My WIT Experience

Moving away from home, moving to another state, all with the responsibility of your teammate. Suffice it to say, it is slightly terrifying!  My thoughts on the drive down consisted mainly of “am I crazy for doing this?” My shoulder to lean on and best friend luckily was moving down with me. Two 17-year-olds traveling 17 hours, learning for three months about what it takes to succeed in the Dressage world.  My horse “William” was my travel companion and teammate through the months at Lendon Gray’s Dressage For Kids (D4K) Winter Intensive Training Program (WIT) as well as the year leading up to winter in Florida 2022.

In order to participate in the D4K WIT program, I had to work hard for the spot in the program. Once accepted, I had to graduate early from high school and apply for numerous scholarships and grants, which in turn, helped to cover housing and living expenses. The days leading up to our departure were spent packing for both William and me. I like to summarize my experience riding with Lendon like being in a gourmet kitchen where Lendon was the head chef. Each day she has her new menu, a wide variety of innovative dishes, one for everyone. Her determination and discipline help to drive the community that she has created. It is she who has helped to spread the wildfire of burning passion in the youth dressage community.

Lendon chose to show all of us that the sport of Dressage reached beyond what happened in the sandbox. Each guest speaker who donated their time to speak with us about their part in the Dressage community helped to further build the understanding of what Dressage is. Lendon helped me to see the support structure within the Dressage community that exists to nurture and inspire green riders and green horses. If you decide your path is not one of the bright lights and big cities, the international stage, there are numerous incredible opportunities in which you can pursue your love of the sport. The discipline of Dressage, I have come to understand, is more than the six-minute snapshot that is displayed for the world to see. It is art, beauty, dedication, triumph, and failure. I have learned more in the four months when I was in Florida than I thought possible. When my teammate had to return home early due to injury, Lendon offered me one opportunity after the other, making sure that I saw the whole picture of Dressage. I was able to audit clinics and attend shows, watching the very best riders from the USA compete against one another.  I was able to speak with people who I had taken inspiration from since I was a little girl and scribe for judges I never thought I would see in person. I would be lying if I said I wasn’t devastated by not being able to fulfill the dreams and goals I had set for myself with William though but Lendon helped to create a learning environment that worked for me.

My journey to Florida was nothing like what I had in mind but then again, does anything in life truly ever go to plan? I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity that Lendon Gray and D4K awarded me in being accepted to the WIT program. Dressage isn’t easy, nobody said it was going to be but I believe that is why we are drawn to it. Each heartbreak, failure, and fall we take with stride because it happens for a reason. Overcoming those setbacks is what leads to triumphs, whether they be small or large. Celebrating each victory is what reminds us of the beauty of what we do. I have an immense amount of gratitude to all who helped me to become the person, rider, and horse lover I am today.  Morals and values are a foundation of the D4K program and seeing the dressage youth in Florida was inspiring. There is no shortage of raw talent in our community but as Lendon says, talent gets you to a point and your decision regarding how hard you want to work will take you the rest of the way.

I hope this is helpful in understanding a glimpse into the WIT program, however, I know that reading about WIT and participating in WIT are two very different things.