

In the Spring of 2018, I was given the opportunity to go to Wellington, Florida and spend 6 weeks training with Betsy Steiner. I have worked with Betsy in clinics in Minnesota for the last 4 years, so I was very excited to get to spend an extended period of time training with her. A very generous scholarship from Dressage4Kids made this trip possible. The trip to Florida is an expensive one and I am so grateful to Dressage4Kids for making it possible for me.

When I made plans for the trip, I was supposed to take my 14-year-old Oldenburg gelding, Stedemann, who is owned by Dressage4Kids. However, an unexpected injury prevented him from coming. Because of this, I took my young horse Rhoyal Encour (Oz) and it proved to be an amazing experience for him. He has sometimes been a challenge for me over the past 2 years as he can be a somewhat insecure and explosive horse. He has not been a horse who naturally tolerates new situations well. This trip to Florida helped us take a huge step forward, in terms of training and attitude. Being able to take Oz out of his comfort zone and work with him in a new environment gave me the opportunity to reset his routine and break him out of some of his bad habits. By the end of the trip he was able to be ridden outside, with the bugs, while the horse shows were going on, without lunging and anyone who knows Oz could attest to the fact that that is a huge deal for him. Betsy also suggested that we enter the last White Fences horse show of the season. Oz completed his first First Level tests at only his second show ever very successfully. I am very hopeful that this positive experience will set him up well to be confident and rideable at the shows this summer.

In terms of his training, Betsy was the perfect fit for our current level. My trainer, Sarah Travis, worked for Betsy as her assistant trainer when she was younger. Because of this, their training systems are very compatible. This was very helpful, as we were able to start off right where we left off in Minnesota while taking advantage of the intensive training and Betsy's vast and creative knowledge base. With Oz, we worked a lot on self-carriage and his acceptance of the aids. The movements have generally been very easy for him as he has moved up the levels. However, he is still learning how to use his core muscles to keep his balance while staying loose in his back so he can bring his hind legs underneath him. Betsy had a lot of helpful exercises for working on this. She had me do a lot of work with him in the walk, helping him get his body in line. I would ride a square with quarter turns on the haunches in each corner. Then, when I

would cross the centerline, I would do a full turn on the forehand. This exercise was great for Oz because it helped me show him how to move the different parts of his body separately, while also working on bringing his hind legs underneath him. Betsy also used a lot of leg yields to help with the balance. She was very specific that his outside shoulder should not be falling out at all and that each step was balanced and forward thinking, It was surprising how difficult that was and I could feel a huge difference in his general way of going when I would get that right. We also worked on his general willingness to accept my aids. Sometimes, especially when he is tense, he will be going fine but he will give the feeling that if you ask him to do something it will not go well. We worked a lot on this by taking advantage of times when he was likely to be a bit tense (ex. windy days, show days at White Fences, when the other horses left the arena, etc.) to practice his ability to help himself relax. When he gets worked up, I would often have trouble bringing him back to a place where he would let me help him. Through putting him in the more challenging situations that Florida provided, we were able to help him practice going from being tense to a more relaxed state without needing to be lunged and getting the chance to leap around.

In addition to my own personal lessons, I was able to watch Betsy ride and teach every day. One exercise that I saw Betsy work on a lot with the upper level horses was an exercise to help with the balance in the canter half pass zig zag. She would have the pair come down centerline and half pass the first direction. Then they would do their change but instead of half passing the other direction they would leg yield in the direction they were going before. This helped school balance in the change for the horses so they don't get into the habit of falling through the change to start the next half pass. Betsy also did a lot of work in the walk with the upper level horses. She did the square exercise I previously described with almost every horse. She would also school a lot of balance work and lateral work in the walk. Betsy does a lot of work with long lining to school the piaffe/passage and to work on the balance of the horse. She did some long lining with Oz, which dramatically improved his response to the half halt. I also saw her do some long lining with an 18 hand horse named Atticus to help him with his balance. He had an amazing start on piaffe and the long lining work helped him balance evenly over his hind legs which made the piaffe even more expressive.

In addition to the time I got to spend at Betsy's, this scholarship allowed me to have some time during the day to take advantage of all of the opportunities that Wellington offers. I spent a lot of time at Global watching the riders in the warm up and then watching the riders complete their tests. Getting to watch the horse show with my trainer Sarah and Betsy was really beneficial. They were able to point out a lot of details in the tests which made the experience of watching even more educational. I even had the chance to watch Lendon teach a couple of times.

This scholarship provided me with an amazing experience. I am a full-time college student so while I took care of my horse and helped with Sarah's horses, I did not have time to be a full time working student. I had thought this would mean that I couldn't come to Florida until I finished school, but Dressage4Kids made it possible for me to expand my education in a very large way while still finishing college. I am so grateful for this opportunity and know that Oz and I both benefited greatly from the training and education we received. Betsy will be back in Minnesota for her first clinic of the summer in one week and I am very excited to show her the progress we have made on our homework and get some new advice and homework for next time.