

Dear Lendon Gray Scholarship Award Committee,

The following is my report from the Gina Smith clinic in March:

Thanks to the generosity of the Dressage4Kids Scholarship Committee, I had the fabulous opportunity to participate in a weekend clinic with Canadian Olympian, Gina Smith. With Gina's guidance I was able to work through a major training issue and gain confidence in my current skill-set. Gina addressed my mare's tendency to bulge into my left leg and have me carry her in my left hand. Although as a rider, I struggle to keep a soft left hand, Gina presented us with an exercise that shifted my focus from what I didn't want (a horse wanting to lean left) to what I did want (a horse responding to my inside leg and outside rein) and this strategy helped immensely. In order to get my mare paying attention to a connection on the outside rein, Gina first had me flex-give-flex on the left rein. By keeping the pressure on the left rein playful and non-holding, I was able to get my horse moving off my left leg and focus on supporting her with my outside aids. The exercise she had us do created a more solid connection in the bridle and enhanced my mare's balance. We trotted on a 20m circle, and at each open end of the circle, we performed a turn on the forehand in the same direction. Then right back into trot.

Auditing some of the other lessons, I picked up these valuable pieces of knowledge: "There's a difference between sitting the trot and having the horse letting you sit the trot. If your horse is tight, go back and work on the back suppleness... and remember, you can do everything in rising trot!", "If you soften the pressure in the hand, you don't need to soften the seat. Hold with the seat.", "in transitions always think about where the hind legs are."

This summer I plan to keep working with Gina as well as participating in a TEAM clinic with Lendon Gray!

Thanks and best wishes,
Elsie Reford