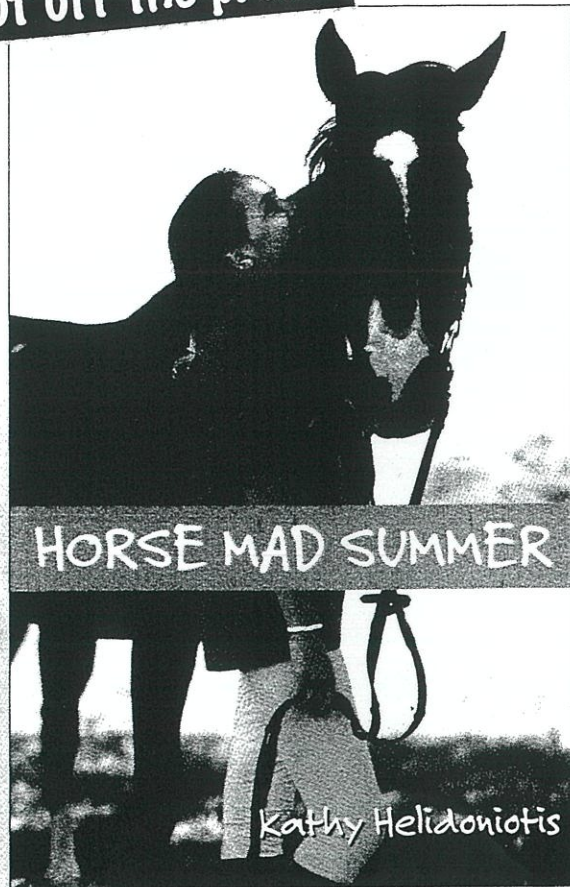


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For readers 8+



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Horse Mad Summer

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Meet the Totally Horse Mad author.....

I'm riding high, riding free! I'm soaring, the wind rushing past my ears. I can hear the da da da, da da da of hooves as they strike against the sun-baked earth. I can see Mum smiling and waving. She raises her camera to her eye and clicks. This is the best day of my whole entire life. My horse is a champion, a legend, a....monster! He bucks, he shies, he twists and I'm flicked from the saddle into a waiting clump of rocks as easily as a fly flicked from his cuddly rump.

That was my first experience of horse ownership and the first of many times I found myself eating dirt (I still have the scars, each with its own tale of woe.) I had been totally, madly in love with horses for years and had spent most of those years begging for a horse. My parents finally caved in when I was ten and I became the proud owner of a gorgeous but very naughty bay gelding. Many years later I became a writer and my horse, with his personality plus, became the inspiration for many of my stories.

By the time I started writing I had spent ten years away from the horsey world. I got married, went to work (I was a teacher!) and had three babies. I wrote cute stories about little lost monkeys, new baby chicks and friendly dolphins. I was chatting with my horse crazy daughter one day (who, incidentally, has spent the last few years begging me for a horse!). She asked me why hadn't I written a story about horses and it clicked. That night I sat at my computer and began to write *Totally Horse Mad*.

The Horse Mad series is so much fun to write. Every time

I write I go back to my own horsey days and relive it all through the main character Ashleigh Miller and her friends! Many of the stories come from my own experiences. I was a horse mad city girl, so is Ashleigh. I would have done anything for a horse of my own, so would Ashleigh. My horse was terrified of plastic bags, so is Ashleigh's. Not everything that happens in the Horse Mad books happened to me. But Ashleigh's world, in many ways, was my world and the world of my gang of horse mad friends. Ashleigh is much luckier than me, though. Her parents sold their city place and moved to the country just so she could live out her horsey dreams. She's a much better rider than me, too! I only tried Pony Club a few times.

I'm very excited about the release of my latest book, *Horse Mad Summer*, and am working on the next two Horse Mad books right now. I feel like I'm the luckiest person in the world. Writing is hard work, but it's the only job I know of where you can wear trackies and socks to work and daydream all day long. Nothing beats the feeling of finally seeing the published book after many many months, even years of work. And to me there is nothing better than going back to that wonderful world of horses that I loved so much and living it all over again. In fact the only thing better would be to move to the country and buy a farm with lots of horses and stables and a riding ring with bush trails and ...hey, that gives me an idea for a story! *Kathy Helidoniotis*

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