

Lendon Gray Scholarship

Riding Right Farm Youth Dressage Team

Boot Camp 2017

This year I attended Riding Right Farm's Youth Dressage Festival preparation camp, or boot camp, on a Lendon Gray scholarship.

Day 1)

The first day I walked in and heard some stressful news – the school horse that I ride, Lear, had some sort of unnamed infection or other injury to his left hind fetlock. It wasn't causing him pain as far as we could tell, but it had swollen to twice the size of the other leg. His leg had been wrapped the night before and he was on antibiotics. His treatment was due to end right before the show, but it was still nerve wracking all the same.

I curbed my anxiety and went to attend Balimo (exercises called "Balance-in-Motion") with my trainer Hollie. The entire sixteen person team piled onto Hollie's famed rug that only comes out for boot camp. We walked around its edges on our toes, then on our heels, then on the outsides of our feet, then on the insides of our feet. We talked about how we can ride on the inside or outside of our feet, and what is softer to your horse (inside). We then did exercises for our cross coordination that balances the brain. We placed our left hand to our noses and then right hand to left ear, then switch to right finger on nose left hand to right ear. It was surprisingly hard, and we all missed our ears many times. We then sat on the Balimo stool which helps balance and we finished by relaxing our tendons.

The day went on as we tackled our next tasks. I grabbed a muddy and swollen Lear out of the pasture to work with local grooming expert Denise Film. We banded Lear's tail, trimmed his bridle path and fetlocks, cleaned his chin with clippers, and then all of us asked Denise clarifying questions from World Class Grooming.

When Lear was done I headed off to study with Julie Crosier. Julie is a teacher at my high school. She has been my school advisor, wellness class teacher, and most recently my Driver's Ed teacher. All throughout Driver's Ed we talked about the assigned reading in the car, confusing the other drivers. Julie is a great teacher. I spent the next couple hours reading and discussing Dressage in Harmony with Julie and the team.

Later I had an equitation ride with Hollie. Hollie worked with Stephanie, another rider, and me about keeping our hands from dropping and disturbing the contact with our horse's mouths. We also talked about going forward into contact and the do's and don'ts of equitation. I was worried

about Lear's leg but he was acting perfectly normal. Hollie instructed me to cold hose his leg after the ride to bring the swelling down.

We ended the day by all gathering together and talking about finding our "happy place" for stress relief. We took little quizzes about where that place may be. Mine is with Lear at the barn. Then we talked about envisioning our tests going well and perfectly handling bad scenarios. That way we were prepared mentally. Hopefully when the time came to ride our tests we would remember our perfect visions and do the right thing.

Day 2)

We started out the day with Pilates which really made my core burn. Earlier in the year some of our riders went to a TEAM clinic with Lendon and did Pilates. They suggested we bring it to boot camp because they loved it. Our teacher Donna Meneto was full of energy and always encouraging us to stretch a little further, or do another roll up. By the end we were all sweating and sore but really happy with ourselves.

Afterwards I went to ride with local judge Gail Kapiloff. We did trot- canter transitions on a twenty meter circle. Lear and I would fit in four on a standard twenty meter circle, and during my downward transitions I thought about Walter Zettl's advice. In the book he said to put your heels down to bring the correct amount of weight into your seat. This really helped with smoother transitions. Lear was much more responsive after Gail worked with us.

I spent the rest of the day studying with Julie, and talking about weight aids for leg yielding with Hollie and the other riders.

Day 3)

We started out our last morning with yoga. We were all very sore from Pilates, and there were many pained noises as we stretched. Thank goodness we did yoga; it really helped us relax for the most stressful ride of camp which is the practice warmup. Eight of us crammed into the outdoor arena on our horses after Hollie read us the "rules of riding in the ring" and we brushed up on our warmup skills. There was a lot of yelling, "Inside! Outside!" but I was very happy with my ride because Lear is a kicker. He gets very anxious when there are many horses in the ring but he didn't so much as pin his ears. This helped him a lot for the high-pressure warmups at D4K with strange horses.

Next we took the practice written test made by Julie. As Hollie says, the written test is the only part of the competition we can control. Who knows what Lear may do, so it is important that I

try my hardest to be prepared for the exam. Sometimes this is hard as the books have so much information but I always learn and love debating the answers with my friends after the test.

We ended camp with Qi Gong. It was probably the most helpful thing I did in boot camp this year. It is the art of energy manipulation based on ancient Chinese medicine. At one point we started blowing bubbles with wands. Our Qi Gong teacher suggested that we breathe as if we are blowing bubbles and to envision our anxiety inside the bubbles, drifting away. We all joked and laughed, thinking about how funny it would be to do this during the written test and seeing all of the bubbles floating inside the tent. I thought about this concept all the way to the show. I just envisioned my stress about Lear's foot and the show blowing away in bubbles. It helped so much and I even did it as I rode my dressage test. This year I moved up a level with Lear to Training 3 so we were both nervous. But the bubbles must have helped as this was the first year that Lear was calm while I rode him. I did not care after my last ride where I placed as I was so happy. Lear did not act up ever, even during the warmup.

I am excited for D4K next year because it is my favorite event of the show season, and because Lear and I did so well this year. We ended up placing 7th, our best finish ever at D4K. Boot camp was a big part of this accomplishment. Thank you for the scholarship that helps me attend camp.

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