

Megan Heeder Scholarship Report

September 7, 2009

To the Dressage 4 Kids Scholarship Committee,

Thank you so very much for your support of my training and showing experiences with Lendon Gray this summer. My experience was one of a dream. I have learned more than I can express in one report, but I will do my best to give an overview of my summer experiences.

Firstly, arranging for transportation and packing for an entire summer away from home with my horse was an unprecedented experience for me. Two days at a show was the longest I had ever been away from the well-stocked barn; two and a half months merited a long and often-revised packing list. Successful transportation of Simba (tack, medical, grooming, and showing supplies included) was just one learning experience this summer.

Upon arriving in Bedford, training began forty-five minutes after getting off my plane. While in New York, I took a lunge lesson, rode up to four horses a day, and had many wonderful lessons with Lendon Gray and her fantastic working students, and also had the great fortune to audit and work with Michael Poulin, George Williams, and Tina Konyot. Every day brought new lessons- literally; a day did not go by without the learning of a helpful tip or the experience of a "light bulb moment."

One of the biggest obstacles Simba and I overcame was that of going forward. As Lendon often reminded me, "Forward is not something you work on; it is something you do." At home, I spent 45 minutes getting Simba to move off my leg, and even then he was not honestly forward. In the first 10 minutes of my first ride at Gleneden, Simba and I had a sincere feeling of what forward was- and with that came the realization of how much work we had to do. From June 20th, the date of our first ride, to mid-July, our rides consisted of my struggle to get Simba forward, and him struggling to understand why I was attempting to ride him on the aids for the first time in our relationship. We eventually reached an understanding, which allowed me to begin focusing more on lateral work and transitions. This brought us more thoroughness and suppleness, which in turn began improving the quality of all three gaits, but most prominently the trot and canter. The starkest representation of our improvement comes from a schooling show held at Gleneden four days after my arrival; Simba and I had a terrible time with Second Level test 1 and received a 58.68%. After nearly two months, we then received a 73% at First Level and a 68% at Second Level at Lendon's Youth Dressage Festival and were the high-score Grand Champions!

Not only did lessons help me to advance my riding, but so did carefully considering what I was taught that day and coming up, on my own, with ways to improve the work Simba and I were doing. In the evenings, after coming home from the barn, I thought about what we had worked on, the comments which were made, and what I personally could do to improve what we were doing outside of correcting the things that were obviously wrong. For example, when I did shoulder-in, I consistently forget to bring my outside leg back to prevent the haunches from falling out. If the quality of my shoulder-in was an issue and I forgot an essential part of the aid, how much better would it be without using any of Lendon's suggestions if I corrected that single mistake? Developing the skills which allowed me to think in this way not only aided my development as a rider over the summer, but will continue to help me as I work with Maryal Barnett back home in Michigan.

Showing was another essential learning experience of my summer. Thanks to the generosity of Lendon Gray and a fundraiser planned and implemented in part with Rachel

Chowanec, I was able to take Simba to four shows over the course of the summer. Having never shown outside of small schooling shows locally, I was thrilled to experience the recognized world of showing. These shows enabled me not only to achieve my first set of qualifying scores for Regionals, but to learn how to effectively warm up a horse (short, schooling the movements of the test and not wearing the horse into the ground, especially at a show which lasts for more than one day) and how to better ride my horse. Learning how to make Simba the best he could be in about 20 minutes was one of my largest and most important lessons of the summer, and will prove to be invaluable as I continue to show Simba and eventually show other horses as well.

Another very important part of my summer was the planning and execution of the abovementioned fundraiser. Rachel Chowanec and I worked very hard- going to various stores to collect donations, doing services (tack cleaning, car washing, boot polishing, trunk cleaning, etc.) for the clients at Gleneden, calling multiple national corporations to solicit donations, contacting professionals (including Courtney King, who generously spoke at the opening of the fundraiser in addition to donating to the silent auction), making bid sheets and signs for the silent auction at Gleneden and planning the fundraiser program. The fundraiser consisted of a lunch buffet, silent auction, demonstration rides by Rachel and me, 2009 NAJYRC competitor Megan Davis, and local professional Tina Konyot, and an opening speech by Lendon Gray and Courtney King. The generosity of those who came to the fundraiser and the many who did not attend, but still donated, was simply overwhelming. The number of people who donated items, services, time, and hands on the day of to make our fundraiser a success. After the actual event took place, the thank you notes and work of contacting those who won items, but were not present at the end of the day, greatly surprised me. I did not expect the weeks after the fundraiser to be as challenging as those preceding it, but this taught me a valuable lesson about planning fundraisers, something which will occur many times if I plan to continue to show and further my riding.

Finally, here is the link to my blog: <http://movinguphill.blogspot.com>. I have postings here from my entire summer, and D4K may use it in any way which may be of help. Thank you once again for your generosity and support, and if there is anything I can do in the future to aid D4K, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you once again for making my summer of dreams possible!

Sincerely,
Megan Heeder