

August 20, 2017

Dear Scholarship Committee,

Thank you so much for considering me to be a worthy recipient of a Lendon Gray Scholarship this year. I used the award to attend Riding Right Farm's Boot Camp in preparation for Lendon's Youth Dressage Festival.

On the first day of Boot Camp we started out with Balimo (Balance in Motion) where we did a series of different stretches and exercises to improve our cross coordination and balance. We also plucked our tendons which hurt a lot but loosened our muscles and kept us from becoming too stiff.

After Balimo I brought in Chadwick who is the Exmoor pony that I ride. Denise Film (a mom on our team and a grooming expert) helped me clip Chadwick's legs and pull his enormous bushy mane. He looked very spiffy afterwards.

Later I rode with Gail Kapiloff, a judge who our instructor Hollie brings in every year to help critique our dressage tests. I rode my test for Gail and then she told me what I needed to work on to get a better score. We worked a lot on getting Chadwick to halt fully and not move off the moment my hand came back to the reins after saluting. Sometimes Gail had me wait ten or more seconds before and after my salute, so Chadwick would learn not to expect that just a few seconds after my salute he could leave. I experimented with letting my reins go to the buckle and gathering them back up a few times before signaling to Chadwick to move forwards. Gail kept a tally, and every time Chadwick halted and didn't move until I told him to I got a point, and every time he disobeyed me he got a point. I had many more points by the time our lesson was over. This really helped me at D4K because once Chadwick realized that when I asked for halt it meant actually coming to a full stop, he did it pretty reliably. Gail and I also worked on making sure I didn't forget my corners. My canter down to trot transition was tricky because then I had a diagonal. The diagonal was much better after I improved my corner. I felt confident because Gail didn't find much to correct during my lesson and Chadwick was very obedient.

After my ride I spent some time studying for the written test with Julie Crosier, another team mom who is also a teacher. It was very helpful to study during Boot Camp because I was being told to study and it wasn't just me telling myself to study and then getting distracted.

After lunch we listened to a relaxation tape. We also did an activity where we pictured different situations and had to decide how we thought our horse would react; whether they would like, not care, or dislike certain situations. This was to test how well we knew our horses. I think I accurately predicted everything for Chadwick. He liked pretty much everything except the heat, since he has so much fur. He also does not like being mounted since he always tries to move away and I have to do a flying leap from the mounting block.

On the second day we started off with Pilates taught by Donna Meneto. We did about one million leg lifts and lunges and various exercises that all hurt a lot. Donna was super nice and enthusiastic. Afterwards I definitely felt much looser. I really could feel the effect since I rode as soon as we ended.

Since I practiced my dressage test with Gail on the first day (Monday), on Tuesday I had my equitation practice session with Hollie. I rode with my team member Molly and we worked on turning the whole body, which turns the horse instead of just turning our head or hands, which just discombobulates our position. I definitely could tell that it helped because my circles were better.

After equitation, I spent time studying for the written test which felt boring. I am thankful though for all the time I spent studying during Boot Camp because it definitely helped me during the test.

We moved on to reading an article about how to get a good equitation score and what the judges looked for in a class. One thing that helped me from that article was that apparently equitation judges like to see you following with your elbows a lot at the walk and canter. I tried to do more during my equitation class at the Youth Dressage Festival.

On Wednesday, the final day of Boot Camp, we began with yoga taught by Kelli. I am not very flexible or particularly good at yoga, so many of my muscles were a bit annoyed that they were supposed to actually stretch. Kelli also helped us with visualizing of all our nervousness and anxiety vanishing, and thinking about how we want the horse show to go.

The other 12-14 year olds and I took a practice written test to see how we might do on the actual written test. This always helps dispel my anxiety somewhat, because I usually do well which helps my confidence.

Afterwards, we tacked up our horses and rode 'the warm-up'. Hollie supervised as we all warm up in one arena and tried to avoid other horses and obey the rules of riding with others in the ring. This prepared our horses and us for the large warm-up arenas at the Youth Dressage Festival. Hollie asked us if we had done everything possible to be ready to go into the arena. I thought my warm-up had gone pretty well as Chadwick was pretty calm, and wasn't being the crazy version of himself that he sometimes turns into if there are other horses in the ring. I think he wants to prove to the other horses, who are all bigger than he is, that he can go just as fast as they do.

Once we finished the warm-up, we ate lunch and made stall cards. Then we did Qi-Gong with a Qi-Gong teacher. Qi-Gong is an ancient Chinese exercise that helps you move your energy around so it is balanced with no negativity. We did a bunch of funky movements that felt kind of silly but apparently are designed to help your energy be at peace. We also blew bubbles, which was fun, to help us breathe deeply and blow all the negative energy away.

Thank you once again for the scholarship you have bestowed upon me. Boot Camp was a fun and helpful way to prepare for the Youth Dressage Festival, which I look forward to every year. I had an enjoyable YDF this year and Chadwick received many compliments which made his ego grow even larger. Thank you for helping me put in a lot of hard work which always makes me a better rider, and will hopefully pay off for Chadwick's next rider too.

Sincerely,
Merritt Perkins (and Chadwick)