

Winter Intensive Training Program Report

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I had the privilege of participating in Lendon Gray's Dressage4Kids Winter Intensive Training Program (WIT for short) from January to March 2019. This opportunity would not have been possible without the support of the Dressage4Kids Lendon Gray Scholarship. The program spanned from January 3rd to March 28th and took place in sunny Wellington, Florida. Each day consisted of horse care, fitness, lessons, and a lecture. We also had frequent field trips to barns around Wellington and attended other activities.

I left Pennsylvania with my horse on December 30th and arrived at Hampton Green Farm, where WIT is hosted, the next evening. This gave both my horse and I time to settle in before the kickoff of the program. This year, there were 15 "WITees" and three staff members who help Lendon. Emily Gill was Lendon's assistant trainer, Julia Hengel was our barn manager, and Elsie Reford was Lendon's assistant who helped with scheduling and coordination. In addition to these three amazing staff members, three other professionals, Robert Leuck, Rosie Simoes, and Stephanie Beamer, volunteered their time to help teach lessons.

My WIT experience was not the typical one. As often is the case with horses, things did not go as planned. Two weeks into the program my horse turned up lame. While this was a very unfortunate circumstance, I was determined to not let it define my season in Wellington. I tried to make the most of all the unmounted learning opportunities WIT offers. I also was able to lease a horse for the last few weeks of the program so I could do some riding.

I learned about such a wide variety of topics during WIT. We had lectures on many aspects of horse care and riding. Every other week, Larissa Brazier of Summit Hypnosis and Wellness spoke to us about mental fitness for the equestrian athlete. Twice weekly, we were taught Pilates by Susan Copich. This was my favorite part of the fitness work, and I will be continuing to work on it. I felt it made a difference in my core engagement, strength, body awareness, and suppleness. I also learned a lot from the frequent quizzes we took. We had to study and test on basic anatomy, muscles, bones, soft tissues of the legs, the digestive tract, the entire USDF Training Manual (broken up in segments), and various articles.

Some of my favorite parts of WIT were the field trips that we took to professionals' barns. Our very first field trip was to Ali Brock. She was incredible to watch ride and teach, and she explained everything she did. She walked us through her warm up routine and emphasized that she uses the warm up to make sure she has control of every single step the horse takes. I also took away that she never does the work for her horses and makes sure to stay elastic so they are able to perform. Ali never cut a corner, even in counter canter. We were also able to take a field trip to Debbie McDonald's barn to watch her train Adrienne Lyle and Kasey Perry-Glass. This field trip was very inspirational. Even at the highest levels our sport, they are still working everyday to perfect the little details. One more notable field trip was to another Olympian's barn, Jan Ebeling. We were able to watch him ride and hear him give an inspiring lecture about training, competing, and the Olympics. One of my favorite things I learned from Jan was on

partnership with horses. He discussed the importance of trust from our horses and always being thoughtful about training so you are setting the horse up to understand and be successful.

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to interview both George Williams and Katherine Bateson-Chandler. My interview with George Williams was incredibly insightful. It helped me more fully understand what it takes to become as accomplished as Mr. Williams and what it is like to be in his position. Interviewing Katherine Bateson-Chandler was equally as insightful. She discussed her career path, advice for young dressage riders, and what it is like to train with Robert Dover and Carl Hester. It was amazing to be able to sit down and have conversations with such successful and kind people.

During my time in the Winter Intensive Training Program, I got a real taste of what it is like to be in this industry and to live and breathe dressage. Along the way, I had fun and made some amazing friendships. I cannot begin to put all that I learned in these three months into words. Even my notebook does not capture what I learned from observation and just spending so much time around horses. I am forever grateful to Dressage4Kids for their support of my participation in WIT.