Last year Brittany Ashley told her parents all she wanted for Christmas was to have Freckles in Wisconsin. She got her wish.

Freckles is a quarter horse. Brittany is a 17-year-old senior at Grafton High School. Together now in Wisconsin, they're great friends and were a winning team on the rodeo circuit.

Brittany, the daughter of Marie and Wayne Ashley, has been riding horses since she was a toddler. Freckles, once her grandmother's horse, had belonged to Brittany for nine years. But Brittany was in Grafton and Freckles in New York.

Now that her wish has come true, Brittany, though busy working at McDonald's to pay for boarding, rides Freckles every opportunity she can find. The bond between the two is evident the moment the girl steps into the pasture where the horse grazes.

This week Brittany moved Freckles from a horse farm in the Town of Grafton to Pinewood Farm in Jackson, where riding trails are available.

Freckles is an experienced rodeo and trail horse. She and her rider competed in cattle penning and cattle sorting in rodeos. They took second place in those events last year in Attica, N.Y.

Brittany's grandmother owns a horse farm in Medina, N.Y., where her mother grew up. Brittany can't remember not riding horses. It's something she grew up doing.

When her family moved to Grafton 10 years ago, Brittany would spend summers with her grandmother, helping with chores and exercising horses.

Freckles, whose registered name is Peppy Star Freckles because of freckles on her shoulders, was too bumpy for her grandmother to ride because of back problems, so Brittany rode her — the faster the better.

"She was always really fast," said Brittany, who rides Western style or bareback with stirrups.

Her grandmother worries when she rides fast, she said.

“Whenever I would compete, she would yell, ‘Slow down.’ She didn’t mean it, but she worries,” Brittany said.

This year, she took time off from her job to compete in Attica on another horse and won $200.

“You pay to ride, so it’s nice when you get money back, plus it’s so much fun,” Brittany said.

Brittany also gives riding lessons and leases her horse to a girl who pays half the boarding costs.

Most of her friends and teachers will be surprised to learn she’s a cowgirl at heart, she said.

“I’m very different at school. I don’t tell people about my personal life very much,” she said.

“At school, I dress in black, more goth. People are surprised when they learn I love to listen to country music, like being outdoors and riding by myself.”

She rides Freckles as often as she can. She’s happiest when she’s on her horse.

“When I brought Freckles here in November, I rode her two to three times a week in the indoor ring,” Brittany said. “It was cold, but you get warm riding.”

Brittany, who considered going away to college, plans to study architecture at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, which will allow her to be close to Freckles.

Freckles, she said, acts more like a dog than a horse. She’s constantly following and nuzzling Brittany.

“She has a people personality,” Brittany said. “She likes to be around people.”

At age 13, the horse hasn’t slowed down, the girl said.

“She loves running fast,” Brittany said. “When she runs fast, she gets excited. When she gets excited, she starts bucking. I fell off her once, and she stopped and looked at me like, ‘Why are you on the ground?’”

Falling off a horse is nothing new, she said. When she’s at her grandmother’s farm, she rides many horses, and some of them are not as gentle as Freckles.

“My horse is awesome,” Brittany said. “When we’re competing, it’s all her. She does all the work.”

Freckles nuzzled her owner Brittany Ashley. Photo by Sam Arendt