

For about 10 years, out of the 13 I have been riding, I have ridden other people's horses. Whether it be school ponies, trainer's horses, or client's horses, I rode them, no matter their experience, background, or breeding I was always willing and eager to feel a new horse and see what they could teach me.

The first 8 years of my riding I learned on school horses/ponies. Everyday with those animals was an adventure. From fighting to get the 11.2 hand pony in the wash rack to learning how to land on my feet when I inevitably fell off (at least once every few weeks), I was always learning and growing into the horse woman I am today. Sitting on the ground with arena dirt in my pants and tears in my eyes, I couldn't have imagined having appreciation for the little pony that just dumped me because it saw a strip of light. But here I am anyway, thanking and fondly looking back on all the horses I have ever been allowed to ride.

I was lucky enough to get the experience of owning my horse for a few years before we had to unfortunately retire him. After owning him, I went on to become a working student which I can say has been one of the best experiences I have had in the horse world. My time as a working student was so unbelievably fun and educational. I feel, especially in the horse world, that your success is often based on the monetary value of your horse, your tack, or the biggest shows you have been to. You must have the most accomplished and famous trainers and win every show you go to. Putting a surface value on such a beautiful and unique sport takes away the real reason we ride horses...Because we love it!! I personally feel the most accomplished when I ride a horse that isn't perfect, a horse that isn't going to just give it to you easily. Working hard for your success is more than just spending your money, you must fail to learn and failure comes from imperfection.

This appreciation that I have is something I have gained over many many years. I have matured into this idea and only recently have been able to appreciate a good "problem horse". I have been lucky enough to have ridden very nice and expensive horses and ridden with some amazing trainers. I have also ridden horses that you might think should never step foot in a dressage arena. Either horse, I learned a great amount on and can take what I learned from them to the next horse I am blessed to ride.

Getting a scholarship from Dressage 4 Kids was an amazing gift. I attend Radford University and was able to join and compete on their IDA and IHSA teams. The appeal of IDA and IHSA is the spontaneity and uncertainty. Once you arrive at the show with your team, you draw from a pool of horses and are randomly assigned a horse you must ride. At IDA you get 10 minutes of warm up with your horse but at IHSA, you just hop on and go. Some horses are

amazing, others take a little getting used to, you really don't know what you will get. I love this idea of showing because I believe it really tests the ability of the rider, not how nice your horse is or how well your trainer can ride it for you.

I hope everyone can come to gain the outlook I have developed over the years and appreciate the horses, and situations that aren't perfect. I started riding when I was 5 years old. I am 18 now and can't wait to see where my journey through the horse world will take me and the infinite knowledge I hope to gain.

Attached is a picture of me on one of my school ponies. Cassidy and I had quite the love/hate relationship. As I look back on our time together, I actually think it was all love.



Here is me a few weekends ago at my first IDA show. Although it was not the best test, I can definitely say I learned a lot and will take that knowledge to the other horses I ride.

