

Junior Dressage Camp with Nancy Later

By Tessa Holloran

Thank you Lendon Gray Scholarship Award committee and D4K community for my scholarship award. I used my scholarship for a week long Junior Dressage Camp with Nancy Later in Ashby, MA. The Ashby Stock Farm is a beautiful facility and if you have not seen, I encourage you to google and look at the pictures. We had wonderful stabling and gorgeous indoor with acres of hay fields to walk around to give our horses a break.

Nancy worked for and trained with Lendon Gray after high school. She went on to study the art dressage extensively in the U.S. and in Germany. She brings the experience of top level competition and training methods to her daily routine. She is a USDF Bronze, Silver and Gold medalist. Nancy has trained horses and riders to compete through the Grand Prix level. She has a simple philosophy that revolves around harmony.

We started every day at 7am and began by feeding hay and mucking stalls, then we would have breakfast and do our sun salutations that we learned. If you are not familiar with these, they are really simple to do and can be a great way to get your day started with some good stretches. To do a sun salutation, start standing with your feet about a foot apart then reach up to the sky, after reach down to the ground letting your neck hang and relaxing your body. Then you would put your right leg behind you so you are in a lunge position. Then you would repeat the same routine on the next leg.



On some mornings, Nancy would ride and we were able to watch and ask questions. We watched first hand her techniques for ground work. Warming up with making the horse Piaffe from the ground. We observed Nancy working through some upper level moves. Nancy taught lessons every day, we alternated with private lessons and tandem lessons. When there were two of us I benefitted from the feedback the other rider would receive.

On Wednesday, Hope Cooper came to speak to us about where she is now as a rider and she also covered a little bit about juniors and young riders and also about FEI ponies. It was interesting to hear her explain how she excelled through junior and young riders. Today she is riding Grand Prix horses. She also took questions from anyone who wanted more information. Thursday we watched a demo ride from Sharon on her Grand Prix horse. She let us ask questions about her horse and about her as a rider.

At the end of each day we would do a quadrille which is like follow the leader, but with a set pattern to music. There were 8 of us all together which meant navigating our route was very important. It was an excellent drill to learning timing and spacing, how to control the amount of ground your horse covers. This was a particularly good learning experience for me. I have ridden quadrille in the past for fun with friends and my trainer coaching us through the pattern. We usually had only 5 horses. My horse Beau is not a big fan of this work. After trying it a couple of times with my friends, I opted to ride a different horse. This time, with 8 horses, Beau was still stressed. It was important not to take on something that wasn't going to be a positive experience and to introduce issues that I wouldn't likely fix in the time we had. Nancy and Brittany (another student) worked with me to make it work out.

We did Tai Chi to help us find our balance which was really fun and interesting. Tai chi is an ancient Chinese tradition that, today, is practiced as a form of exercise. It involves movements performed in a slow, focused manner and accompanied by deep breathing. On Friday we continued the day with lessons after our morning routine and our practice quadrille. Nancy added African music to the routine which was really fun. Then we watched some Grand Prix freestyles on the computer which was fun and educational. It's exciting to imagine what it feels like to ride one of those great horses.

At the beginning of the week I had too much flexion and not enough bend. But at the end of the week I went home with a little more bend and also some exercises to help me open up my hips. This is something very consistent that I hear and I am working on. I have many exercises to do in the saddle and my neighbor who teaches yoga and Pilates is helping me at home.

The week went way too fast. The days were long and very busy, but so worth the work. On Saturday we got to show our quadrille pattern to family and friends. We took a walk to cool out in the beautiful fields and Nancy had lunch for everyone.



Thanks to this week, I made a lot of new friends. Different ages and different levels of riding. We all shared stories that reminded me that everyone is working on something with their horse. And I enjoyed talking about the non horse stuff as well. Meeting these girls has allowed me to be on a team for the first time at this year's Festival. A few of us decided to form a team and I am really looking forward to it. Thanks again for such a rewarding week.