

Dear Courtney's Quest Scholarship board,

I first want to say thank you for helping me to make the dream of European Competition come true. I think I floated on air most of the 10 weeks I was there. To recap my adventures I arrived in Europe in May amid a bit of struggle. There were a lot of last minute changes and I even had to find a flight, train and bus on the fly. Two days before we were to leave for Europe I found out I couldn't fly with SJ. I had to get a quick ticket and I flew to Dusseldorf and not Amsterdam. I supposedly had a car reservation at the airport and I was going to drive to meet the transport at Gut Hohenkamp. My dad had called in advance to ask if I could rent the car even though I am only 20. Well he got the info wrong somehow and I couldn't get a car. So I was in Dusseldorf and had to find my own way to Schermbeck. I hopped a train and changed trains and got a taxi and got to the hotel and barn before SJ! I definitely learned a bit about staying positive and getting it done without freaking out. In fact, I think my parents were more worried than I was. I think I realized with this trip that I can handle any type of travel emergency ever on less than 4 hours sleep. Sjafoer and I boarded in Schermbeck, Germany. He was at Guthohenkamp and I was at the hotel zur Linde with Genay Vaughn and Jessica Hainsworth. I trained exclusively with the USEF National Youth Coach George Williams. I have trained with him before and we worked on issues that I have had with SJ for a while. SJ and I tend to get tight in the neck and that is what we always get dinged on. I didn't get any 'new' or surprising insights, just more reinforcement of the basics. George and I really clicked well and his style of coaching is really open. He is very positive and encouraging. I was proud to have him as our coach. He went out of his way to help each of us preform our best not just at this show but in our long term careers. He is a great advocate for US Dressage.

I did learn that the nature of competition there is very different than here in the US. In Europe it is like a zoo. There is so much going on and no one cares about what might spook your horse or disrupt your ride. Here we get upset over the littlest disturbance. I learned a valuable lesson about easing up on the things that we can't control at shows. I also learned that perhaps we are too anxious about every little thing and I could improve as a rider if I learned to be aware for the safety of my horse but relaxed in that awareness.

Genay, Jessica and I spent most of our time in the usual barn mode-feed, clean, train, clean more and then feed more. We also always watched each other's lessons. We did get to go to see a castle and we did some strawberry picking. We visited one cathedral and hung around our little town but that was about it. We did have to drive back to Amsterdam to return the rental car after just a few days because they gave us the wrong one they said. The quote was so much cheaper than what they were charging. So we had to drive 2 hours back to the airport. When we got there they said they didn't have a car and that we would have to come back in an hour. So we walked around Amsterdam and saw the canals. That was fun. Then we went back to the car place, you won't believe it but they gave us back the EXACT same car!

Gut Hohenkamp where we stayed was really nice and it was near our little bed and breakfast. The city of Schermbeck where we stayed is very tiny and picturesque. I was nervous driving in a foreign country at first. German is hard to navigate while driving. But once I relaxed I LOVED driving really fast on the Autobahn.

The food was cheap and really good, but rich. One thing I loved about Europe was the size and scope of the CDI's. There were almost 900 horses at the Future Champions in only dressage and jumping. That dwarfs our NAJYRC which is our biggest youth event and with all the different disciplines. So many

competitors from 27 different countries helps you to grasp the true size and scope of our sport and what it means to be competitive in it. I believe the US can be competitive at youth events and we need to get more teams over. I also learned that being on a team and representing the USA in a true international atmosphere is a big responsibility. When you walk around with that red, white and blue jacket and the initials USA printed on everything, it is like having a beacon on your back. The light is shining on you and you have to be at your best and brightest every minute. I think my teeth still hurt from smiling so much. I really tried to reach out to many other competitors from other nations to try to build connections and to show that youth dressage in the USA is ready and wants to be included.

The language issue wasn't too bad as I speak a little German and so does Genay. We knew food and numbers which was the most important to survive. It was fun trying to work together to be understood. I also think one of the best things about the USEF, USDF and D4K programs are the camaraderie and friendships you develop. We are all better off when we help each other and support each other. I have made so many amazing friends in this sport. Sometimes it can seem like we are isolated and alone because of the nature of training and the isolation of our barns, but we can make connections across those lines that can help in so many ways.

It is my intention to take what I learned and continue with SJ and hopefully soon a young horse. Right now I am back at Albert Court with Christine Traurig and I will be competing SJ in I-2 until he is ready for Brentina

As I sit here trying to think of advice for up and coming young riders, I have to say what helped me the most was being open. Talk to everyone. Work hard and be open to any opportunity that might come. They might turn out badly sometimes, but other times they won't. Either way you learn and grow.

Thanks again,

Ayden Uhler