

Journal for the Instructor Certification Program Assistance Scholarship

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The USDF Instructor/Trainer Certification program has been important to me since I was a young trainer at Lendon Gray's Gleneden Dressage. Lendon herself encouraged me and her other student trainers to attend a USDF Instructor/Trainer workshop when it was in our area. I was impressed with how much I learned in that first workshop through Fourth Level. The program encourages participants to justify what we are doing, whether riding, teaching or longing. We were required to discuss how our actions adhere to the classical principles of dressage training, in other words the training scale. The program's teachers were strict about using the proper terms (for example, "connection" and "contact" are not interchangeable). They were picky that we stayed in order from the base of the training scale and moving upwards. These new rules made me think much harder about my teaching, riding, and longing. Before I completed the program, I usually felt I was doing the right aid or movement, but now I had to prove it. I was impressed with the improvement in my teaching and training and was happy to pass the testing in 2009, with the help of a D4K scholarship.

Imagine now how excited I was to learn the program, which used to top out at Fourth Level, was adding another level for riders to become certified through FEI Intermediare 1. By this time, I had been competing through Grand Prix and felt that participating in the program would help me not only polish my resume but really push me to test my knowledge at the higher levels. I signed up for a workshop in my area and was encouraged to test this winter (December 2015) in FL.

I was honored to receive a D4K scholarship for the testing, which took place at the gorgeous HavenSafe Farm in Wellington, FL. Before we even arrived we completed the written portion online. The day started with an oral exam that allowed us to also introduce ourselves to the outstanding panel of examiners: Anne Gribbons, Kathy Connelly and Lilo Fore. Our professional scribe was Fern Feldman.

We were required to ride a horse familiar to us, and unfamiliar horse, and teach two lessons to unfamiliar combinations over the course of two days. The examiners grilled us about the fit of the tack, what we were doing, why we were doing it, what would we do if we had the horse or student for a month, etc. We showed all the movements through the I1 and sometimes higher, depending on the horse. In the end, I passed and am proud to say had many high scores and complimentary remarks from the examiners.

Overall, I learned a lot by participating in the program and look forward to sharing the knowledge with D4K as well as my current and future students. The best part for me was improving my confidence teaching at the upper levels. Because there are generally fewer riders trained to that level, I don't have as many opportunities to teach those movements as I do, say, First Level exercises. In preparation for the testing, I not only practiced teaching riders I didn't know but I made sure someone was watching and critiquing what I taught to make sure I could justify my thoughts. That forced me to stay more organized in my mind and, in turn, teach a more clearly organized lesson.

I am proud to be a part of the new FEI level certification program and look forward to helping the program grow and thrive, improving the quality of dressage across the whole US.