2026 government initiative, The National Year of Reading. She is on a mission to help young children grow into resilient teenagers by teaching them visual lessons all wrapped up in beautifully illustrated, fable-style stories.

Each sheep-themed story contains a unique message. The first teaches that love is a superpower. The second teaches that it's ok to be your real self even if that means you're different to others. The third teaches the power of positive thinking and the fourth teaches unity – that we are really all one family on planet Earth.

Ms Olson suffered from depression during her youth and attempted to take her own life. She believes that her poor mental health was due to not being taught how to be in charge of her mind and hence, she became the victim of negative self-talk and a belief that she was 'less than' others.

Fate brought Ms Olson a truly remarkable psychologist who helped her to learn

how to 'reprogramme' her mind and become the master of her thoughts and emotions. She now uses her experiences to help others in her therapy work and in her books.

She said: "If we can instill a sense of self-worth at a young age and help children realise that their mind is a tool which can be used positively, they will become teenagers who are positive and able to withstand the stresses that come with that phase of life." She believes that reading books and immersing in the illustrations can help children develop their full creative potential and rise above the toxicity within social media and modern technology. She also believes that lessons taught within the context of a fun, adventure story are more easily absorbed and accepted by young minds. Observing her therapy sheep inspired her to use them as the role models within the stories and she feels that as they are real, this adds a relatable connection for children who read the books.

Ms Olson is an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) level 5 coach and equine facilitated therapist. She is also qualified in lymphatic drainage massage and has worked with cancer patients for 30 years.

In her 'outdoor' therapy work, she and her sheep and horses help people to find inner peace and emotional balance so that they can cope better with life's challenges. She and her sheep have been featured on The Yorkshire Vet several times and will be in the next series.

Ms Olson is based in Leeds and is the

writer of best-selling, tragicomic memoirs *The Yard* and *The Farm* – books which bring joy and transformation for the reader. She has also penned a series of beautifully illustrated, sheep-themed children's books to empower young minds – *Merlin Finds His Magic*, *Galoshad Finds His Voice*, *Berel Finds His Wings* and *Rhubarb Finds His Family*.

She said: "It was very therapeutic to write about my mental health struggles and a lot of fun to wrap it all up in the comedy of the relationships that were growing in my life at that time – new friendships with horse-mad people and connections with the noble horses who ultimately healed me on the deepest of levels."

"As I am a therapist, I wanted my books to feel like a friend and show how it is possible to find inner strength and self-healing even when we feel totally awful about ourselves."

"We all struggle with doubts and negative thoughts but ordinary people can live extraordinary lives and we can find mental and physical health benefits if we open up to the wonderful atmosphere of nature and the great outdoors."

"I write as an extension of my therapy work. So even though my novels are full of adventures, rich dialogue and very character driven, they also carry deeply meaningful and relatable messages conveyed in such a way as to teach without preaching. These stories are my life experiences but they are universal which is why they are helpful for others."

More details about her series of stories can be found on her website – <https://www.graceolsonauthor.com>



The Dalesman, December 2025



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DECEMBER 2024 43

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44 DECEMBER 2024

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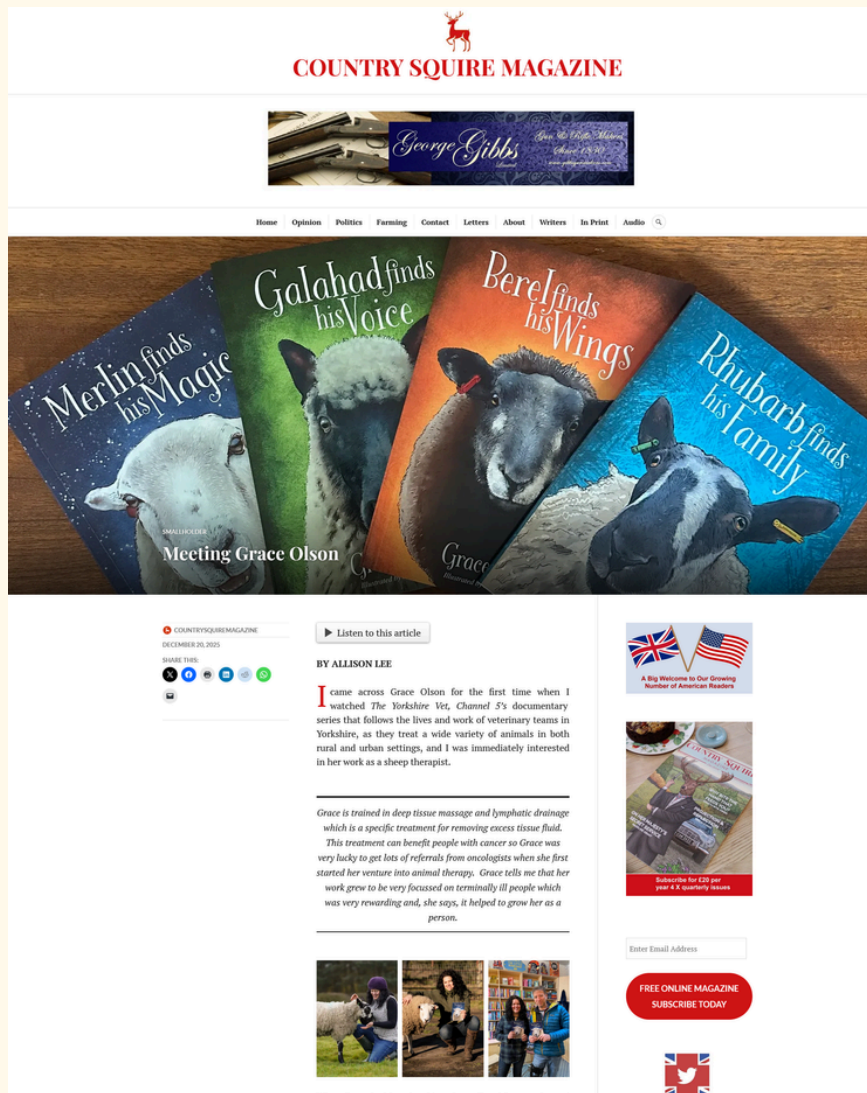
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Country Squire Magazine, Dec 25



When Grace had her daughter, she suffered from prolonged post-natal depression and decided to take up horse riding again, a pastime she had enjoyed as a teenager. Grace explained how horse riding helped her enormously and she ended up having a session of equine assisted therapy which, she says, was incredible. Watching how the facilitator and her horses uncovered and released deep-rooted negative belief patterns, helped Grace with her own depression and enabled her to start to feel genuinely happy. Grace's experience led her to gain her own qualification in equine facilitated coaching and she subsequently got her own horse, shared a field with friends and set up to do equine therapy.

However, it was when a friend asked her if she would take on a couple of bottle-fed lambs that things started to change. Grace knew that the sheep would be a benefit to have around as they would eat the weeds and help to reduce the worm burden of horse pastures. However, she didn't bargain for how friendly they would be and, she says, she loved them instantly.

It was during one of Grace's therapy sessions with a very depressed lady that the sheep chose to get involved and Grace says it was eye-opening to see, how just being with a sheep, helped this lady to laugh. Over the course of a few sessions with various people, Merlin the lamb kept choosing to be involved with the therapy, and Grace began to realise that he knew what he was doing. Merlin knew that his presence was cheering people up.

Grace has a drive and passion which is obvious to anyone who knows her story. She uses this drive and passion in her therapy and it also served her well when, after writing a blog during lockdown to cheer people up, she ventured further afield and started to write her memoir, following her own journey about how she got back into the saddle. This resulted in her first book and, *The Yard – How A Horse Healed My Heart*, was born. Despite the book being rejected by every publisher she sent it too, she didn't give up and, with true Yorkshire grit, she decided to self publish – something, she admits, was a scary but, ultimately brilliant, decision when the book sold out on the first day of publication and reached number 1 on *Amazon* – one in the eye for all those rejections she received!

Grace's publishing success has led her to continue writing and she now has two further memoir-novels about how horses can help to health mental health issues, along with a four part series of sheep themed children's fables specifically written to empower young minds. Grace's stories instill values of empathy, self confidence, positive thinking and unity, wrapped up in beautifully illustrated tales.

Grace tells me that her ultimate wish is that one day she will be able to afford her own land and set up a therapy farm to help terminally ill people for free, if they don't have enough money to pay. Grace explained that she 'wishes that my books would sell in their millions so that they can be my income to fund this dream! I honestly believe my novels would make a great TV series which would then help me to fund my passion. So, if any scriptwriters are reading maybe they can help!'

GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Young Stock Magazine, Dec 25



GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Daily Star Sunday, Dec 25



The magazine cover features a large photo of Molly Smith wearing a white fur stole and red earmuffs, holding a small yellow object. The title 'HOT TV' is in large yellow letters. A circular inset shows a woman with a lamb. Text on the cover includes 'ALL THE TOP TELLY NEWS with ED GLEAVE', 'Lamb's tale for Grace', and 'MOLLY: YULE BE JUST GREAT!'. A small photo of Ed Gleave is in the top right corner.

BAGA
Chipz has signed a big-money deal to perform at Butlin's holiday resort. The RuPaul's Drag Race UK finalist will be at its Don't Tell Mama bash at the resort in Bognor Regis next month.

HOT TV

ALL THE TOP TELLY NEWS
with ED GLEAVE

edward.gleave@dailystar.co.uk

Lamb's tale for Grace

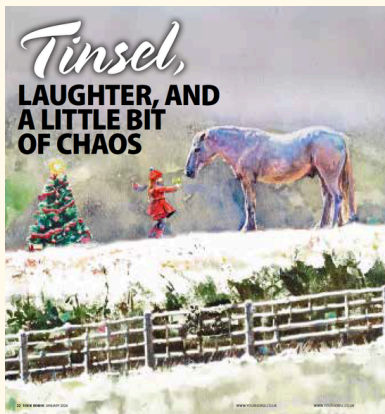
GRACE Olson has penned a children's book.
The star of **The Yorkshire Vet** tells a story about a lamb in Rhubarb Finds His Family, which features illustrations by Andrew Prescott.
She said: "It's about a little orphan lamb who goes on an adventure to find a new mummy.
"On this journey he makes several new friends, one of which is a very wise pony.
"This pony helps him to discover that everyone is part of one big family bathed in the love of one mother... Mother Nature. It's a story full of bravery, resilience and love." For details visit graceolsonauthor.com

MOLLY: YULE BE JUST GREAT!

MOLLY Smith is getting very festive indeed.
The **Love Island: All Stars** winner has been having fun at Christmas parties in the run-up to the big day.
As you can see, she has all the right gear for this time of year.
A source close to her said: "Molly loves the festive period.
"It's a chance for her to dress up in festive outfits and have some fun."

CARMEX
Cafe

Your Horse, Dec 25 Christmas Short Story



Tinsel,
**LAUGHTER, AND
A LITTLE BIT
OF CHAOS**

SHORT STORY

After losing her nerve in the saddle, Grace plans a quiet Boxing Day at home — until her friend Jack persuades her out for a snowy ride that turns into a hilarious, heart-stopping adventure. With medieval gowns, recorders, TV-set explosions and one very upset bull, she discovers that courage sometimes comes with a side of chaos — and this wild ride proves to be the best gift of all

BOXING DAY ARRIVES with a sprinkling of snow, reminding me of my youth at the annual riding school treasure hunt. I smile wistfully as I begin the post-Christmas tidy of the living room — my new, dull, annual thing. “Are you busy?” teases my friend Jack, when I share a field with. “Just clearing up after yesterday,” I reply. “Leave that ‘til later! Let’s go for a ride!” My stomach ties itself in a knot and then those phone rings. It’s Jack. “I know you’re worried about riding again, but today’s a good day to get over those nerves. The roads are quiet and there won’t be any tractors dragging noisy machinery.”

“Times,” I reply. “I don’t know why I’m so nervous after that. She only catered for a time and then stopped. What’s wrong with me?” “You’re overthinking as usual,” Jack laughs. “So, stop thinking, come up here and let’s go out. You know I’ll regret it if you don’t.”

Jack is right. It’s a beautiful winter’s day and I need to get over my elastic leas and just get back out riding. “Great! I’ll see you in a bit,” says Jack as I dash upstairs to get changed. My mind begins to whirr. What if there is a really noisy tractor and my mare runs off again? Then just turn her into the hedge. She’ll soon stop, replies the sensible part of my brain. What if I can’t turn her though? What would you rather do? Clean the house or go for a ride? Cleaning the house is the opposite of fun. I remember how exciting it felt to decorate a riding school pony with tinsel before the Boxing Day treasure hunt. So, taking a deep breath, I grab some tinsel off the tree before marching out of the house and into the car.

“Gillian zooms past, medieval gown flying behind her and the veil on her headpiece flapping like a streamer”



The dreary suburban streets soon give way to snow-topped, dyptone walls as I drive towards our field in the beautiful Yorkshire countryside. “I brought tinsel, too,” grins Jack as I get out of my car with tinsel trailing behind me. Snow is still falling lightly and Poppy, my horse, waits by the gate as if she knew we were going out. Seeing how relaxed she is makes me wonder why I suddenly lost my nerve. Not wanting to overthink it, I busy myself with grooming and tacking up. All the while, Jack keeps up a steady stream of chatter, helping to soothe my mind. “A nice quiet ride, just the two of us, will help you get over your fears,” she says, as she ties her red tinsel around Buddy’s neck.

JANUARY 2020 YOUR HORSE 23



Buddy is such a laid-back horse, but then so is Poppy after the years of effort I’ve put in. I know deep down that I don’t need to worry, as I tie the tinsel around her neck and lead her to the mounting block, swallow my anxiety and get on. “Well done, that’s step one,” grins Jack. She leaps on, cowboy style, and declares: “Right off we go!” We clatter out onto the lane and I watch the snow dusting the fields like icing sugar. The old stone farmhouse is dressed for Christmas and a jolly robin hops along the wall, tweeting melodically. It is probably shouting obscenities at us, but it is still lovely to hear it chirping away. I smile happily as we turn onto the bridle path that winds behind the farm. “I’m so glad I came out; it’s so lovely and peaceful!”

“You-hoo!” calls a voice from nearby, making me jump out of my skin. “Oh no, it’s Mad Gillian,” I mutter. “What the hell is she wearing this time?” My jaw drops open at the sight of Gillian, riding side-saddle, resplendent in a billowing medieval gown complete with a double horned scullion and floppy veil. Poppy snorts at the bizarre spectacle, promptly regaining my nerves.

“Merry Christmas!” greets Gillian. “I’m on my way to an early music recital at the church hall. How fortunate to bump into you both. You can accompany me there and perhaps we can play some grans!” Gillian rummages in her saddle bags and pulls out a selection of wooden recorders of varying sizes.

“Oh my God this is going to send Poppy into orbit!” “Er, I don’t think Poppy will like hearing recorders,” I mumble, my chest tightening. “Nonsense, dear. On the contrary, horses find music soothing and it’s just the thing for you after your unfortunate experience. I’m sure it’ll help you feel calmer. Here you are, and here’s one for you, Jack.”

Gillian presses the recorder into my hand while Jack rolls her eyes. “I brought tinsel, too,” grins Jack as I get out of my car with tinsel trailing behind me. Snow is still falling lightly and Poppy, my horse, waits by the gate as if she knew we were going out. Seeing how relaxed she is makes me wonder why I suddenly lost my nerve. Not wanting to overthink it, I busy myself with grooming and tacking up. All the while, Jack keeps up a steady stream of chatter, helping to soothe my mind. “A nice quiet ride, just the two of us, will help you get over your fears,” she says, as she ties her red tinsel around Buddy’s neck.

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JANUARY 2020 YOUR HORSE 24

“Oh, jolly good, Grace, that’s marvellous! Now your turn, Jack.” The sound that comes out of Jack’s recorder is remarkably reminiscent of a cat fight. She manages to produce two discordant notes, simultaneously, which shocks Poppy, who jumps sideways into the hedge. My heart lurches into my mouth. “Oops!” laughs Gillian. “Perhaps we should put the recorders away for now.” I shove it into my pocket. Take a deep breath, commands my brain. I breathe deeply, fighting the urge to jump off. Instead, I make myself enjoy the scenery once more. We are on my favourite bridle path and the rolling farmland is a sight that always lifts my mood.

“Hello!” calls a voice from behind us. “Can you help? I’m lost!” I look round and see a smallish woman on a Dartmoor pony. She looks relieved to see us. “I’m parked at The Red Kite car park. I have no idea how to get back there and I left my phone in the horsebox.” “Welcome to our merry band,” greets Gillian with a flourish of her hand. “The woman, who turns out to be called Eve, has had a huge row with her family and stormed off with her horse to get away from them all.

“Gillian rummages in her saddle bags and pulls out a selection of wooden recorders”

WWW.YOURHORSE.CO.UK

“It happens every Christmas,” she laughs, “but it’s a good excuse to go somewhere new for a ride and I often pretend to get lost on purpose. This time, though, I genuinely am totally lost and I was freaking out because this snow’s getting heavy, isn’t it?” I look around at the snow, which is indeed now falling fast and settling in a way that suggests the strong possibility of sledding. It fascinates me that Eve didn’t ask Gillian why she is dressed like something out of Cawdor.

“We’ll be riding past the pub, so tag along with us,” I say.

The presence of another rider helps me to feel calmer and more like my old self. I began to relax and enjoy the chatter. “We’re so lucky to be able to ride here,” I sigh happily. “Yes, it’s gorgeous,” agrees Eve. “What’s that village over there? It looks like a Christmas card.”

“That’s the film set for the *Birkdale Farm* soap, but it looks real, doesn’t it? We’ll be riding past it to get you back to the pub.” “I don’t think we will,” says Jack, nodding towards a peculiar barricade in the distance. “Oh! I wonder what they’re doing?” “Nick! Is there another way?” asks Eve. Let’s see if we can get through wherever it is. “I’m sure you both learned recorder at school, but I’ll give you a quick recap.” We ride along, listening to Gillian’s lecture about the origins of medieval music, while silently praying that no one we know will see us. Under different circumstances, I might have found the history of the recorder an interesting subject, but on my first ride out after a stressful episode, it is the last thing I want to hear about.

Mind you, Gillian is so enthusiastic and her words are so hypnotic that after a while, I suddenly find myself attempting to play the lolly and the boy Gillian claps her hands.

“Gillian rummages in her saddle bags and pulls out a selection of wooden recorders”

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local council, I will not tolerate your impudent manner.” “My what?” “Good heavens. This is exactly the problem with young people of today. They only have a basic grasp of language. Impudence means...” “Look mate, we need to get through so this lady can get back to her horsebox at the pub before it’s dark,” interjects Jack. “Mate,” mutters Gillian quietly to herself. “Such appalling diction.” The other security guard begins talking into her radio.

“Sorry, but you’re going to have to move away because the explosives are going to go off soon.” “I can’t believe my ears.” “The what?”

“Yeah, they’re filming some explosion thing today because it’s a quiet day. You’ve got seven minutes before it starts.” Jack is horrified. “Blinking back, come on, let’s get out of here!”

“Just a moment, young lady. I refuse to be bullied into leaving a public right of way. Do you have the necessary permission to be setting off explosives in this vicinity?” “Damn. It’s nothing to do with me. I’m just on security.” The security guard shrugs her shoulders and scratches her head. “Oh, you ‘lano?” “Come on Gillian, now’s not the time. Let’s get out of here!” Jack turns her horse and we all follow as fast as we can. My heart is beating like a drum and my brain begins firing on all cylinders. “You’ll have to turn back, folks,” one of them says, fanning his arms in an unnecessarily aggressive manner, instantly rising Gillian. “This is a public right of way, young man, and as a member of the

“Wow, yes, I did, didn’t I? I stayed on!” I feel triumphant to have survived my worst fear. “I’m amazed I stayed on, too,” laughs Eve.

Riding through the private, snowy woodland is a feast for the eyes and I feel incredibly boosted by the realisation that I’d stayed on despite Poppy bolting. We sing a few Christmas carols and Gillian regales us with stories of her farming youth when presently we arrive at a gate. “Ah yes, now I know where we are,” says Gillian. “We need to go through this field and then we’ll be out on the road near the pub.”

She opens the gate and we all trot through. The field is a huge undulating pasture flanked by deciduous woods. Their bare branches create ethereal lace patterns against the cloudy winter sky. The snow is deep in places, so we have to be careful where we ride as the horses keep stumbling. “What’s that over there?” asks Eve. I squint to see through the snowflakes blurring my vision. Then I notice horns. My heart misses a beat. “Oh, is that a bull?” “Yes,” nods Gillian, “and he doesn’t look like the friendliest of fellows.”

Flumes of breath swirl from his flaring nostrils. “What the hell! That wasn’t seven minutes!” yells Jack. “What! Steady!” Poppy rears, for the first time ever. I grab onto her spine as she every swear word in my vocabulary tumbles out of my mouth. And then she is off, like a rocket on a fast forward, thundering up the hill heading straight towards a PRIVATE, NO ENTRY sign.

My whole body goes into shock as I cling on for dear life and keep repeating “whoa” in a feeble attempt to calm her down. “I shall be bringing this up at the next parish council meeting. Mark my words,” shouts Gillian as she zooms past me on her Thoroughbred, medieval gown flying behind her and the veil on her headpiece flapping like a streamer.

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SHORT STORY

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“I don’t think he’s liking your headress Gillian,” says Jack. “He’s pawing the ground and snorting. What should we do?” “I don’t know!” “He looks really angry. Should we gallop?” asks Eve in a quivering voice. “No! He’ll go berserk,” I reply. “His coming over! We’ve got to get out of here!”

My heart is thumping in my ears and a wave of nausea sweeps over me as the powerful bulk of the bull draws ever nearer with a rapid trot. Despite the cold day, I have begun to feel hideously hot with terror. Poppy senses my fear and begins to speed up and prance around. I want to cry, but then a thought pings into my brain. I pull Gillian’s recorder out of my pocket and blow.

“Grace what the hell are you doing?” Jack is horrified. “I’m trying to scare him,” I reason, and then quickly go back to playing. Gillian joins in with some discordant harmonies. “It’s working,” whispers Jack. The bull stops dead with a look of confusion on his face. “Keep playing!” Despite the fear of death boiling in my veins, I force myself to keep playing. The bull snorts and turns with its tail like a shishikan that belies his enormous body. “Oh, thank goodness,” cries Eve as the bull hurries away to the farthest corner of his pasture, snow spraying up from his hooves.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Olson is the author of best-selling equestrian memoirs, *The Yard and The Farm*, which are available from all UK bookshops and Amazon. She has also written a series of children’s books and is a regular contributor on *Country & The Yorkshire Vet* with her flock of therapy sheep. Her dream is to use the income from book sales to enable her to treat homeless ill people at no cost. graceolsonauthor.com



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Ruth Buchanan is a full-time artist and author whose work features globally in the private collections of notable names in the arts as well as equestrianism. Visit ruthbuchanan.co.uk

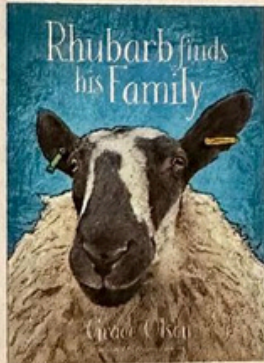


“The bull stops dead with a look of confusion on his face. ‘Keep playing the recorder!’”

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GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Best of British, Dec 25



Rhubarb Finds His Family

By Grace Olson, Brown Dog Books, paperback, £9.99

Commencing with the classic opening line: "It was a dark and stormy night...", we are introduced to the world of Rhubarb the sheep, who wonders why he is alone when other young lambs in the barn are being looked after by their mums.

Ignoring the pleas of other, more patient orphan lambs, he asks mums if they would like him as an additional family member. When they say they have their quota, Rhubarb pushes his way out into the world at large, determined to find a mummy.

Guided by the light of the moon, plus a helpful pony and a young girl, our hero wanders the countryside – meeting all kinds of birds and animals before satisfying his inquisitive nature about this Mother Nature that everyone keeps on about.

Anyone with a knowledge of the Channel 5 documentary series The Yorkshire Vet will know that Rhubarb is a real animal, who is learning to be a therapy animal as part of the author's flock to help her do her therapy work at no cost for people on low incomes.

In addition to Grace's lovely story, the artwork by Andrew Prescott adds more magic to this book with a fine attention to detail of many aspects of the countryside. It appears that Rhubarb even managed a ride in a Morris Traveller.

Young readers with a love for animals will enjoy this and further stories about other lovable characters.

Country Smallholder, Dec 25

COUNTRY
SMALLHOLDER

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ADOPT A GOAT FOR AND CHANGE A LIFE AT CHRISTMAS

Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats was founded in 1989, with the goal of rescuing and rehabilitating goats who have suffered from neglect and abuse. Since then, they have welcomed over a thousand Caprine characters through their gates. Once at Buttercups, they receive the love and care they deserve, and are allowed to heal from wounds both physical and emotional, whilst living out the rest of



Brandy



Douglas

their days in peace and comfort. As the UK's first charity solely dedicated to goat welfare, the sanctuary is largely dependent on the generosity of their wonderful supporters. One of the ways you can help the work of Buttercups is through donating to their Hay Appeal, which helps to cover the significant cost of hay that it takes to keep our herd well-fed and nicely rounded. Buttercups is also open to visitors year-round and offers a truly unique experience; wander amongst the goats, meet the characters and even have a go at feeding them too. If you wanted to add a little something extra to your visit, you might consider attending one of their additional experiences, which include a *Goat Keeper Experience*, a *Goat Encounter Experience*, and a *Husbandry Course*, which run throughout the year.



Maggie

You can also sponsor one of their goats; another fantastic way to help! For as little as £20 a year, you can receive an adoption certificate, two photos and a letter from your goat, as well as a subscription to our quarterly newsletter, full of all the latest rescue stories and goatly antics! A very different Christmas present! Brandy, Douglas and Maggie are just a few of the gorgeous goats who want your support.

All support received is always greatly appreciated by both the charity and the goats themselves - they simply could not do it without you! For more information on Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats, as well as other ways you can support the charity, visit www.buttercups.org.uk.

SHEEP STORIES TO INSPIRE ALL AGES

What can you buy that's meaningful yet inexpensive? Magical stories to empower and grow self-esteem, cleverly woven into the adventures of a flock of sheep - as seen on Channel 5's *The Yorkshire Vet*. Grace Olson originally wrote the books for children aged 5-10 but they have become very popular with adults too. The themes in the book speak to everyone and can help to raise self-worth and change negative thought patterns into powerful, positive ones - all wrapped up in whimsical tales, beautifully illustrated with immersive, watercolour paintings.

- *Merlin Finds His Magic* teaches that love is a superpower
- *Galahad Finds His Voice* teaches that it's ok to be your unique self
- *Berel Finds His Wings* teaches how to think positively
- *Rhubarb Finds His Family* teaches unity and that we are all the children of Mother Nature

Grace and her flock of therapy sheep have become regular contributors on *The Yorkshire Vet* with two fabulous features coming up soon.



Grace Olson filming with the Yorkshire Vet



Grace and friend relax on set



The therapy sheep are centre stage

"I'm not allowed to reveal any details about these next features but they will bring lots of smiles to peoples faces! They were hilarious fun to film and I can't wait to be able to share what we did. My newest sheep, Rhubarb, was so naughty during filming that at one point he knocked the camera off its tripod and then we discovered he'd eaten the wires to the microphones!"

Here's some behind the scenes photos (only the ordinary ones though so as not to give away any secret content!)

Grace's big dream is to use the income from book sales to enable her to treat terminally ill people for free. Her books are available from all UK book shops, Amazon and the James Herriot Museum in Thirsk. Please support your local independent bookshop if you can. For more information about the books and her wonderful therapy sheep, visit her website <https://www.graceolsonauthor.com>.



A great feeder for your barn cats



Keeps your dustbath useable in bad weather

USEFUL, TOUGH AND VERY DIFFERENT

Dust baths are an essential item for good chicken health and with the weather turning wetter, these stylish and robust dust baths from RoostWorks.co.uk are a great way to keep your precious bath mix nice and dry plus reduce holes in your lawn. If you have a friend who has chickens, they will love one of these.

These durable units also make great cat feeders for outdoor cats and goat lick preservers. Designed and made in the UK, they're made from recycled UK plastic and are long-lasting and maintenance-free. To find out more visit RoostWorks.co.uk

STILL THINKING ABOUT SHEEP INSIDE!

Here's the perfect solution to a game that involves all the family. Sheep Dip is a fun filled, family card game for 3-6 players. It is very easy to play, with games usually

Find out more at thecountrysmallholder.com

taking no more than 25 to 30 minutes. A game for all ages, it's easy to learn and great fun to play.

The game consists of two packs of cards FLOCK cards and EWE DO cards, plus a playing board.

The FLOCK pack consists of four different breeds of sheep, each with 15 unique characters, there's Hardy Herdwicks, Leggy Leicesters, Sturdy Suffolks and Bonnie Blackfaces. There are 71 illustrated Flock cards including a few Wild Cards and some Sheepdogs to help protect your flock and one very special Rainbow Sheep, hang on to it if you can!

The 45 EWE DO cards guarantee to make each game different, players can lose sheep to Rustlers and the Wolf or when they leave their Gate Open and everyone can add to their flock at a Sheep Dip or on Market Day. Playing the game couldn't be easier. Players are dealt five FLOCK cards each, face up and the object of the game is

GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

SixtyPlus Surfers, Nov 2025

**Article by Grace Olson, The Yorkshire
Vet star, sheep therapist and
bestselling children's author**

Winter can often be a difficult time for people because of the long, dark nights and abysmal weather. So, what can we do to make ourselves feel better? Well, for me the answer is always my pets and I am very fortunate to have quite a menagerie. Let me introduce you to my unusual and wonderful four-legged therapists...

Merlin, Galahad, Lancelot, Berel, Teddy and Rhubarb are my beloved pet sheep and they bring tremendous joy to a lot of people. You may have seen them on Channel 5's popular documentary series, The Yorkshire Vet, where they have become regular contributors thanks to their adorable personalities.



Sheep came into my life by accident. There I was, happily enjoying life as a therapist working with horses when suddenly someone told me about an orphan lamb who needed a home. I am a bit of a soft touch for a sad story so the little lamb ended up coming to live with me along with another random lamb that the farmer needed to rehomed. These young lambs absolutely blew my mind!

Like most people, my experience of sheep were 'blobs of cotton-wool that lived in fields and they all looked the same and they weren't friendly animals'. So, you can imagine my surprise when these two lambs turned out to be more like dogs than – well – dogs! They were so loving, playful and interested in everything I was doing and eventually, their interest extended into my work.

One day, a lady came for some equine assisted therapy and as she was telling me about her grief, Merlin the lamb trotted over and pushed himself into her knees. The lady couldn't believe what was happening and she bent down to cuddle him and laughed her head off.

It was incredible to witness the joy she felt simply by cuddling Merlin. She found it so magical and amusing that a sheep would want such attention. That was the beginning of sheep therapy. From then on, whenever I was working, the sheep insisted on being part of it and that's how I ended up with a flock of six woolly therapists.

Just being with or near sheep can lower your blood pressure and calm your nervous system. They literally resonate relaxation. So, with that in mind, I would like to invite you to wrap up warm, get your boots on and go outside. Even if it's grey, miserable, damp weather. Go outside and get into the countryside. If you have a car, drive. If not, get on a bus that goes to farming country and find some walks.

You won't be able to get physically close to commercial flocks of sheep but you'll be able to see them and hear them and this will have such a powerful impact on your central nervous system. Stop and observe them. Listen to them calling out to each other.

Listen to the birds, the wind, the insects. Breathe deeply and allow a deeper part of you to connect with it all. Some sheep are very inquisitive and they may come over to observe you and 'chat' with you.



And if there are no sheep, you can do all of this near fields of cows. Just listen, watch them, breathe in the country air. Allow it to soothe away your Winter blues. You will return home feeling much happier than you did before you ventured out.

As an extension of my therapy work, I have written two memoirs about the healing power of horses – they are heartwarming, hilarious and deeply moving. I have also written a series of sheep-themed stories.

The sheepy stories, although officially for children, are loved by adults too. They are empowering, uplifting and transformative and they are beautifully illustrated with immersive watercolours. I was so lucky to have the book launch for my first sheepy book filmed for The Yorkshire Vet.



If you'd like to see comical videos of me singing to my cuddly sheep, you can find links on my website – it should give you a good laugh!

Sunday Express, Aug 2025

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BUSHELL ON THE BOX

with GARRY BUSHELL





Grace Olson

TV's The Yorkshire Vet regular Grace Olson, 51, is a sheep therapist and best-selling children's author.

What was your first TV memory?
Animal Magic with Johnny Morris. I blame him for me having conversations with my sheep. I pretend they're talking to me. They all have different accents. Merlin is potty-mouthed, he's always swearing.

What was your first TV appearance?
BBC local news when I first got pet lambs because of an emotional backstory. I'm only on TV now because of Merlin.

Who was your first TV crush?
It's embarrassing! It was Reece Dinsdale in Home To Roost. I don't normally fancy someone unless I know them, but there was something mesmerizing about him. He was a bad boy, always falling out with his dad.

What is your favourite current show?
The Yorkshire Vet. That's true, it's not just a plug. I loved it from the start, before I was on it. I've always loved animals.



Which TV show would you take to a desert island?
Ghosts - it's hilarious. It made me want to be there with them. Brilliantly done. I tried and failed to like the US version - it's unbearable.

What TV show would you like to put out of its misery?
Soap operas, they're a cringey abomination. I blame them for the demise of society. They're all fighting, drugs and horribleness.

Guiltiest TV pleasure?
I love watching 22 Kids & Counting. She had her first at 14 and never stopped. How do you do all that washing?

What are you up to at the moment?
I've just published my new beautifully illustrated children's book Rhubarb. It's about sheep, but the purpose is to make children realise we're all related.

● *Rhubarb Finds His Family* by Grace Olson (£9.99, Brown Dog Books) is out now.

GARRY BUSHELL

Euro mystery tour is a lavish let-down

ABUS load of blinkered people who don't have a clue where they're going... BBC1's *Destination X* could be a perfect metaphor for the Corporation itself. Their latest reality game show sells itself as *Race Across The World* meets *The Traitors*. It's more like *Coach Trip* meets *Ted Rogers' 3-2-1*... in an eclipse.

The show is duller than a bowl of quinoa. There's little scenery, the rules are convoluted, the clues are misleading and there is zero plotting.

Wearing hi-tech blindfolds when outside, the contestants are driven around Europe in a coach with blacked-out windows. Even likeable games-master Rob Brydon comes lumbered with a lame script (and publicly-funded Alan Partridge blazers). The over-priced fiasco began in a false airport with 13 contestants immediately whittled down to ten, *Traitors*-style.

Sadly, the ten included time-wasting Mabel, who soon decided it was time to "go home... see my family... have a home-cooked meal".

Later the contestants, confined to a box in a town square, were asked questions about the country they're in. Except they didn't know where they were, or if their guessed answers were correct.

Two emerged to meet a woman speaking a language that wasn't French or German, which convinced crime author Deborah they were heading to Vienna.

Where they speak German.

The Alsatian dog clue was helpful if you knew German shepherds were re-named after Alsace. Others included 99 Red Balloons (Berlin), tulips (Amsterdam) and a St Bernard (the Alps).

They'd have needed eagle eyes to spot the "locals" lurking into Persian cakes.

What a waste of our money.

Channel 4's four-part docu-drama *Operation Dark Phone: Murder By Text* was a terrifying reminder that cops have more to worry about than tweets that upset MPs.

In 2020, French police hacked EncroChat, a global encrypted phone network used for drug trafficking and arms-dealing. It was known as "the LinkedIn of organised crime".

Message exchanges provided chilling insights into the minds of modern villains.

Police access lasted for just 74 days, but that was long enough for the UK's National Crime Agency to work out the identity and location of a character codenamed "Live-long". He was organising brutal hits - "kick his hands... face... 15K" - and gun-running.

Thankfully, vanity would

prove to be his downfall. When he wasn't orchestrating appalling crimes, he treated EncroChat like Instagram. He sent a selfie showing his face and then the view from his hotel room - enough for investigators to work out who he was and where in Barcelona he was holed up.

Many user handles sounded like nicknames from *The Mighty Boosh* - Mystic-steak, Tubby-ten, Bull-snuff, Luxury-balloons... the latter was a cocaine supplier based in Spain who paid Dutch sociopaths to build torture chambers - "operating theatres" - inside sound-proofed shipping containers in order to inflict terrible pain on AI, a man he believed had ripped him off for millions.

Underworld slang abounded. "Wedding cake" was cocaine, "pie-spy" was a grenade, "metal" and "heavy tools" were guns, "sweets" were bullets etcetera.

Sadly, a corrupt Cheshire Police employee revealed all to a villain's girlfriend. Yet NCA data suggests the seven-week operation led to more than 2,300 convictions, and the seizure of huge quantities of narcotics, 175 guns and £23million in dirty cash.

It takes time to warm to *The Assassin*.

Kesley Hawes plays Julie, a had-ten-pence middle-aged housewife lured out of retirement.

Her nervy journalist son Edward duels her "a perimeter-assual James Bond" - think *Killing Eve*

on HRT. The son moans constantly and insists on having needy conversations in the middle of life-threatening situations like nobody in real life ever would.

"Don't you two ever shut up?" asked a casualty, channeling viewers' pain.

THE NINJA and the Whinger were sucked into a series of unlikely situations. Ed's hot girlfriend Kayla was the daughter of Aaron Stone, a grumpy billionaire with a dark secret - he'd borrowed money from arms dealer Jean Luc Bertrand to set up the family firm, then commissioned an assassin to blow him away. The killer was Julie. And Jean Luc was... Edward's real father using a surrogate mum. Julie just rescued and raised him. Neglectfully.

The action scenes are lively enough to distract from the improbability of the coincidence-laden script.

And I'm still not entirely sure why Jean Luc's widow Marie slept with Aaron's idiot son Ezra and poisoned Edward.

Written by Harry and Jack Williams, the Prime six-part is a gruesome slaughter-fest leavened with dry comedy.

Marie's hitmen wipe out a Greek village, an IT wiz in a Libyan prison has four fingers chopped off and tries to blackmail Cross, sealing his fate.

Ezra, on loan from *Love Island*, ends up killing his old man, and the big clue "Chantaine" (French marmalade) was a red herring. Nice yacht though.

The best drama all week was sporting - the *British & Irish Lions* pulled off the greatest comeback since Lazarus against the Wallabies. England's footballing women also excelled.



X MARKS THE SPOT Rob Brydon presenting *Destination X*



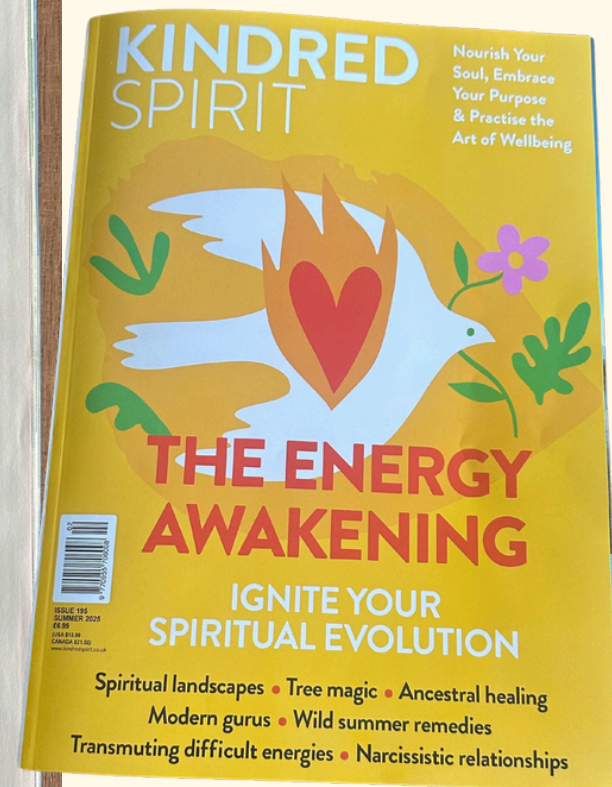
TARGET: Kesley Hawes and Edward Hawes in *The Assassin*

GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Yorkshire Life, June 2025



Kindred Spirit Magazine, May 2025



Telegraph & Argus, May 2025

PAGE 30

COMMENT & ANALYSIS

Discover who's saying what @ telegraphandargus.co.uk

Monday, May 19, 2025



SHEEP BRING JOY TO THOSE IN DESPAIR

GRACE OLSON
- therapist and author - shares the magic of sheep therapy

"WHAT on earth is sheep therapy?" I got asked this question a lot and it's a tough one to answer. So, I'll start at the beginning of this unusual work. I am now immersed in. Many years ago, I suffered from postnatal depression and in an attempt to feel better, I went back to horse riding. I'd loved my riding lessons as a youngster and knew this was the tonic I needed. I was right. Being outside with horses helped me massively and then I accidentally ended up receiving a therapy session which involved horses. It was mind-blowing. The interaction between myself and the horse was more effective than any human therapist could ever be. I decided to explore this more and eventually I became a certified TLM level 2 equine assisted coach and set up my practice in Ecup, West Yorkshire. I was already a qualified massage therapist and had been treating people with life-threatening illnesses for many years so I was used to being with people who were deeply suffering.

One day I was offered a couple of young sheep who had been bottle-fed and needed a home. Without much thought, I said 'Yes'. I had absolutely no experience of sheep at all so it was a steep learning curve. But the thing that surprised me the most was how friendly they were. They were more like dogs than any dog I'd met - playful, cuddly and very impulsive.

It was a sunny afternoon when a very depressed lady came for a sheep therapy session. The horses were grazing and Merlin, the sheep, was watching. He watched with great intensity as the lady talked to me about her sadness. Suddenly, Merlin marched over to the woman and he pushed himself into her knees which made her bend down to greet him with surprise. She gave him a cuddle and laughed at how comical he was. She hadn't laughed in over a year. Merlin stayed with her for a considerable amount of time and the lady ended up roaring with laughter. She left feeling better than

ever and I was left feeling absolutely stunned. Merlin seemed to smile as he walked casually away back to his dinner.

Over the course of a couple of months, Merlin grew in confidence and was always the first animal to choose to engage with anyone who visited our field. All my animals are known, none of them are forced to do therapy work. The process happens in an organic way.

So, what actually happens in a sheep therapy session? Well, it's different for each person, but generally, how it works is this...

The person arrives feeling horrendous. Often, it's a combination of fear of their illness, sadness, anger and grief. We walk around the field and I listen as they talk. Eventually, one or more of the sheep will come and join us on our walk and they'll offer themselves very physically to

the person. This is such an unusual experience that it brings great joy to the situation. All the senses are engaged and focussed on the sheep - how woolly they feel, how wonderful they smell, how huge they are to cuddle.

Sheep are very laid-back and this triggers deep relaxation in the person who is with them - this is a result of mirror neurones in our brains which help to switch our nervous system into chill-out mode.

After a while we sit down on low stools so it's easier to cuddle the sheep and by now, the person is feeling so liberated that everything they need to say can be said. I have learned how to listen deeply and ask questions to help people dive deeply into their subconscious to unearth the hidden stresses that may be causing their symptoms to be worse.

We all carry various sadnesses from life experiences that can

burst if left inside to rot. Talking about things in a non-judgemental, constructive way can help to lessen the severity of physical illness. In this way of freeing the heart from its burden of sorrow, people can get the best results out of their medical treatments and live longer and happier lives.

My wonderful sheep have featured several times on channel 5's The Yorkshire Vet and I have also written several books about my animals - some are for children and some are for adults. These books are full of valuable life lessons written in a fun way so they're very easy to read and absorb. They are an extension of my therapy work and my wish is to one day be able to earn my income from book sales so that I can treat terminally ill people for free.

* Here is my website for more details: graceolsonauthor.com



Grace with Merlin (looking at camera) and some of her other sheep. Image: Pooch and Ponies.

Left: Merlin during an emotional therapy session with a grieving mother

Telegraph & Argus
The West Wimp, The New Hall, Newhall Way, Bradford BD5 8FF. Established 1996

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 Regulated

GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Weekend Magazine Front Cover, April 2025



Living North Magazine, April 2025



Creature Comfort

Author and therapist Grace Olson's pet sheep are changing lives. Grace shares the healing powers of animals, and her own inspiring story, with Living North

You might've spotted Grace, a mum from Leeds, on Channel 5's The Yorkshire Vet with her therapy sheep, including three Clun Forest and one Blue Texel, on her farm in Fecup. She's also a best-selling author and her goal is to use the income from book sales to help people find inner peace with her horses and sheep, for free.

Grace herself has experienced mental health issues and depression since the age of five, and attempted suicide when she was 14. She started horse riding as a child. 'I think it's in your blood,' Grace says. 'My mother really loved horses and she probably first took my sister and I riding when I was three or four. We'd always go riding as a family in the summer holidays. Even my dad used to ride.'



'It's like they know which sheep is the right one for a job'

'It was when I became a mother myself that I got back into it because I had such hideous post-natal depression. I just needed to feel better, and horses were always the thing that made me happy. I got back into riding and it was transformative.'

Grace began practising massage therapy, and later began treating people with cancer with a specific treatment called lymphatic drainage massage. 'But when the horses healed my post-natal depression, I realised there was something in it,' she says. 'By that time I had my own horses so I got a qualification to do equine-facilitated coaching.'

Grace's therapy sheep came into her life by accident. 'I was offered a couple of sheep as pets that I'd been bottle fed,' she says. 'Because we have so many hideous weeds in our field, I thought they'll eat the weeds that the horses don't eat so I essentially got them as lawn mowers, but I was not expecting them to be like dogs! They're so loving and that was really, really surprising. A lady came for some equine therapy a year after her husband had died from a heart attack and she was in shock and depressed. Merlin, one of my sheep, looked at her and you could imagine him thinking 'I can do better than those horses.' He walked up to her and pushed his body into her so she had to bend down. She gave him a cuddle and just laughed. That comedic moment of cuddling a sheep made me realise how awesome sheep are.'

'When I do my therapy I don't put a head collar on a horse. They're out there in the field and it's very free and I allow the

animals to make their own decision whether they want to get involved or not.' Grace's sheep roam free in the field too. 'It's like they know which sheep is the right one for a job,' she laughs.

Grace has researched the science behind this, and found that some studies show that they can regulate our nervous system. 'There's an unusual factor of cuddling an animal that you can't normally get near to,' she explains. 'People expect to be able to touch a horse but nobody expects to be able to touch a sheep. It's a massive sensory thing, especially with the density and smell of the wool.'

Sheep are either eating or chewing the cud and Grace explains how this interaction with them activates our parasympathetic nervous system. 'In every mammal's brain we have things called mirror neurons and they mirror the animal that's nearest to us. If you're near someone who's really chilled out and relaxed, your brain will put you in a relaxed mode as well and when you're in that relaxed mode, that's when your body can heal itself. It's a real thing that happens, not just a load of whimsical nonsense.'

Grace and her sheep have appeared on The Yorkshire Vet and Julian Norton has treated the sheep, and even meditated with Merlin. 'It's helped me share more about what I'm doing too,' she adds. 'How lucky is that? I'm a self-published author and they filmed my book launch.'



'If we can help children to believe that they are in control of their story, and that they can make their life happy, that's programmed in there before their hormones kick in as a teenager'

Grace began writing in lockdown, posting short stories on Facebook when she couldn't do her close-contact therapy work. Her followers soon asked for a book, and her debut novel, The Yard - How A Horse Healed My Heart, became a number one best-seller on Amazon. 'When I appeared on The Yorkshire Vet, I thought it would be a good idea to write a children's book about my sheep,' explains Grace. 'What happened when I actually started writing the story was that a deeper story came through - it was so meaningful and positive.'

'I could see why I had written these books. I'm a very sensitive person and I can use it to my advantage now that I'm older, but when you're little you're completely at the victim of your emotions and your brain. I was depressed and suicidal at a very young age but if I'd been

taught as a youngster that I could control the thoughts in my head, things might have been different.'

'If we can help children to believe that they are in control of their story, and that they can make their life happy, that's programmed in there before their hormones kick in as a teenager. These books I've written are cute stories that are beautifully illustrated but their meaning is so important. Each one has a different meaning that I really feel will stand a child in good stead. It's like this is an extension of my therapy work because it can only treat one person at a time, but a book can help endless amounts of people.'

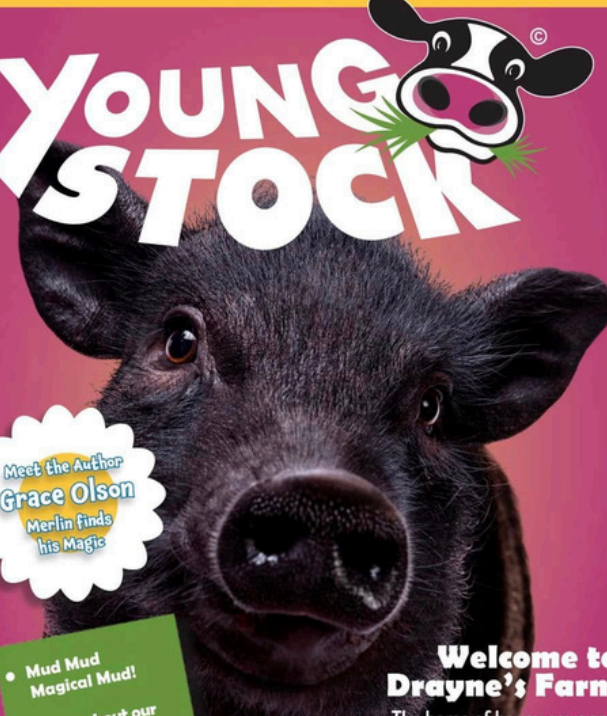
Grace's books and more information about her animals and therapy can be found at graceolsonauthor.com.



GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Young Stock Magazine, Spring 2025

Cultivating our future farmers



YOUNG STOCK

Meet the Author
Grace Olson
Merlin finds his Magic

- Mud Mud Magical Mud!
- Learn about our ancient hedgerows
- Farming in Ireland

Welcome to Drayne's Farm
The home of happy cows and tasty wholesome dairy products

Spring time Animal facts!
... and much more farming fun inside!

Meet the Author
Grace Olson
Merlin finds his Magic

Merlin Finds His Magic by Grace Olson is a captivating story about Merlin's journey of self-discovery, where he learns to embrace his hidden powers and the responsibility that comes with them.



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Have you always wanted to be a children's author?

No it happened by accident! I was avoiding editing a novel because I was being a bit lazy. So I decided I'd have a go at writing a children's book just to see if I could do it!

What part of the book was the most fun to write?

All of it! I absolutely love writing children's books because you can let your imagination run wild. Children are magical so writing books for them ignites a magic in me.

Are any of the books you write inspired from your own childhood or own experiences?

My two memoir-novels, The Yard and The Farm, are all about my life experiences (with a tiny bit of fiction added but not much). My sheepy children's books are very much based on the lives and experiences of my real pet sheep and their unique personalities.

When you begin writing do you know what the ending will be?

No, it always surprises me how my books end! I always say "Wow I didn't see that coming!"

How do you channel your inner child to write your stories?

This is a wonderful question. When I write I feel that I am channeling from something external. Like the words come through from somewhere else. However, my inner child did help write my book, The Farm, and it happened without me trying. Like it was already there ready to come out.

Approximately how long does it take to complete one of your books?

Another great question! It takes a couple of months to write and edit the children's books. It's important to let ideas bubble

and grow and change. It took two years to write and edit each of the big books. They're over 95,000 words so it's a lot of work and I don't like to rush because I want to create something that will be meaningful for people to read.

Finally, please can you share how your sheep are regulars on The Yorkshire Vet?

Merlin was the first of my sheep to be featured on The Yorkshire Vet and he was filmed doing an agility course with Julian the vet. My sheep have also been filmed doing their healing work. The best thing ever was when my book launch for Merlin Finds His Magic was featured on The Yorkshire Vet!

Competition Time!

We have two copies of Merlin finds his Magic to give away! To enter answer this question

How many words are in the book?

Email your answers by 15th April to susannah.theyoungstock@gmail.com

Good luck!



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GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

The People's Friend Magazine, March 2025



Country Smallholder
February 2025

THE COUNTRY
SMALLHOLDER

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Share in the therapy sheep experience

The chance to win one of ten books in a series designed to empower young minds where 'Merlin finds his magic'



Grace and her sheep

Regular readers of The Country Smallholder magazine may recall the enigmatic therapy sheep who have been featured previously. The small flock of unusual sheep have since made a big name for themselves on the popular channel 5 programme, The Yorkshire Vet and as a result, their keeper, Grace Olson, has written a series of books about them.

'Being on the television was such an amazing opportunity to show people how versatile sheep can be. For centuries they have provided mankind with wool and meat but for me, they offer a different dimension on which was completely unexpected.'

Grace explained how she had originally taken on the sheep mainly to keep the weeds down in her horse pasture and had planned to spin their wool to make blankets.

TAKING PART IN 'THE YORKSHIRE VET' ON TELEVISION

'But they revealed a depth of character that really surprised me and they became very effective therapy animals. When I was invited to take part in The Yorkshire Vet it was wonderful to see the response from viewers. People found me via social media and messaged to say how fascinating it was to see the work my sheep do.'



Grace's sheep provide comfort for people

Grace's sheep provide comfort for people suffering deep despair but they can only treat one person at a time. It was this realisation that triggered Grace, already a successfully published memoir author, to write children's stories so that her magical sheep could reach more people.

'My aim is to help young minds grow into happy adults through the magic of empowering stories. Each book is a whimsical tale featuring my individual sheep and their unique personalities. They are fun but have a poignant message which will help children to see what really matters in life. The stories will help them to feel brave enough to be the best that they can be when faced with challenges, and embrace their authentic selves,' says Grace.

The books are enhanced by beautiful, watercolour illustrations by the artist Andrew Prescott, and are reminiscent of classic tales such as Peter Rabbit, The Wind In The Willows and Winnie The Pooh.

IT'S NOT ONLY CHILDREN THAT LOVE THE BOOKS

When the first story, Merlin Finds His Magic, was published, Grace was so astonished by the volume of positive messages from readers that it spurred her on to publish a second book, Galahad

Finds His Voice sold out on Amazon the first day of publication.

'What has amazed me the most is that loads of adults have bought the books for themselves and find them to be very therapeutic. It's been quite emotional to have received such tremendous feedback.'

The third in the series, Berel Finds His Wings, is due to be published on March 3rd and is the tale of a little lamb with low self-esteem. He is presented with a terrific challenge in which he has to dig deep and harness the power of his mind in order to succeed. It's a very beautiful and empowering story.

There will be one more sheepy story published later this year, entitled Rhubarb Finds His Family. This is a tale about discovering how we are all part of one big family called Mother Nature.



Win this book

Grace is offering 10 readers of The Country Smallholder the chance to win a signed copy of the first in the series, Merlin Finds His Magic. To enter simply scan the QR code or head to <https://bit.ly/3Eck2G>

Check out more on Grace on graceolsonauthor.com



Country Living, Feb 2025

WELLBEING



MY NATURE FIX

Continuing our series on the healing powers of green spaces

This month: Grace Olson had a major mental health crisis at just 15. It sparked an extraordinary insight into the healing power of animals – and a new vocation as a “sheep therapist”

It's hard being an empty nester but my pet sheep help me cope. They're my forever children and fill the gap while my daughter is at university. I've got five sheep, including three Clan Forest and one Blue Tassel, and keep them on a farm in Eccles, just outside Leeds, where I live. Like dogs, they have distinct personalities. Merlin is especially funny and Galahad is the cuddle king.

Whenever I'm having a difficult time, I'll go to the field to be with them. They're such heart healers and have become an invaluable part of my work as a therapist.

Sheep came into my life by accident. I'd been working as an equine-facilitated coach, using horses to help people open up, and a friend told me about two sheep needing a home. I took them on, but immediately wondered what I'd let myself in for – they can be hard work. Yet as we spent time together, I started to understand them. They're such calm, peaceful and intelligent creatures.

Studies show they can regulate our nervous system. Interacting with sheep activates our parasympathetic nervous system, the network of nerves that helps us relax. Just watching them chewing the cud is meditative. I can really relate to the shepherd who of yesteryear who lived with their flocks.

Animals have always been important to me. We didn't have much money when we were growing up, but my mum saved enough so my older sister and I could have riding lessons. She had loved helping out at her local stables where she was young and wanted to pass on her passion to us. I started riding when I was five and they were my happiest childhood memories. When I was on the horse, I was in the moment, not thinking about anything else. It was joyous.

In my darkest hour, riding pulled me through. I was badly bullied when I was young, but never had the power to tell my bully to leave

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WELLBEING

My sheep have helped people feel happier at the worst time of their lives

me alone. I didn't talk to my family about what was happening and when I was 15, I tried to take my own life. But I realised in that moment that I wanted to live and started the road to recovery.

I hadn't ridden for a while, but a local friend let me use their retired racehorse, Tommy. He was such a character and we rode around the countryside having amazing adventures. It was so freeing. There was no sadness, just happiness in my heart.

These memories changed the course of my life. I'd always assumed I'd have a textbook birth. Instead, it was complicated and I suffered badly from postnatal depression. I thought back to the wonderful times I'd had with Tommy and knew I had to reconnect with nature.

Once again, I turned to horses. I cantered through ancient woods, past old flax mills and over bubbling streams. Horses are big packets of healing and I soon felt like myself again. I knew then that animals had to be part of my work.

My sheep have helped people feel happier at the worst time of their lives. One lady came to be with the horses after losing her husband, but Merlin marched over to her instead. She gave him a hug and laughed for the first time in a year. It's amazing to watch moments like that. I've helped people overcome illnesses, deal with personal trauma and rebuild their self-esteem.

We're not used to engaging with sheep. We tend to see them from afar in fields, so there's something unique about the situation that helps people talk. Even just hugging them can feel supportive. It's like smuggling fresh wool.

Merlin and my other animals inspired me to write. When we were in lockdown, I started sharing tales of the horses on Facebook and established a large following. Encouraged by my audience, I've written three books. The first two are semi-autobiographical, but the latest, *Merlin Finds His Magic*, is a children's story – though I've had messages from adults who have been reassured by it. I hope it brings sheep therapy to people who can't come to me in Yorkshire.

I'm proud to be part of James Herriot's legacy. The sheep and I have appeared on Channel 5's *The Yorkshire Vet* a few times, presented by Peter Wright, who was trained by James Herriot, and Julian Norton. Julian has treated the sheep and he even meditated with Merlin. I post videos of Merlin on the Friends of The Yorkshire Vet Facebook page. Sheep are often misunderstood, so it's wonderful to show them as the amazing creatures they are.

TO FIND OUT MORE about Grace's work and her books, head to graceolsonauthor.com.



Creature COMFORTS

Discover the healing power of animals at one of these therapy farms across the UK

Bash-Land, Sheep Therapy and Sanctuary in Worcestershire runs sessions to improve mental health, boost mood and cope with the stresses and strains of modern life. bashland.co.uk

Owens's Farm Therapies in Lewes, East Sussex, harnesses the calming nature of sheep and ponies to help individuals tune into their emotions and overcome challenges such as depression and bereavement. owensfarmtherapies.co.uk

Clinks Care Farm in Norfolk provides placements to disadvantaged people who use the farm and its animals as a therapeutic place to learn and grow. clinksarefarm.org.uk

Susan's Farm in Carlisle, Cumbria, helps vulnerable adults and young people with learning difficulties, challenging behaviour or mental or physical health problems through hands-on tasks on the farm. susansfarm.co.uk

Middle England Farm, Hensley in Aiden, Warwickshire, has goats, alpacas and other animals, which support a variety of visitors including those with dementia, learning disabilities and ADHD. middleenglandfarm.co.uk/care-farm

ART: DREW BY HELEN DUNN; PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADRIAN BROWN; PHOTOGRAPHY: ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMMA SMITH

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Yorkshire Post, Feb 2025

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Lifestyle | People

THE YORKSHIRE POST
Monday February 17 2025 13

Turn to sheep for therapy, says Grace

Author and therapist Grace Olson is spreading positive messages to young people with her series of children's books, inspired by her therapy sheep. Laura Reid reports.

WHEN Grace Olson was 16, she sent off her first book to the celebrated author Sir Terry Pratchett. It was an illustrated, comical tale about the human body – and she wanted to hear his thoughts.

When the writer wrote back, she was stunned. But she could kick herself for what happened next – and the fact that she can't even apologise to the late, great for her 'rudeness'.

She never replied to his advice on how to get the book published, instead shoving his letter – and her manuscript – to the back of a cupboard. "I wish I could go back in time and make myself reply to him," the now 51-year-old reflects.

"I wish I knew why I didn't reply. I think it was because he advised me on how to present the book for an agent and I didn't believe that anyone would think it was good enough. So I put it away to avoid rejection. I'm braver now."

Grace now also has four books to her name. The fifth is due out in a fortnight's time and her sixth is in editing for publication later this year. Those latter two will complete a four-part series which is aimed at children and inspired by Grace's small flock of sheep.

"Each book is about one of my sheep and their characters," she says. "However, each story also has a really vital message to empower children and help them to create their own positive lives. The books are not preachy, they're delightful tales, so the message comes through in a really natural way within the story."

Grace's six sheep live close to the edge of the Harwood estate, in Eccup, Leeds and will likely be familiar to fans of the Channel 5 documentary series, *The Yorkshire Vet*, after featuring in the show on several occasions.

Along with horses, they form part of Grace's animal assisted therapy work, helping people with mental illnesses or severe depression. Her dream is to run a farm-based therapy centre with free sessions for those seriously unwell.

The books are part of the vision, she explains, to help children realise they're in charge of their lives. They can be powerful, even as a child. The whole thing is one – my stories, my therapy work.

"I feel like I'm fulfilling my sole purpose," she adds. "I feel like the reason I am alive is to help others."

Berel Finds His Wings, illustrated by Andrew Prescott, is out March 3. A book launch will be held on March 9 at 1pm at The Little Bookshop in Chapel Allerton. To book a free ticket, visit the.littlebookshops.co.uk.

Grace, who lives in Moorville, describes her collection of sheep adventure stories as an extension of her therapy work.

The first book, *Merlin Finds His Magic*, explores the idea that true happiness is only experienced when we care for others, she says. She hopes the second – *Galahad Finds His Voice* – reassures young people that it is okay to be different, and, with her upcoming release, *Berel Finds His Wings*, Grace wants to inspire young minds to think positively and "become the heroes of their own destiny".

She says, "Berel was really scared at first and was bullied for being so shy but he found his inner strength and nobody would dare bully him anymore... He's a brilliant therapy sheep because he is so calm and loving. He will stand with people for hours and he's so cute. It just makes you feel better just to be with him."

Grace's sheep and equine therapy is part of her HeavenStone Healing therapeutic offering, with other services including massage therapy, meditation, and spiritual healing. She has been involved in therapy work for 30 years, but only in the past five or six has been working with animals.

It came after a personal discovery of the "healing power of horses". She says the animals helped to transform her mental health and supported her to find inner peace and joy after she struggled with postnatal depression.

Grace's first two books – *The Yard Fire* and *Horse Healed my Heart* and *The Farm: My Journey Deceives* – capture her own experiences. She turned her hand to writing when she was unable to work during the Covid lockdown, initially creating a Facebook page to share short stories and extracts with horse lovers.

Her work with therapy sheep then happened by accident. She was offered her first sheep, Merlin, as a pet to help with grazing. Then, during an equine therapy session, Merlin walked over to a client and nuzzled into the lady's knees until she bent down to cuddle him. "That made her laugh her head off. And that's how sheep therapy was born," says Grace. "He made her laugh and there's no better therapy than laughing."

Now, Merlin is joined by Berel, twins Galahad and Lancelot, Teddy, and baby Rhubarb. The sheep are "dressed out" animals, says Grace, loving and full of personality, but also calm. The human body can mirror that calmness when people are in their presence.

"The animals seem to know who is going to be the therapist, so often it is a sheep," Grace says. "It's incredible."

She has been working with one lady whose teenage son took his own life. "Merlin came up to her and made her laugh. She's been to the field a few times now and she is a different woman. The animals have helped to heal her, to soothe her soul."

Visibly emotional, Grace continues, "There are so many young people taking their own lives. And if they can learn positivity as a young child, they could avoid that as adults. When I was a child, I was so depressed. I tried to take my life several times. I was bullied at school. Four of my six stories are to make children realise they're in charge of their lives... They can be powerful, even as a child. The whole thing is one – my stories, my therapy work."

Grace says, "It's incredible."



COUNTING SHEEP: Children's book writer Grace Olson with The Yorkshire Vet, Julian Norton, and some of her therapy sheep.

The Country Smallholder
August 2024

THE COUNTRY
SMALLHOLDER

THERAPY SHEEP

How Merlin the sheep works magic on and off screen

Originally born to be someone's dinner, Merlin the sheep is now the star of a book and a new favourite on Channel 5's popular series, The Yorkshire Vet! How on earth did that happen? We caught up with Merlin's owner to find out more...



Grace's therapy sheep are set to warm hearts on future episodes of The Yorkshire Vet

The last we heard about Merlin was that he was working as a therapy sheep along with Grace Olson's other animals on her smallholding in Eccup, West Yorkshire. But destiny had bigger plans for this little sheep.

"It was pure luck that a friend of mine passed on my sheep agility videos to her friend who is one of the directors on The Yorkshire Vet," said Grace. "She was hooked and called me to ask if I might need a vet and if so, could they come and film?"

As fate would have it, Merlin did have a stubborn issue with his ear following an infection so Julian Norton, The Yorkshire Vet, and the team popped over to help.

"It was such fun! As a farm vet used to dealing with large flocks of difficult-to-handle sheep, Julian was really surprised at how friendly and cuddly Merlin was. He even had a run around the obstacle course with Merlin which was absolutely hilarious!"

Julian and the camera crew were mesmerised by the interactions that they received from Merlin and the feature was a big hit on the current series.

DREAM TO PROVIDE FREE THERAPY FOR PEOPLE

"People love to see 'love' and my sheep and I give that in abundance in our work as therapists. We work primarily with terminally ill people and it's such a humbling experience to be able to bring joy to people who are living with such fear and discomfort."

Grace's big dream is to be able to provide free therapy for people who need help but can't afford it and she is utilising her skills as an author to raise money to fulfil this dream.

"Before the Yorkshire Vet came along, I had already



Merlin's book is out now



Cheeky Merlin knocking the Talk TV cameraman off his feet!



Julian Norton, The Yorkshire Vet is now a firm favourite of Merlin the sheep

published a novel which reached number 1 bestseller on Amazon. So it made sense to write a children's book about Merlin knowing that he was set to become a TV sheep."

Merlin Finds His Magic is a beautifully illustrated first chapter book for children aged 5-10 and is all about how Merlin discovered his unique gift of making people happy.

"It's written in the style of a classic fable, very heart-warming and charming and the illustrations are watercolours by a wonderful artist so it's visually a very special book. I wrote it to also appeal to adults so that they can enjoy it when they're reading it to their kids."

Merlin's book has been so popular that it attracted the attention of BBC radio Leeds where Grace enjoyed a fun interview on the Gayle Lofthouse show and that led to a fabulous feature on Talk TV.

"Merlin was so cheeky! He wasn't getting enough attention during the filming so he decided to knock the cameraman off his feet! Fortunately, he had a good sense of humour..."

SO WHAT'S NEXT ON THE HORIZON FOR MERLIN AND THE REST OF THE WOOLLY THERAPY GANG?

"Well, I'm not allowed to give away any details but there are a few more features in the can with The Yorkshire Vet and they're all really fun and heart-warming. We also have some features coming up with the BBC."

Will there be any more sheep books to add to the collection?

"Yes! I am currently writing a story featuring my Clun Forest sheep and then after that there will be one about my very cute Blue Texel. I want children to see how special sheep are and what better way than in the form of a lovely story?"

If you would like to learn more about Grace and her books and therapy work, have a look at her website www.graceolsonauthor.com.

(Ruminations of a Yorkshire Vet by Julian Norton is out now and will be followed by New Pastures for a Yorkshire Vet in autumn 2024 - extract in September's The Country Smallholder)



Merlin loves being the star of a children's book!

Snapshot Magazine
July 2024

Amazing Grace Olson



A special feature on author Grace Olson

Grace Olson is an author, therapist and animal lover based in Leeds, West Yorkshire. She is the writer of three best-selling books and has featured on Channel 5's *The Yorkshire Vet* with her wonderful therapy sheep. She has been a therapist for 30 years, helping people with a wide range of problems. Her goal is to set up a 'therapy farm' with the proceeds from her books, so that she can afford to do her special therapy work with her animals at no cost for people with terminal illness. Her books are both amusing and enlightening as she shares her own personal life stories with a refreshing candour.

The Yard by Grace Olson

This is a refreshingly honest memoir about post-natal depression, vulnerability and low self esteem - and how the author found a way through her problems as she spent time at a local stables allowing the miracle of a rescued horse to open her heart and soul like a flower opening in the sunshine. The book is a beautifully written memoir full of amusing stories, anecdotes, and characters (with both two and four legs!). Grace hopes to set up a farm-based therapy centre for terminally ill people to share the wonders of the therapeutic benefits of animals with a wider audience, with the proceeds of the sale of this book going towards making that dream a reality. Recommended.



The Farm by Grace Olson



Grace continues her story, weaving her horse-related escapades into a deeply personal and honest account of her own emotional and mental struggles. Reaching back into her own childhood, and cleverly reflecting her experiences with those of her own daughter, Grace manages to cover many important topics with a light yet impressive touch, much like the touch that her wayward horse responds best to. Grace's story has the power to reach into the heart of anyone who has been the victim of bullying, offering solace and the potential for self-discovery and empowerment. Grace's ongoing hilarious horsey exploits and experiences also add an extra layer of excellent entertainment.

Merlin Finds his Magic by Grace Olson

Separated from the flock, Merlin the lamb desperately yearns to return home. His mummy had told him he was magic. Could his magic help him to get back to her? Merlin has no idea what his magic does but life presents him with several new companions in the form of three bouncy goats, three wise horses and a little girl who is able to understand what animals say. Each one teaches him that nature surrounds us with magic all the time. A whimsical tale for young and old. This is a beautifully illustrated book that will delight readers of all ages - not just children - with a timeless message to inspire and encourage us all.



Absolutely Yorkshire Magazine, July 2024



"Sheep can help lead to a deep feeling of inner peace"

22 ABSOLUTELY magazine

CULTURE · INTERVIEW

Animal SOS

Grace Olson has won us over with her hilarious and heartfelt books, not to mention making the lives of many a happier place. Absolutely heads to Leeds to find out more

By MARK KEBBLE

Considering the topics of post-natal depression, bullying and death come up in a conversation with Grace Olson, you'd expect it to be a real downer – but time with the Leeds local Absolutely magazine's head, who has a bad day. Absolutely urges you to seek out her work – it will, we guarantee, put a smile on your face. We first came across Grace when we heard about her book, *The Yard*. How A Horse Healed My Heart. "I was very inspired by James Herriot and his vivid descriptions of the rolling Yorkshire countryside and the hilarious farming characters," she explains its origins. "It was lockdown and I was unable to do my therapy work, but I wanted to do something that would uplift people. So I wrote one little memoir about a very funny old horse I'd been caring for and posted it in a horse Facebook group. The response was amazing! Several hundred people loved it and that inspired me to set up my own Facebook page where I wrote a weekly story to entertain people. The page rapidly gathered thousands of

followers and they all wanted a book, so as I had acres of spare time, I wrote *The Yard*. How did he feel writing the book? "I loved writing the e-mailed memories – it made me laugh out loud!" she says with, of course, a laugh. "And I loved reminiscing about the beautiful places in Yorkshire where I had been fortunate to ride out in. But writing my memoirs about the post-natal depression was painful and it did make me cry a lot, however the parts about the healing epiphanies with the horses were very therapeutic for me." The path to the healing magic of animals wasn't a straightforward one. "I was very aware of that I felt so depressed to be a mother," she says. "So many people are desperate to become parents and have difficulty conceiving, so I felt grateful and that made me hide my true feelings and pretend that I was really enjoying being a new mum. "To begin with I only had a cat and she was very helpful to spend time with," Grace continues. "We then got a dog and that was hard work but lovely. It was when I returned to horse riding that I began to feel confident and empowered to be more of

the person I had been before the depression knocked me down. There is something magical about horses that dissolves your sadness and brings you back into the light." Grace was inspired to look into a career that revolved around therapy. "When I qualified as a counsellor, I was full of self-doubt so to avoid actually launching my business, I went on another massage course!" she laughs. "The teacher taught me a specific treatment – manual lymphatic drainage – for fluid removal and she said 'Now go out there and get working!' so I found the courage to begin. "This treatment enabled me to offer help to post-operative cancer patients who needed fluid draining therapy and my name grew as a therapist, which brought me more and more people. Over 20 years later I learned equine facilitated coaching and, during a session, one of my pet sheep chose to involve himself and so the magic of sheep therapy began by accident." It is sheep therapy that caught the eye of Channel 4's *The Yorkshire Vet*, and the show has regularly featured her show. "They are usually a very shy type of animal that people only see at a distance and they are unable to touch them. To be able to get

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close enough to cuddle a sheep is a very unusual experience that truly delights people," Grace explains their power. "Sheep are the most adaptable mammal, able to cope with many changes of environment. This means that they are calm more often than they are stressed. They are mainly active in their 'parasympathetic nervous system' (PNS) – eating and digesting, conserving their energy. Being near a sheep enables people to access their own PNS leading to a deep feeling of inner peace and a reduction in stress hormones." There's no getting away from the fact that her work will see her encounter death. "I cry – a lot," she admits. "I create real relationships. It is the greatest honour to serve someone who is on their outward journey."



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Her books, too, continue to spread happiness and inspire many. *Merlin and the Magic* was a book for a younger audience with a sheep as the star of the show, and a follow up to *The Yard* is due out now. "The Farm has many layers," Grace explains. "Firstly, it's a beautiful story full of Yorkshire countryside and eccentric characters with a lot of comedy action and dialogue. But it is also a deep dive into my past history of having been a victim of bullying. Once again, the horses come to my rescue and the reader experiences my growth and transformation." Home life in Leeds has been the perfect backdrop for Grace to write *The Farm*. "I love nature the most so I am extremely fortunate that every day I get to enjoy walks in the glorious woods with my greyhound and then spend time at our smallholding, near Harwood, which has many wildlife visitors. We have stags, ewes, Red Kites, cute little rabbits, wild geese and so many fabulous song birds," she smiles. "I love Chapel Allerton, which is a short walk from where I live, because it has so many fabulous independent shops such as The Glasshouse Gallery, which has

unique crystal jewellery, and a wonderful independent shop called The Little Bookshop who have supported my books. It also has lots of cafes and restaurants. I love our East Coast too. My favourite place to visit is Robin Hood's Bay for its ever-changing rocky beach full of wonderful rockpools. I also love Gouthwaite because it's filled with hundreds of free-ranging sheep. It's sheep heaven!" Absolutely isn't surprised, but this interview ends with Grace thinking about others. "The vision is at least 15 acres of land in Yorkshire and a lovely farmhouse that can be used as an indoor therapy centre with other practitioners – massage, healing, homoeopathy, osteopathy, acupuncture, yoga, meditation, art therapy, dance therapy, music therapy, writing therapy," she says on her dream to have a therapy farm. "The outdoor therapy will involve my sheep and horses and hopefully some cows in the future. Meditation and yoga in nature – experiencing peace, calm and happiness. "I want to offer a complete package of real care for people facing terminal illness and their loved ones. I want it to be a charity so that people who can't afford it can still come and be immersed in a loving and supportive environment. A place where their loved ones will always be welcome to visit after they have gone."



GRACE OLSON

Yorkshire Post, June 2024

The Big Interview

Embracing tonic

Yorkshire Vet regular Grace Olson talks to Louisa Gregson about her life and how she comforts people with terminal illnesses through her farm animals and books.

WHEN an imposing horse placed its nose directly over Yorkshire Vet regular Grace Olson's heart, she sobbed uncontrollably from the "depths of her soul". Years of crippling depression, guilt and trauma melted away in the middle of a field and placing her hands on the horse's shoulders, Grace knew her life, blighted by mental health issues from the age of five, would never be the same again. From being a troubled infant, Grace, from Leeds, says she struggled with simply being alive, despite having a loving upbringing, and years of being bullied at school drove her to an attempted teenage suicide. Suffering PTSD after giving birth to her daughter, Tali, brought further pain, but she finally found healing in her love of horses and now helps terminally ill people to find inner peace with the help of therapy sheep on her Yorkshire farm.

Grace, who is now 50, says she was bullied at school from the age of seven to 14, when her ordeal resulted in drastic consequences. "I was a very sensitive person. I was one of the most popular people in the school and had loads of friends – but a girl at school just didn't like me, and I was so soft-natured that I wanted to appease her. My mother was amazing and very loving but over-protective. I wasn't taught how to stand up for myself and I was filled with fear every morning before school."

Describing her suicide attempt, Grace says: "It was like I snapped. I just walked home and very calmly I swallowed a whole bottle of painkillers and went upstairs to my room to lie down to die. Then suddenly this voice within me said: 'You have got to sort this out.' I told the lady across the road and she called an ambulance. I had to have my stomach pumped and see a psychiatrist. My poor mother was not aware of me being bullied or how bad I was feeling – it was just hideous."

Despite moving schools, Grace says she simply attracted more bullies. She also suffered when she became a mother herself in her early thirties. Following a traumatic caesarean, Grace says she found herself unable to love her baby.

"I was expecting it to be this amazing experience to become a mother. I was really looking forward to it but when it happened it was awful. I was in shock. I had a lot of blood loss. I was low in iron and B vitamins and then there I was having to look after this baby. It was an absolute horror show."

"I managed to do all the practical things be-

cause I wanted her to have good memories. But I just didn't feel any emotion whatsoever – just fear and depression. It took me seven years to really love my daughter."

Grace is aware of a stigma attached to mothers who say they struggle with motherhood – a taboo she addresses in her books *The Farm*, published earlier this month, and *The Yard* and hopes will encourage more women to open up. "That's my whole purpose of writing – the books are full of comedy. They're very similar to the James Herriot books, so they're easy to read. But they go very deep and I want ordinary women to be able to read these books and know that, actually, it's normal to feel totally s***c."

For Grace, animals were a huge part of her healing. It was another encounter with bullying and a feral pony that finally taught her self-worth. "Me and my friend took on a livery yard and I was bullied by a woman in my own livery. It was terrifying, like being back at school. Then my friend got a young pony that was so badly behaved and we had no boundaries – we couldn't stop her from barging into us and doing what she wanted. We took her to a riding school and we learned techniques of how to value yourself and how to not be bullied."

She adds: "Horses need to know where your stop line is. It's all about feeling confident within yourself and thinking 'no you won't stop over the line and walk all the way through me'. From learning how to keep myself safe from this feral pony, I learned I actually had value and I felt powerful enough to speak to the woman and it changed everything."



EWIE TURN: Main picture, Grace with two of the therapy sheep on her farm and, above, alongside fellow Yorkshire Vet Julian Norton.

But it was an encounter with a huge brown horse that finally helped Grace find peace and led her towards her work with animals and dying people. After travelling to a beautiful mountain farm in Wales to learn about a bridle for a problematic horse, she was invited to pick out a horse she didn't like the look of. "I pointed to this big brown sports horse. All the horses were trotting past and he came past me – but he stopped and put his nose on my heart, and I just started crying."

"The lady said: 'Just put your hands on his shoulder', so I stood next to him and did so and all these tears just came. I was properly sobbing from the depth of my soul. It was absolutely bizarre. She said: 'He's telling you that you don't need to be afraid of him' and I continued crying even more. She asked: 'What are you crying about?' and my mind went right into my feelings of guilt and remorse about being a bad mother. She then asked: 'So who took care of your baby?' Was it you or somebody else?' and I said it was me. She asked me what I did with her and so I told her all about all the groups that I took her to and the routine I put her in."

"In that conversation, I realised I had done so much for her. But actually that is love. It was just a light-bulb moment. I was able to realise that love isn't a feeling, it's doing."

From then on, Grace, already a qualified massage therapist, realised the power of healing with animals, signing up to a degree-level coaching course, learning to observe horse body language within a therapy session.

She says her work with therapy sheep happened by accident when she was offered a couple of pet sheep and knew they were good for grazing. "I got these sheep for practical reasons but they're like dogs, they're so loving. It was phenomenal. During a therapy session, my sheep Merlin was watching me and walked up to this woman and just barged into her and made her cuddle him."

Today Grace works with terminally ill patients, helping them face death with the help of five sheep including Merlin. "People who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness are filled with fear because when you're faced with your own mortality, it's terrifying," she says. "The purpose of the session is for them to find inner peace and calmness. The sheep help because they are just super-chilled animals. We all have mirror neurons, so we mirror who we're with."

"If you're with a calm sheep, that makes you feel calm. It's unusual to cuddle a sheep, so along with the smell of them and the feel of the wool, it helps people to step into another dimension and relax."

Grace first started working with terminally ill people when she first qualified, nearly 30 years ago, and learned a particular massage which helps cancer patients. "I realised this is my sole purpose – to help people die better. In the process of helping others, you can learn a lot about yourself. I've learned so much from terminally ill people and they have changed me completely. Each one has been like a magical gift. I've loved every one of them deeply."



GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Your Horse, May 2024

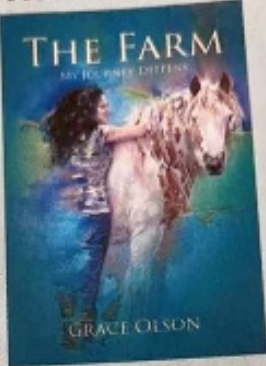
We love...

**EQUESTRIAN AUTHOR PENS
SECOND BOOK**

Grace Olson,
an equestrian
author, has
written a
new book, a
follow up to
her Amazon
bestseller, *The
Yard – How a Horse
Healed my Heart*, and this time she
has tackled the subject of bullying.

"I suffered hideous bullying at a
livery yard, but a feral pony helped
me to learn how to protect myself,"
said Grace, who's new book, *The Farm
– My Journey Deepens*, also chronicles
issues such as unresolved childhood
trauma. It is due to be published on
3 June.

Find out more at [graceolson
author.com](http://graceolsonauthor.com)

The book cover for 'The Farm' by Grace Olson features a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue shirt and jeans, standing in a field and holding the head of a white horse. The title 'THE FARM' is at the top in white, with 'MY JOURNEY DEEPENS' in smaller text below it. The author's name 'GRACE OLSON' is at the bottom.

Yorkshire Evening Post
April 2024

YEP

YORKSHIRE
EVENING
POST

BREAKING

lad at 60

Star quits BBC in tears

Megastar's devastating health update

King Charlie

People

Eccup: I met the Leeds therapy sheep that has healing powers – and everyone should try it



By Geha Pandey
Community Reporter



Comment

Published 7th Apr 2024, 16:30 GMT

Meet Merlin the Therapy Sheep and the rest of the flock with Leeds owner, therapis...
National World - LocalTV

On a little farm in Eccup, past a golf course and near the reservoir, live five sheep.

They belong to qualified equine therapist Grace Olson, of Moortown, who believes it is her 'sole purpose' to treat people. She achieves this with the help of the animals on the farm.



Grace Olson, therapist and author, with her new book Merlin Finds His Magic based on her therapy sheep Merlin. Photo: Submitted | Submitted

The concept of spending time among nature and animals as a means of healing is a long-standing one, backed by many scientific studies.

Grace said the friendly animals on her patch can help people "loosen up" and express their concerns with ease.

But there's a deeper element to it. Grace predominantly works with terminally ill cancer patients, who need a level of emotional support that can be difficult to come by.

Time spent among these "magical" animals can help people face death with less fear, Grace finds.

I spent an hour on the farm earlier this week, and despite not seeking any emotional support or having anything worrisome on my mind, the time that I spent with the five sheep in an open green field led me to easily understand how beneficial this kind of therapy can be for some.

Grace is incredibly easy to speak to thanks to her warm nature but the stars of the show, the sheep, are very well-behaved and eager to meet new people.

Merlin, a sheep that Grace got two years ago, is the most social. Wanting to be pet, scratched and smothered, he spent much of his time brushing up against my leg.

This was new to me – I haven't been on a farm since I was maybe 10 – but I found myself reaching out to the sheep anyway.

Leaving the farm and leaving a therapist in the traditional sense felt largely similar: I felt lighter – maybe it was the fresh air, maybe it was the safe environment that Grace fosters, or maybe it was just Merlin.

Grace has been championing the benefits of spending time with such animals for years. In January, she released a children's book called *Merlin Finds His Magic*, to share just what sheep can do for us.

Many people have got in touch with Grace to say it has also helped them massively, and while it wasn't intentional, Grace says she is fortunate to know she can also offer therapy through written word.

Find out more about Grace Olson and the therapy sheep via her [social media channels](#).

Related topics: [Sheep](#) [Leeds](#) [Animals](#) [Nature](#)



Comment

GOING NUTS: The nuthatch gets its name for its fondness for nuts, which it holds in its claws and chips open with careful chiselling. The word 'hatch' comes from the old French word 'hache' meaning axe or hatchet. Birds rarely travelling far from the woods where they hatch.

Healing powers of Merlin the sheep

I WAS out and about on a sheep farm recently. But this was not a normal sheep farm. And Grace was not a typical farmer. The handful of sheep she cared for would never see an auction mart, nor an abattoir and would have no role in the food chain. Along with a couple of horses, these sheep helped provide therapy for people in need. Was this a worthwhile role for our ovine friends? Over the course of this afternoon visit, I felt sure I'd find the answer.

I first met Grace on the farm to see a magical sheep called Merlin. He had a sore and damaged ear, which was the reason why Grace had come to own him. The farmer who once looked after him did not think it was fixable, so was happy to divest himself of a problem. The ear healed up nicely following treatment with our new light therapy a few months ago. Today, a new male sheep needed castrating so he could co-habit with the rest of the flock without risk of any coitus and concomitant pregnancies. It was a simple process, and afterwards, I spent a bit of time talking about the wider role of the flock. Grace told me about the visitors she had, some suffering from terminal illness, others from mental health problems. All of them felt better after half an hour or so around her calm and apparently empathetic creatures.

"I have lots of people who come and just sit with the sheep. Merlin, especially, is lovely. He actually loves contact with people and af-

Julian Norton *The Yorkshire Vet*

fection," explained Grace, emphasising the words 'lovely' and 'love'. The fluffy sheep had acquired a reputation among her clients, of Arthurian proportions. "They love him. And he loves them," she continued. Kneeling among the sheep, in the warmth of the sun on this wintry day, was indeed an experience which was almost ethereal. Merlin sauntered up to me, then nestled closely, searching for a hug.

It reminded me of a lovely scene in an episode of the final series of a classic Netflix series. Adam is a confused adolescent, struggling with various issues centred around low self-esteem and a difficult relationship with his father. He finally finds his niche in life, helping in the stables at a riding school, looking after the horses. Although he knows nothing about animals, he quickly finds himself at home among the animals and slowly his life

starts to change. One day, his father arrives, also seeking solace for the problems in his life. "Adam, we need to talk," he says. There is a brief and emotional interchange between father and son, before Adam offers his solution.

"Do you want to hug a horse?" says Adam, enlightened by the healing powers of being around animals.

Until I met Grace and Merlin, it had never occurred to me that sheep might have a similar therapeutic effect. Normal sheep, like tiny dots of cotton wool on distant hills, run away from humans and, in fact, most other things. They do not seem to enjoy human contact and prefer the company of their woolly friends.

But maybe it is because they haven't had the right opportunity. Maybe, given half a chance (as I'd discovered today) they, too, thrive on company. It was very enlightening. It reminded me of the huge impact animals can have on humans, often in an unexpected context. Yes, we all know about the special bond associated with

"man's best friend" and every cat owner is well acquainted with that interaction. The perennial "are you a cat or a dog person" question will go on for ever, but it doesn't really matter.

A better question would be: "are you an animal person?" I hope so, because all our lives are better with an animal around.

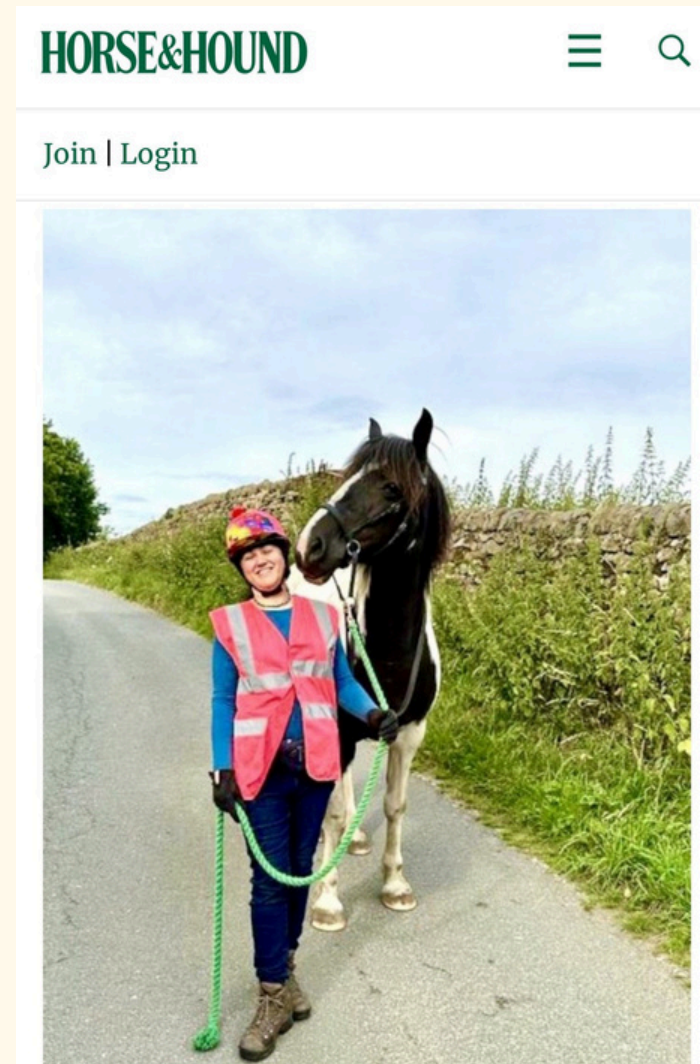


GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

February 2024



Horse & Hound, December 2023



Horse & Hound, November 2023

NEWS *Insider*

Equine therapy field growing as more people see horses' benefits

By BECKY MURRAY

THE equine-assisted therapy field is continuing to grow as more people see the benefits horses can offer.

Dementia, mental health and terminal illness are some areas in which equine-assisted therapy is proving beneficial, and providers are reporting an increase in patients referred by social prescribing (when health professionals refer patients to community support).

The Way of the Horse, founded by Dina Shale, treats children and adults for conditions such as stress, anxiety and trauma – including those who come to her via social prescribing. The business also offers training courses on delivering equine therapy.

"We're seeing the industry grow, especially with people who are not horsey. Most of the people that come to us have never been around horses but they are looking for an answer and we have the solution," Ms Shale told *H&H*. "Our programmes are 'trauma-informed', so it's teaching people to develop and understand their bodies. We use horses to demonstrate the fight and flight mechanism and we help people to understand what stress is and how it manifests in the body.

"Our bodies do the same

sort of thing as horses' do when they are scared of things; when we feel fear, we respond either by going into fight or flight. When you understand the basics of the science behind what is happening in your body when you feel anxious or stressed, you have a chance to calm that nervous system and the tools to regulate it."

Grace Olson of Heaven Stone Healing provides equine-assisted therapy to people with terminal illnesses, and has had clients referred via social prescribing. She told *H&H* the equine-assisted therapy industry is "talked about more".

"My therapy focuses on helping these people just to find inner peace so that they can cope with things like their hospital appointments. Sometimes in sessions all a person wants

"It's a chance to show that horses are for everyone"

GRACE OLSON

to do is just stand with a horse, and that's enough for them," she said.

"Horses have a lot more to offer than we were ever aware of. I personally feel the vibration of a horse is just naturally healing."

Ms Olson was involved in organising a class at Weeton Show on 30 July to celebrate therapy equines. People who could not attend could enter online, and a marquee displayed pictures of the horses and information about them.



The equine-assisted therapy industry continues to grow

"We wanted to celebrate equines as therapists," she said. "If someone had had physical, mental or emotional therapy from any equine, whether they owned the animal or it was at a centre, they could enter."

"The public could meet the horses and handlers and find out how to access this type of help. It's a chance to show that anyone can access horses, even if visiting a rescue centre. Horses are for everyone."

A Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) spokesman told *H&H* the charity now has 50 groups offering "tea with a

pony" sessions for those living with dementia.

"This started in 2018 at Cotswold RDA, which had become aware of the increasing number of people living in their community with a range of life-changing conditions, particularly dementia, and for whom riding was not suitable but who might be helped by some other form of animal-assisted therapy involving horses," said the spokesman.

"Other RDA groups run specialist hippotherapy sessions, and increasingly we are seeing a rise in social

Horses are helping people with mental health issues, dementia and terminal illness, and more are being referred for therapy by health professionals

bit quirky, but they're having positive health and wellbeing outcomes for the people benefiting from them," she said.

"There's a whole spectrum of therapeutic equine services; from Godolphin taking former racehorses into care homes, to horses being used to support military veterans, or people with physical mobility problems. It's huge and it's growing."

"We held an event in March to celebrate our anniversary and we had more than 150 people attend from across the industry, including the Princess Royal, and it shows the attention the sector is getting."

MEETING STANDARDS

MS COLLINS added that the organisation has been "delighted" with the applications it has received to the register.

"We're working on the basis that if people don't meet the standards we will advise them how to do so, rather than just say you're not in," she said.

"The most common things that people need support with are making sure they have a safeguarding policy – or that they're insured. We'll look at their insurance policies and say, 'You're not really covered here for what you're doing', and it's quite a shock for them."

"I think it's been really good because collectively everybody's learned that in some areas there may be a few weaknesses, and that's why the register is needed. It's all helping raise the standard."

Pictures by Getty Images, Stephen Sparkes, Alamy, Peter Noon and Eli Birch/Boots And Hooves

Yorkshire Post
Sept 2023

Horses playing key role in wellbeing



HEALING: Main picture, Grace Olsen with therapy horse Belle, and, above, with Pippa. Below, Galahad the sheep also helps people with depression.

There is a growing interest in using horses as therapy. Emma Ryan spoke to one woman promoting the concept... as well as using sheep.

HORSES have been hailed as a major therapy solution for helping people in a range of conditions from cancer to depression. Author and horse lover, Grace Olsen, who lives in Moortown in Leeds, is hoping to show the public that horses are not just for sport, but for something much deeper.

Earlier this year she was asked by Weeton Show about the possibility of introducing the concept of therapy horses at its annual event.

The show, held at the end of July, had introduced a new class called Community Pony where people were asked to nominate an equine that had helped them feel empowered, develop confidence and have the ability to deal with everyday life better.

There was also a parade of horses to show the connection between them and humans.

Such was the response and interest in therapy horses, Grace is now looking at getting them to other Yorkshire shows during next year's season and ultimately at The Great Yorkshire Show and the Horse of the Year Show.

She said: "We had a parade of eight horses. It was wonderful how many people were interested. Lots of the au-

'I am treating a lot more people with general depression and young people with suicidal depression but it is really helping them.'



dience came to speak to us in the ring afterwards. There is a very big interest in how horses are therapeutic."

As well as writing she has two of her own horses, Pippa whom she has had for ten years and Belle. They are both horses she uses for 'happy hacking' herself and therapy.

Mainly, Grace works with clients who are terminally ill and the horses help them feel calm.

"It is not a subject people ever want to talk about but it is the most guaranteed part of life", she said.

"I had a lady come to me in the last couple of weeks of her life and she would still make herself get up and come to our fields. The whole thing, being in the field, the peace, the wild birds, it was everything that helps to

soothe people as well as being near horses."

It isn't a new 'fad' although it has admittedly gained more interest in the last few years. But there is some science to the theory.

Grace explains: "Science has recently discovered, because of the size of the heart and nervous system, the electric magnetic radiation makes physical changes within people when they sit next to them (horses), it is not just fantasy. Because horse hearts are so big, there is a big vibe going on there. People don't even have to touch the horses."

"Your central nervous system starts to work differently, that is when you feel calm. Horses don't think as much as we do. Their whole system is working differently. It is wonderful."

One of her clients had a tumour in her liver. Pippa had been disinterested in people at that time but made a beeline for the woman and placed her head over the area of the body where the cancer was.

When the horses have done a session, there is also a change in them said Grace.

"They are totally different. You can tell that they feel that their life has more value. Horses are wonderful at sport and that is fantastic but being a healer is a bit more valuable than jumping over a pole."

Grace is qualified and insured to treat people with horses and can only use the horses listed with the insurance company but she is also now looking at sheep as therapy animals.

It came about during a normal session when one of her sheep was determined to get involved and left the client laughing.

She has six sheep at the moment which are a mixture of Clun Forest, Blue Texel and Texel cross and hopes to get more next year as they are good for people with depression – a condition that animals are more often being linked to as tools for treatment.

Grace said: "I am treating a lot more people with general depression and young people with suicidal depression but it is really helping them. Sheep are great for depressed people, I think it makes them laugh."

"You expect to be able to touch a horse but sheep are usually in a field and a distant animal but mine are like dogs. One woman has not smiled for a year and left with a big grin on her face."

Last year she had a book published, entitled *The Yard: How a Horse Healed My Heart*, which she began writing during the pandemic, initially creating a Facebook page to share short stories and extracts with horse-lovers and was about how Pippa helped her deal with her own post-natal depression.

She is currently writing *The Farm: Our Journey Continues* and as well as working to get more presence at country shows she would like to be earning enough money from book sales so she can treat people for free.

Your Horse, August 2023



Country Smallholder, May 2023

THE COUNTRY
SMALLHOLDER

SHEEP AS THERAPY

Find out more at [the country smallholder.com](https://www.graceolsonauthor.com)



Grace and friends enjoying
a gentle stroll in the country

Meet the therapists!

We look at how Grace Olson discovered the healing power of sheep

Merlin, Galahad and Lancelot may look like just a trio of scruffy sheep but their role in life is very important. They work as therapy sheep with their handler Grace Olson, helping humans to feel better. But how did it all begin? Let's rewind 16 years...

Following an emergency caesarean, during which the anaesthetic wore off half-way through, Grace was plunged into post-natal depression and panic. After a few years of soldiering on, as mums do, she finally realised that she needed something in her life that would make her feel happy again.

"As a child, my favourite toys had been my farm set and riding school. So it dawned on me that I needed to be outside

with animals. I had ridden as a child so I had a few refresher lessons and then I got a horse on loan. The horse lived on a smallholding with various animals so it was just perfect."

After a year of riding, Grace booked herself a weekend in Wales at a mountain farm that specialised in animal therapy.

"It was life-changing. That was the piece of the jigsaw that I needed to get myself well again and it was the most beautiful farm. There were alpacas, goats and horses. It was such a mind-blowing experience that I came away a different person. All the years of guilt and sadness melted away and from then on I became a much better mother and I valued myself more."

So how did Grace go from that experience to becoming a therapist working with sheep?

"Well, I was already a qualified massage therapist and 'natural listener' so it was another few years of learning more about horses and their body language that changed my work. I enrolled on an ILM coaching course and became a certified equine facilitated coach and began renting a 7-acre smallholding but something always felt lacking. In my heart I wanted to work with cows and sheep. We didn't have enough space for cows but we did have space for sheep."

And this is where it gets a little bit spooky! Grace didn't know where to start in her search for sheep but out of the blue, a friend asked her if she might be interested in taking on a pet lamb that needed a home.

"It was so bizarre, I had only just decided I wanted sheep when I got this message asking to re-home a lamb. The lamb was very cuddly and he ended up arriving at our smallholding along with another lamb from the same farm who had not been bottle fed so he was a bit wild."

Sadly, the pet lamb died so Grace was left with the wild lamb who she named Merlin. In no time, Merlin transformed into what Grace calls "a cuddle monster".

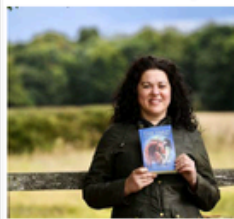
"He was just like a pet dog, following me around and asking for cuddles. Although he had our horses for company, I felt he needed more sheep."

ENTER THE CLUN FOREST SHEEP!

Pete led Grace to meeting a breeder of Clun Forest sheep who gave her a pair of wethers the same age as Merlin who of course became Galahad and Lancelot.

"They were so nerdy! You couldn't go near them without sending them into apoplexy so I put a lot of time into sitting quietly near them and after a few months they realised I am safe and all three of them love being near me while I'm doing my jobs in the field."

It was then that the sheep therapy began to happen very naturally, starting with one of the locals from the village where Grace rents her smallholding.



Grace with the book she has written

"I needed help moving a heavy trough so I asked one of the neighbours. This particular lady was very depressed following the sudden death of her husband. Merlin and the Cluns trotted straight up to her and let her stroke them which she found absolutely enchanting. It's not every day you get to touch a soft, woolly lamb is it? The smile on her face was literally ear to ear. She laughed for the first time since losing her husband and went home happy. It was then I realised that's real therapy."

Since that day, Merlin and friends have brought solace to other people suffering depression due to various issues. But what is involved with a sheep therapy session?

"Well, there's no set routine. Everybody who comes, presents with different needs. A lot of the people I treat have terminal cancer so for them it's all about simply getting back to nature. Cuddling the sheep makes them feel instantly happier. This then leads to a loosening up within them which enables them to start talking about their fears, family problems and other worries. Using my coaching skills, I listen and ask further questions which helps them to work out what, if anything, they want to do to improve their life."

MEDITATION WITHIN NATURE FOR PEACE AND CLARITY

Some people just enjoy being in silence with Grace's sheep and horses and this type of meditation within nature is enough to bring peace and clarity – something we all need in this hectic world.

"I am very lucky to be able to have the help of my friend's Shire horse as part of my therapy team. He is enormous yet so intuitive and graceful. His presence makes people feel supported by a giant at a time when life is making them feel fearful and small. It's a wonderful thing to see the traditional hard-working farm animal, being the key to teaching people how to find inner stillness."



Sheep enjoy contact too!



Meet the therapy team

During lockdown when Grace was unable to work, she decided to write about her journey from misery to happiness thanks to the healing power of animals.

"I set up a Facebook page and posted a weekly episode every Friday. It was amazing how popular it was! So many people messaged me to say how much it lifted their spirits and they looked forward to Friday. It was compared to All Creatures Great and Small so many times and then people began asking for a book."

Grace spent two years writing her book and editing it, honing it into the very best it could be. Sadly, it was rejected by every agent she approached but Grace did not give up. She self-published and the book became an overnight success, selling out the first day it was released on June 27th 2022 and reaching the coveted number 1 spot in various categories on Amazon.

"I get so many messages from readers, both men and women, thanking me for being so honest and allowing them to speak out about their mental health issues. It also makes them laugh which is the best medicine!"

Grace's book is entitled 'The Yard-How a Horse Healed My Heart'. Many readers have said it is genuinely hilarious and feel-good, full of eccentric humans, horses, goats, cows and chickens in

tabards. Although it dives deep into depression it leaves the reader feeling joyful and inspired to improve their own life. Grace wants to use the money from book sales to use as an income so that she can treat people who can't afford her sheep therapy for free. The book is available to buy online in paperback from Waterstones, WH Smith, Blackwell's, Amazon, The British Horse Society and The Book Depository. It's also available as an E book and Audiobook.



The boys are still very close

Take a Break, February 2023



Our Lives

Me with baby Tali

NEIGH worries, Grace!

After a traumatic birth, I struggled to bond with my child. But help came trotting into my life when I least expected it. By Grace Olson, 49

As I sat on the sofa with my husband Doug and we stared at the positive pregnancy test in my hand, we couldn't have felt happier.

'I can't wait to be a mum,' I said.

My pregnancy progressed, and as my bump grew, so did my excitement.

But in time, my due date came and went.

A couple of weeks passed before I went into labour.

At hospital, I was given an epidural to help with the pain, but 24 hours went by and my baby was still in no hurry to be born.

'We'll need to perform an emergency Caesarean,' a doctor said.

But I realised something — I could still feel my legs as I moved them from side to side.

I thought: *Hold on, if I've had an epidural, surely I shouldn't be able to move my legs?*

I gripped Doug's hand.

'Something's not right,' I said.

'I don't think the epidural's worked properly.'

But before I knew it, I was being rushed to the operating theatre and medics sprung into action.

My daughter Tali was born,

weighing a healthy 7lb 11oz.

But as I was being sewed up, I began to feel every stitch.

'It's hurting!' I cried. 'I can feel everything!'

But it was like being underwater, and nobody seemed to hear me.

The pain grew worse.

Doug saw the panic in my face, but all he could do was look on helplessly.

Finally, I was taken back to the ward, and a nurse gave me a shot of morphine.

I didn't meet Tali properly until the following morning. But as I stared at her little features, I felt numb.

Days later, we were discharged from hospital and returned home.

But the trauma of the birth haunted me. I suffered severe postnatal depression and was unable to bond with Tali.

I made sure she was fed, clean, safe and happy.

But as Tali grew, things didn't get much better.

I took her to dance classes in the morning and to the park in the afternoons.

But I was an emotional wreck.

One night, as I lay in bed with Doug, I made a confession.

'I can't cope,' I said.

His eyes filled with tears. I

knew that he wanted to help me, but I was in the throes of postnatal depression.

I felt trapped in a fog and couldn't see my way out.

Despite my own struggles, Tali grew into a bright little girl. And like me, she adored horses.

So, when she was six, we decided to look after a horse on loan.

The horse was named Velvet, and we would visit her at the livery yard a short drive from our home in Leeds, West Yorkshire.

Tali and I loved to brush Velvet's long brown mane. She fed Velvet apples and laughed when she gave an appreciative neigh.

Every morning, Tali asked: 'Are we going to see Velvet again today, Mummy?'

I realised that whenever we visited Velvet together, I'd have a smile on my face for the rest of the day.

I told Doug: 'I feel like there's finally something Tali and I can bond over.'

I wanted to buy a new bridle for Velvet. But felt it was cruel to force an animal to have something stuck in its mouth, so I wanted a bitless bridle.

After doing some research, I found two women, named Rosemary and Sheila, who ran a farm in Ceredigion.

They had the perfect bridle, and offered to show me how to use it. I travelled

to meet them, and when I arrived, they greeted me with a warm smile.

I took in the incredible views around their land. On the farm, there were 20 horses, plus alpacas and goats — all roaming freely in large fields.

Then Rosemary said: 'Go and choose three horses you like, and one you don't.'

I felt confused, but I went along with it.

I selected three horses I felt a good vibe from, and one I felt 'off' about.

I learnt his name was Andy.

Then, all of a sudden, he trotted towards me, stuck out his nose and pressed it against my heart.

There was something tender about the moment and, unexpectedly, I burst into tears.

I felt shocked by my reaction.

But when I looked at Rosemary, she said: 'Andy's telling you that you don't have

to be afraid. Put your hand on him, and tell me how you're feeling.'

Slowly, I placed my hand on his shiny coat. And as I did, all the fears, thoughts and anxieties I'd been holding on to for years came spilling out.

I explained about my depression. But instead of judgment, Rosemary's eyes were soft with kindness.

'Loving your daughter isn't just a feeling,' she said. 'It's a doing act as well, and everything you do for her shows just how much you love her.'

Later, I learnt that what I'd experienced was called equine, or horse, therapy.

Horses were naturally sensitive animals, and Andy, my new four-legged friend, had picked up on my sadness and reached out to touch my heart.

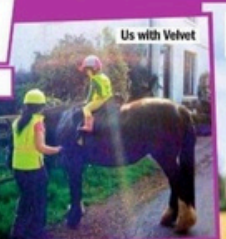
Rosemary had then been able to help me talk about the feelings I'd kept hidden.

As I returned home, I knew something inside me had changed.

The fog began to lift, and my relationship with Tali changed.

When I took her to a pottery class or to the park, I didn't have to force myself. I wanted to enjoy every moment with my little girl.

In time, I told Doug: 'I'm



Us with Velvet



Me with one of my therapy horses, Belle

It's all OK Mum!



Tali and me

going to train as an equine therapist. I want to help people who are ill or have depression like me.'

He squeezed my hand.

'You can do anything you put your mind to,' he said. 'And I'll be with you all the way.'

I felt a burning new focus, and went on to complete a degree-level course.

Then I became a coach and qualified therapist, with my own field and three therapy horses.

As I built up a client list, I felt proud of my achievements, and it brought me great pleasure to help other people.

Now, Tali is 16. We have a strong relationship and she tells me everything.

I wrote a book explaining how a horse helped heal my postnatal depression. It was the first time I'd been able to explain to Tali how I'd once felt.

'It's all OK, Mum,' she said.

Now, my book has helped other people, and they reach out to share their experiences.

And it's all because of Andy — the horse who helped my heart to heal.

● Grace's book: *The Yard: How A Horse Healed My Heart*, is available on Amazon.

Edited by Charlotte Owen. Email mystory@bauermedia.co.uk

Photos: Poch and Poch

Take a Break 29

GRACE OLSON AUTHOR

Your Horse Magazine, November 2022

YOUR HORSE MAGAZINE
meets
Grace Olson

The author, whose new semi-autobiographical novel is currently flying off the bookshelves, tells **Julie Harding** how horses helped to cure her of a protracted bout of severe postnatal depression that came close to driving her to suicide

GRACE OLSON WOULD clock watch. Obsessively. With the accuracy of a potential military manoeuvre, she would know, to the minute, when she was scheduled to feed her newborn daughter, Tali: when her nappy would need to be swapped for a pristine clean one; when she needed to be laid gently in her Moses basket for her afternoon nap. Every day was the same. Monday round to Sunday. Week in, week out. Month after month. This preoccupation brought no joy to Grace's life. The elation that had followed the discovery that she was expecting her first child was absent. At that point, only weeks before, she had gleefully gone shopping and purchased all of the usual baby paraphernalia — buggy, car seat, cot. Then she found herself in hospital, which is when the unexpected happened.

"Tali was two weeks late and then she got stuck and her heart was slowing, so I was given an emergency Caesarean section. The anaesthetic wore off when I was being sewed up and everyone ignored my pleas for help. That's when I went into shock."

Nothing would be the same again for years for Grace, a massage therapist. She endured a week in hospital, with Tali in the special care baby unit suffering from jaundice. However, returning home and shutting her front door, now alone with her newborn for the first time, was far worse.

"That's when the depression really kicked in," says Grace, whose partner, Doug, an osteopath, worked long hours and was rarely around. "But

INTERVIEW

"I would feel fear when Tali made the slightest noise. My heart would explode and I would go cold and feel sick. The sound was so ordinary, but for me it brought utter terror"

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Grace with her mare, Pippa, one of the horses who has helped to lead her postnatal depression

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESSIE SPENCER

Horse & Hound July 2022

Home / News

'I was like a stone with no emotion': rider who was 'healed by horses' hopes now to help others



Eleanor Jones
9 July, 2022, 20:53



A rider who credits horses for "healing her heart" when she had post-natal depression hopes now to help horses, and people, in her turn.

Grace Olson has written a book about her experiences, which she hopes will not only benefit others but also raise funds for [equine rescue centre](#) Hope Pastures.

She told *H&H* she works with people who have serious illnesses; offering massage, healing and coaching. But when the first *Covid* lockdown was brought in, she could not work.

"I'd always wanted to write so I wrote a short episode on a horsey Facebook group and it got so many likes, I set up a page," she said. "It became popular so I set up a website, and someone said 'Why don't you write it as a book?' I thought 'Go on then!'"

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"It brought a bit of joy to people; I wrote an episode a week during lockdown and people were emailing to say it made them laugh, and carry on. And it made me carry on, to think people were enjoying it."

Grace had a bad experience when she gave birth to her daughter Florence, who is now 16.

"I had an emergency caesarean and the anaesthetic wore off halfway through," she said. "They all ignored me when I was saying 'Ow', but because I was in shock, I wasn't screaming. I could feel being sewn back up."

"It was like being in a horror film, then I was given this baby to look after — and it was horrendous."

Grace said she "went into autopilot"; caring for Florence but she became "obsessive" over cleaning the house, and "I couldn't feel," she said. "I was like a stone with no emotion."

"But being with horses opened my heart."

One of Grace's clients was a horse owner, and hearing her tales, and remembering how much she had loved riding as a child, although she had never been able to have a horse of her own, Grace went back to the yard.

"It might sound a bit hippy-dippy but horses have a natural healing energy," she said. "I met an amazing woman with a mountain farm in Wales and had the most unbelievable healing experience. It made me realise I'm not a shit mother, and I learned what love really is."

Grace believes that had she not found horses again, she would still be depressed.

"My life would just be empty," she said.

She now has her own horses, and involves them in offering equine-assisted [therapy](#) to her clients.

"I want other people to have that chance," she said. "To realise that, whatever happens, they can always be all right. The dream is to earn enough from the book to be able to live off it, and to be able to treat people without having to charge them, because often people with cancer can't work."

Grace has her "big ginger" Irish sport horse Poppy, and Belle, a part-bred Welsh section D rehomed from Hope Pastures. She launched the book, which has been compared to the works of James Herriot, at the sanctuary to raise funds.

"The world is so miserable at the moment," she said. "I just want to help people laugh."

The Yard: How a Horse Healed My Heart is on sale online now.