

2021 ENYDCTA Instructors Retreat Experience by Krystal Wilt

I had the tremendous honor of attending the inaugural 2021 ENYDCTA Instructor's Retreat on April 17-18, 2021 with a wonderful group of dressage professionals from my area, and Sarah Geikie as our fearless leader. This clinic was set up differently from any other that I had attended, as it was for trainers/instructors only, and was established as a judgement free zone for us to learn, laugh, collaborate, and ask questions together. I was not sure what to expect from this format, but it completely blew away every expectation and more!

With a last minute scratch, a slot opened up so that I was able to bring not one, but two horses to this clinic. I was extremely fortunate to have financial support from the Training4Teaching Scholarship Program through Dressage4Kids, that made it affordable for me to bring two horses for this amazing weekend. As it had been advertised as a judgement free zone, I decided to bring the two horses that I find the most challenging, with the hope of gaining lots of great insight on how to bring out their fullest potential.

The first horse I rode was my own mare, Wolkenklaren, who is coming 9 and schooling 3rd level. I have owned Klare since she was 18 months old, and her energy has always been a challenge to contain in a balanced manner. For the two days of the clinic, we worked hard under Sarah's careful guidance to refine the half halt so that it would help Klare to carry more weight behind, without adding speed, which is her absolute favorite evasion. During this clinic, it really became clear that I needed to ride Klare with the expectations that I have for a client horse, and not with the mothering attitude that I tend to take as her long-time owner. We really focused on true acceptance of the contact, allowing me to create a connection from Klare's hind legs forward and out to the bit. Klare sometimes likes to request that I avoid certain "buttons" and talks me out of really achieving the connection to her hind legs that I am looking for, but the encouragement of Sarah for the two consecutive days of riding really helped me to push through my comfort zone and attain a new level of submission and thoroughness with this powerful mare.

The second horse that I brought was Suraya, a Grand Prix mare that I co-own with a wonderful client. She is a challenging mare to get in front of the aids, and struggles with the strength and impulsion to maintain her poll as the highest point, especially in the lateral work. We worked on both of those things with Sarah during the clinic, and had some great breakthroughs. After warming up, we utilized the passage (her favorite trick) and medium trot to really help get her thinking forward, and then carried that into some traverse and half pass work. In the canter, we utilized medium canter into traverse or half pass to help keep her more forward in those movements, with stunning results. We also practiced quarter pirouettes interspersed with medium canters to help teach her to stay more forward within her pirouette work. It was incredibly fun and educational to ride this capable mare in this educational format.

I was blown away by the FUN that I had during this weekend. It was incredible to be in discussions about training methodology, teaching struggles, and business questions amongst people that I generally only get to see at competitions. I felt an immediate sense of camaraderie and support amongst my peers, and we had some incredible conversations about our industry and the ways that we can continue to grow in our roles as trainers and instructors. It was a very unique format that sent me home feeling so inspired to utilize many new tools with my students and training horses, and also left me feeling genuinely connected to, supported by, and a

cheerleader for the other professionals in attendance, who all clearly share a similar passion for our amazing sport.