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Dear Dressage4Kids community,

A month ago I got the amazing opportunity to do the Summer intensive training program. It was such an honour to be able to learn under Lendon Gray and all the other professional that kindly gave us their time to teach us their knowledge. I only have great things to say about August 2022.

One of my greatest discoveries with my lessons with Lendon would be the importance of a forward horse. Not just forward yet a horse that reacts to your aids right away with no exception. The first day of lessons I heard Lendon say: "If you can walk forward you can do anything" I find that very true. If your horse isn't in front of your leg at the walk, it won't be at the trot nor canter and you can't get a true connection without your partner being in front of your leg.

Following my discovery on wanting your horse to be forward, I also found the importance of the utility of your aids. Lendon would say: "Your aids are there to make the next stride different". Now this might seem obvious, yet to actually be able to perform this I found to be pretty difficult. It was a real eye-opener to make sure that every aid counts and that I am correctly using my aids and not just nagging.



What I also loved about Lendon's style of teaching is to "not be afraid to make new mistake". Before this program I thought of myself to be a pretty daring rider with trying out things even if they don't work, yet Lendon put me on another level of not being afraid of new mistakes. She really helped me realize that if something isn't working to try something completely different. As an example, if my mare would get strong or resistant and suppling didn't work she would tell me to just give a stride most of the time it worked! Lendon really made me open my eyes on if something is not working, try something else, it might not work yet it might also work.

While I was there, I also got the amazing chance to have a wonderful lesson with Margaret Freeman. I loved how Margaret explained everything from the point of view of a judge. She really helped me overcome my challenges with my lengthening. She really emphasized on the the fact of building the energy up in the corners before the lengthening and then releasing it. I found this very helpful in developing a nice balanced lengthening. She also equipped me with another amazing tool to bring the lengthening back; if you shift your weight on to the inside stirrup, biomechanically this will slow the canter down. Overall, I had an amazing time learning from Margaret Freeman and I would recommend her wisdom to anyone that has a chance to jump on it.

We also got the chance to talk with Mike VanBlargan. He is an amazing farrier who was very kind and honest with answering all of our questions. He talked about how he used to participate in shoe making competitions (which I did not even know was a thing) and we got to see plenty of the incredible shoes that he forged during that time. One of the coolest things I learned about the foot and shoeing is that one of the main reasons a horse's hoof cracks is because of an unbalance of moisture found in it. Also, if your horse already wears shoes and by some misfortune gets a soft tissues injury, it is actually better to put on an aluminum shoe because they are lighter. He also thought us an amazing trick of how to pull a shoe off with something everyone has on the farm: a hammer! I thought it was really impressive that he found a way of pulling off a shoe safely with a tool everyone has at their disposal. It's a great trick to have in your pocket and it could really save your horses foot in certain situations.

Beth Haist also came to give us an amazing lecture on bits. Her knowledge and up-to-date research made bits super fascinating! She even took the time at the end of the lecture to fit everyone's bit with their horses. I learned that loose rings shouldn't actually be the go-to bit when you have a young and nervous horse as the loose ring creates a constant vibration which can be disturbing to them. Often, for horses that are more nervous or unsteady with their mouths, you would actually want to go for something with a fixed cheek. For example, eggbutt or properly made Boucher bits are often the way to go. The Boucher bit would more likely be used on a horse that is more pole high. Yet, over the years, the Boucher bit started to lose its original design. The mouthpiece (sometimes referred to as *bar*) of the bit should either be in the middle or over the middle point in the loop of the bit. If your mouthpiece is bellow, your Boucher bit isn't working as it is supposed to.

Overall this experience was just phenomenal. I learned so much about riding ethics, a horse's health care and equipment. I also learned so much by speaking with the other riders and the other business owners to see how they do thing and how they manage it. I would definitely recommend this experience to

anyone who has the opportunity to participate in a Dressage4Kids program or the TEAM clinic. The amount of work and generosity that is put in to these event are absolutely insane. You meet so many amazing horse people and riders and learn so much.

Thank you so much for your time and a huge thank you to Dressage4Kids for hosting all of these amazing event for all of us young riders. It's incredible.

Sincerely,

Arianne Fournier