

In the fall of 2021, I applied for D4K's Winter Intensive in Florida, never expecting to get the chance to participate in such an amazing program. The only problem was figuring out how to afford Florida's expenses and the \$3,000.00 dollars per month it took to take part in WIT. This was especially hard since my mom had just been diagnosed a few months earlier with cancer. At the time, we planned to only be in Florida for a month, due to my mom's diagnosis. This would have meant I was only able to partake in the first month of WIT and would need to raise the required \$3,000.00 dollars ahead of our arrival.

I was able to raise about \$1,000.00 dollars through online donations, but it still was not enough to cover the monthly WIT fee. That's why I applied for a scholarship. About a month or two later I received an email informing me that I had received a scholarship. I was totally amazed and excited that it happened and that I would actually be attending WIT! In the month I attended WIT I learned so many things. One important lesson I learned was how to work in a team to run a barn and keep things organized. Another important lesson I learned was how to be a team player and care for a horse in Florida's warm climate.

But, I could have never expected my horse Norra to go lame about two and a half weeks into WIT, I was lucky enough to be able to ride my mom's horse Retro until the end of WIT. Retro is a challenging horse to ride because when you put your leg on too much, he stops and gets angry. However, when you do not have enough leg, he also stops. In addition, he is easily offended and often responds by pinning his ears and bucking! We had a schooling show at Farmore Farms two days after Retro arrived, and I decided to go for it.

Two days later, I competed in the Junior Team Test in front of our guest judge. This was the first time I had ever competed in the Junior Team Test and sometimes during my lessons, I couldn't even keep Retro cantering. However, the test ended up going really well, and I was able to keep him cantering. The amount of support, encouragement, and congratulations I received after the show from the whole group was incredible, the team atmosphere was so amazing. This atmosphere was one of the things I liked most about WIT. Each week we would have new jobs to keep the barn clean, such as cleaning the tack room or bathroom, scooping up the manure bin, or sweeping the barn. Each person relied on each other to be able to keep the barn clean and well taken care of.

Another one of the amazing things that we did in WIT was going on field trips. We were able to see Adriane Lyle and Sabine Shut-Kery train, watch the Global Dressage Festival CDIs from the VIP tent, and so much more. We were even able to compare how they trained to how they competed. Being able to watch the

best riders in the United States ride and train is incredible. When you watch them you can see how their aids impact the responses of the horse and how incredibly skilled the riders are. Their positions are impeccable, just watching them made me already feel like a better rider.

My family and I ended up being able to stay in Florida for the entire 3 months of WIT program, but I was not able to attend the program for the remainder of the time (February and March) for multiple reasons, such as finances and Lendon had found someone to take my place for the last two months.

What I never expected was that even after my month in the WIT program I would still be able to go on field trips, listen to lectures and watch the CDIs from the VIP tent. I was never ever expecting to be able to do these things, even after I was out of WIT.

Once I left Florida and returned to my home in Washington state, WIT continues to open up opportunities for me. It connected me with people I never expected to meet and a few weeks ago I was offered the ride on a D4K scholarship horse.

Thank you to Lendon, the WITies, and the Sponsors who each helped make my experience in Florida truly great!

- Olivia Martz