

Although 2020 was a crazy year, I was so excited to learn that I was accepted into Dressage4Kids' new program, the Summer Intensive Training Program (SIT). SIT was held at the beautiful Pineland Farms (Cabot Morgans) in Gray, Maine. I took my D4K lease pony, Perlita, a 13-year-old bay PRE pony mare. We had been struggling to find our connection, and I was hoping that a month to just focus on riding one pony (instead of juggling 3-4 while I'm at home), would be the key to unlocking our potential.

I had never been away from home and my animals for a month before, but I packed and loaded up with my friend, Emma and her horse, Hereford, and our moms and we were off to Maine for a life-changing experience.



The farm was absolutely beautiful and a perfect location to spend the month of August. In a typical week, Sundays are days off, but we still have chores at the barn. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday we had lessons, most were semi-private with 2 riders for 45 minutes, but some days when it was hot, we had larger group lessons. We really had to learn to

pay attention to what was going on around us on those days! Thursdays were hack days, where we hack through the surrounding fields and the woods of Pineland in small groups.



There was a lecture from 1:30–2:30 each day (except Sunday). There were a variety of lectures with topics about horse health, saddle fit, nutrition (both horse and human), para-rider, etc. We also had the opportunity to practice completing an FEI jog. Each of the riders had to do a

lecture to practice public speaking as well. There were some interesting topics and it was fun to get to share our talents, skills, and knowledge with each other (and now I know how to survive a shark attack!).



We then had fitness with Angie Morin from 3:30-4:15 (except Sunday). Angie was awesome and while the workouts were challenging, they were also fun. The fitness schedule was Monday - Core, Tuesday - HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training) teams, Wednesday - Balance day, Thursday - Boot Camp (this day is much more fun than it sounds!), Friday - Field trip/hike/game day (EX. Capture the flag), and Saturday - HIIT (except this day is the hardest day of all). In between the lecture and fitness, we had to take care of our own horses, and do an assigned barn chore.

The first week of riding was mostly working on getting Perlita stretching down, and become low and deep. As I mentioned, connection was a big struggle for us and her preferred way of going resembled more of a giraffe than a dressage horse. We started using a sliding rein, which connects under the girth, goes through the noseband, and to my hand. We were using the sliding

rein so that I can work on being quieter with my hands, and just use it if needed. This week was the first hack day, which was uneventful.



The second week was once again, getting Perlita to stretch down and be deep. We also had Liz Austin come to teach this week. Perlita had an opinion about leg and whip, as well as not falling back to the wall. Liz hopped on Perlita to tackle some of our issues and then I was able to get back on and really feel what that connection should be like.



The third week was working on going on straight lines and bending serpentines. Perlita likes to be speedy, which helped us to find a better connection, but we still had to work on being

able to come back and maintain the contact. Hope Cooper came this week to teach the SITees. My biggest takeaway from Hope were; 1) There are three parts to every transition and to every aid: the preparation, giving the aid (or doing the transition), and the riding after.



Our final week of SIT had arrived way too quickly. Perlita and I had come a long way in a month and while I was sad to be leaving my new friends and their horses, I was also excited to continue to develop my relationship with Perlita. While we didn't master the idea of connection in Maine, we did build a stronger relationship and put together some of the missing pieces to help us continue to grow together.



I am so grateful to everyone who worked so hard behind the scenes, to make SIT happen including Meagan and Caroline Cadorette, Rick Lane, Angie Morin who did the fitness training all month, sponsors, donors, lecturers, and everyone in D4K. Special thank you to Liz Austin and Hope Cooper for coming to teach. Of course, a huge thank you to Lendon for everything you do for youth dressage riders, for teaching us, and for believing in Pia and me as a team. It was an incredible experience from which I learned so much and made many new friends.

Fortunately, we were able to carry that momentum from SIT into our training when we returned back to Pennsylvania. The past several months have been full of progress and I'm really proud of how far we have come and am looking forward to 2021!

