

Training4Teaching Scholarship Report

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Thanks to the generosity of Dressage4Kids and the Training4Teaching Program, I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in two clinics with my horse, Calypso, to further my dressage education and teaching skillset for my students. The first was a clinic with Jennifer Sappington Truett which took place on April 9-11, 2021, and the second was a clinic with Bill Woods which took place on May 1-2, 2021. Working with Jennifer and Bill was not only an invaluable opportunity to better myself as a rider as I approach the FEI levels with my horse Calypso but also to better myself as an instructor/trainer for my students, and I am so grateful to have had this opportunity!

Both Jennifer and Bill are highly skilled instructors. Jennifer is a seasoned Grand Prix competitor, USDF Certified Instructor, and current member of the USEF Emerging Young Horse Program who offers a focused and unique perspective on rider biomechanics. Bill was an influential force in developing the USDF Instructor/Trainer Program and has over 40 years' experience in competitive dressage as not only a rider but highly sought after instructor and judge. His experience brings the combined experience of that of a dressage judge and the trainer's teacher, given his experience as a USDF Instructor/Trainer mentor. Both clinics were valuable training experiences for horses of all varieties and stages of development. I've included some of my key take-away's below:

In my clinic with Bill Woods, we focused primarily on the quality of the gaits, consistency in self-carriage, and improvement in pirouette preparation. One exercise I found particularly helpful in preparation for pirouette work involved riding haunches in on a 20m circle with trot/canter transitions. First starting with a collected trot on a 20m circle, then adding the haunches in and staying on the circle for a half a circle or so, then going back to the collected trot, and repeating the exercise until the horse maintained the same forward momentum in the haunches in as she did in the collected trot. We then repeated the exercise in the canter with the idea that hindlegs would keep stepping under in a lively manner through the exercise. I felt this exercise really set up the pirouette work nicely as I had better control of the rhythm and improved thoroughness going into the pirouette. I also found this exercise to also be beneficial for the quality of the gaits and impulsion overall as it gave me better adjustability in both the trot and canter and better control of the hindlegs.

Bill also used lateral movements to improve the quality of the trot with a variety of exercises. One exercise I really liked for my horse involved traveling to the left on the right rein in the trot, turning onto centerline, changing flexion to the right and riding a half pass to the right. And vice versa to the other side. We also varied riding the half pass from sitting to rising trot depending on the commitment of the hindlegs. As we worked on this exercise, I could feel my horse get more and more even in the contact and that it created better lateral flexibility while encouraging the horse to continue to step into contact. With the same ideas in mind, we worked on a half pass across the arena with lively steps and consistent tempo throughout. Halfway through the half pass, turning it to a leg yield while maintaining the same sideways propulsion. This was helpful to improve engagement and commitment from inside leg to outside rein. From there, we worked on some half-pass zig-zags in the trot, with a focus on being able to adjust the shoulders from

one direction to the other. By focusing on that adjustability of the shoulders, I felt that my overall trot improved in that she was lighter and more lifted in front of the saddle.

In my clinic with Jennifer Sappington Truett, we focused on the quality of gaits, improvement in the lateral movements, and self-carriage. Jennifer used a variety of exercises to create more expression and was diligent that the horse carry herself and that the contact be elastic with forward impulsion. One exercise I found particularly helpful involved creating adjustability and flexibility in the horse's ribcage. We began the exercise at the walk down the long side. Starting from straightness, ask the horse to move the shoulders slightly to the inside for a few strides and repeat the question and ask the horse to move the shoulder slightly to the outside track. While you do this, the horse's hindlegs should remain on the same track, and the focus should primarily be on the horse's shoulders without overbending the neck. Once we had the concept down at the walk, we moved on to the trot. I found that the reaction to move the shoulders and bend the ribcage came quicker the more we worked the exercise until her reaction became almost within-stride, giving me greater adjustability and encouraging lightness of forehand.

Jennifer has a keen eye for subtle positional issues, and I found her insights to be particularly helpful in that regard! We focused primarily on my leg position. She noticed that I was carrying my legs with too much outward rotation, causing my thigh/knee to be too open. This in turn effected my driving aids, as I was placing more pressure on the back of my leg when in use rather than maintaining equal pressure down the calf as a whole. By narrowing my thigh and rotating my knee forward, my lower leg feel into better position and was more effective as a driving aid. With that in mind, we also discussed a feeling with my seat bones rotated straight down so that my core could better stabilize my position, with also the feeling of sitting on a bouncing ball that allowed my back to follow and flow with my horse's motion. Jennifer includes some really helpful visuals in her teachings that will be wonderful to incorporate into our program!

Without the generous support of Dressage4Kids, the Training4Teaching Program, Lendon Gray, and their wonderful sponsors, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to participate in these clinics and to further my dressage education for myself, my horse, and my students. I am forever grateful for the support of this wonderful organization – Thank you for such an incredible learning experience!