

Dressage 4 Kids Essay by Anna Wilinsky age 14

In the days leading up to Lendon Gray's Dressage 4 Kids summer "festival," I wouldn't say I was excited for the event. Instead, I was anticipating a very long weekend that would produce more anxiety than smiles. I worried that I was ill-prepared for the experience, especially for the written test portion of the competition, considering that I hadn't even been able to purchase part of the required reading (thanks, back order!). I'm glad to say that my assumptions were incorrect, and that the trip was not only a successful and enriching one, but one that was super fun as well.

Upon arrival, I was awed by the massiveness of the show grounds, which supposedly boasts two hundred acres of land. The first afternoon consisted only of preparations for the next day, namely settling the horses in and retrieving our mountain of stuff from the trailer. On Friday, the competitions began with a schooling show. Undeniably nervous, I went into the warm-up fearful that my first test would end with an unintended dismount, or perhaps an early exit from the ring. Thankfully, Huron and I completed the test without any disasters. I was pleased, but had little time to be relieved, as I had two more upcoming rides as well as a written test and a test on sport horse conformation. Both of the knowledge-related competitions went well, as did the second dressage test and equitation class. Looking back on the experience, I realize that I needn't have worried.

Aside from the competition, Dressage 4 Kids strengthened the bonds and friendships that the RER team possesses. The constant need for teamwork during the competition was something I think was beneficial to the entire team. It reminded us that we aren't alone during competitions, and that there's always help to be found. It was also a valuable experience from a stable management stand-point, especially since I had to care for Huron when he was understandably agitated from being confined in a stall in contrast to his usual all-day turn out, and then when he was lethargic and overheated. It gave me a new confidence in my abilities. Dressage 4 Kids also seemed like an assessment of my endeavors in the saddle for the previous months, and I saw improvement not only in myself, but in the pony I ride and in my teammates. I'm proud of our team for our

accomplishments, and I am already looking forward to next year's trip.