

I would like to thank Lendon Gray and the many volunteers at Dressage4Kids for giving me the opportunity to continue learning about the sport I love to so much.

In mid- November, I participated in two Moray Nicholson clinics at Silver Crest Equestrian Center. Cirinity, my lovely Friesian, and I have ridden with Moray many times and as a result he knows us both well. Before our clinics, I had anticipated working on some elements from first level, instead Moray and I focused in on the minute details of my position and riding. While doing so we primarily focused on steering, hand placement, and the importance of clear and precise signals.

After riding for around ten years I had assumed that I had mastered the ability to steer my horse. Moray disagreed. After watching Cirinity and I go around the school for a bit, Moray noticed that I was asking Cirinity to do very simple things, such as cross the diagonal, with overly complicated signals. Moray explained that I was not communicating with Cirinity in an effective manner and that just because overriding had worked for me did not mean it was correct. He then made a very good point and told me that I should save the complicated riding for more complex movements and let simple movements be just that, simple.

After diagnosing our problem, Moray had me do a couple exercises. He first had me cross the diagonal from V to R. While doing so, I was to focus on being precise and keeping the movement simple. After completing this exercise a couple times, it became evident that I had a tendency to push Cirinity with my inside leg towards my intended destination rather than steering her there and keeping my eyes looking towards my intended target. Although this exercise was simple, it exposed how overly complex I had made such a basic movement. After completing the exercise correctly a couple of times, we reversed the exercise and focused on the same objectives as we had in the other direction. We spent the rest of the day's lesson doing other figures around the school while focusing on being precise and keeping my signals direct and uncomplicated.

On the second day of the clinic Moray focused on the placement of my hands and how their current placement was impeding my ability to clearly and effectively communicate with Cirin. Moray set me up on a square figure with the sides of the square positioned off the wall, giving Cirinity enough room to swing her hind quarters towards the wall as we turned the corners of the square. Moray first asked me to do the exercise to the best of ability without any instruction from him. While doing the exercise, Cirinity was somewhat unresponsive and seemed to participate halfheartedly. After going around a couple times Moray had me bridge my reins and hold them with one hand in the center of her withers. We then tried the exercise again. Cirinity was much more responsive this time around. Moray explained that the change was so drastic because when going around with both reins in one hand I was unable to negatively impact Cirin's way of going. Moray then had me go around again, holding my reins normally. This time I was to be aware of where my hands were and how they were affecting Cirin. Although bridging my reins had helped me understand what I was supposed to do, my execution was a bit off at first and it took me a couple of tries to truly understand what Moray was asking me to do. Once I did understand, Cirinity seemed much more responsive to my aids.

Although I did not work on any fancy movements during my clinics, the lessons I learned from this clinic shared a common theme with much of what I learned throughout 2017. For most of 2017 I was unable to take many lessons. As a result, I began to work on my position. Throughout the year, my position improved and sure enough, Cirinity's way of going seemed to improve as well. After realizing the great effect my position had on Cirinity, I changed the way I thought about riding. If I was going to ask Cirinity to use herself correctly, I was going to make sure I was using myself correctly as well. Although my position had improved throughout the year, Moray's lessons gave me more tools so I can continue to improve.

Thank you so much,
Allison Salt