

Scholarship Report 2018
Merritt Perkins

Dear Scholarship Committee,

Thank you so much for awarding me a Lendon Gray Scholarship. I am very thankful that I received this scholarship because it went to a three day clinic with former Olympian, Eric Horgan. I am extremely lucky to have had the opportunity to work with Eric, and even luckier to be able to have the Lendon Gray Scholarship Committee help me with the funds required.

On the first day of the clinic I had a very early ride. I was riding in a group with two other people (one of whom was my sister). Eric had us do lots of transitions from walk to trot and back. That was challenging for me because the horse I was riding, Jimi, has a very slow and plodding walk. It took a long time for me to get him not to screech to a walk from a trot. I also had to get him to go from a walk to a good trot quickly. After we could go from a "best practice" walk to a good trot, we moved on to trot and canter transitions. When cantering, Jimi often starts out really slow and his canter is almost four beats. When doing the transitions, I was eventually able to get his canter to be good as soon as I made my transition. These transitions also helped his trot get a lot better. Then we moved on to cantering from a walk. I thought that this would be hard, but since I had just spent a lot of time convincing Jimi to be more responsive to my aids, we actually did very well with these transitions. It really helped me see how much progress we could make in just an hour of riding.

The next day I rode with three of my teammates. We worked again on making smooth transitions. We also improved on our position while making the transitions. I have a habit of leaning in when I am on a twenty meter circle, and Eric would remind me every time I started leaning in. He called me "the Leaning Tower of Piza." This was very helpful because I usually don't realize that I am doing it, and when he reminded me I was able to correct it. I also look to the inside a lot, and Eric kept reminding me to look at the outside ear of my horse, which was very helpful. When my position is correct, it is much easier to get Jimi to be more responsive and lower his poll. Eric asked us at the end what we got out of our lessons. I said "don't lean in, and look to the outside ear." I also quoted Eric as he said "practice does not make perfect, perfect practice makes perfect."

On the third day, I did a jumping class on the Exmoor pony I rode last year, Chadwick. He hadn't been ridden in a while so he was very excited and trotted super-duper fast, so jumping was really fun. Eric didn't spend any time using small crossrails, but went straight to larger verticals.. He said he does not use crossrails as the horse will naturally jump the highest part, so it is actually the same as jumping the vertical (even though the vertical looks scarier). Eric talked about setting up my line way before turning for the jump and getting the right pace then. Eric said that in "the old days" riders were taught to make last-minute changes in the pace right before the jump to get the right strides. But now it is different and Eric said that the horse can figure out the strides if the pace is right. One time I did not have a good line and Eric told me to stop, but Chadwick was so excited to jump that he charged right over the jump. Eric

thought I had a choice! He did not throw me off though, which my trainer Hollie thought might happen.

Another thing Eric said a lot is that horses are good at interval training. Our horses, especially Chadwick who was not ridden all winter, are just starting to get into better shape. We rode pretty hard for over an hour each day, but he said not to worry as horses go until they are tired, then they recover, then they go again. It was so rainy and cold all weekend, that we were cooling the horses longer than they were ridden! It was a good experience to prepare for the Youth Dressage Festival, where our horses get ridden a little more than they usually do, and will definitely be very sweaty after.

I think this clinic was a great learning experience for me, and I am very grateful that the Scholarship Committee considered me a worthy candidate for this scholarship. I kind of take it for granted that I get to do these clinics with such impressive people thanks to my riding instructor's good connections, but I also realize that these clinics are a once in a lifetime experience and can totally change the way I ride. Thank you so much for providing me with this scholarship, and I hope to see you at the Youth Dressage Festival this year!

Thank you,
Merritt Perkins