



LPSDC Vicki Mears Adult Amateur Educational & Training Scholarship 2018 by Tina Hansen



I used the \$250.00 grant awarded to me to supplement the fees for four Karen Pavicic clinics this summer. Karen Pavicic is a Canadian dressage rider. She represented Canada at the 2014 World Equestrian Games in Normandy where she finished 9th in the team competition and 41st in the individual dressage competition with Don Daiquiri. She is one of the several clinicians that comes to Miari Stables several times throughout the year.

My trainer, Jill Seely, encouraged me to take advantage of opportunities to ride with some of the FEI trainers with more national and international experience that come to our area.

And I decided to clinic with Karen.

My first lesson with Karen was May 7, the day after the LPSDC May show. It was the first show of the 2018 season for us and I was pleased with my partner, What a Girl, aka Missy. She was a true partner at the show. The clinic with Karen helped me to get Missy more responsive to my aids, especially helped me get her to be more forward. She pushed me beyond my comfort zone in asking my her to go forward in the canter work. She had me galloping down the long side, collecting and halting then back up to canter/gallop again. This exercise was huge in helping me overcome my deep fear of a big canter having sustained a broken rib in a big canter/ buck accident several years ago. I realized that it had been a fluke, and not her normal way of going and had to trust her. Karen explained that by holding back on the canter work it was keeping me from tapping into her full potential. And that we needed to push ourselves beyond our comfort zone each day to work to achieve the maximum quality of her gaits. We also worked on straightness by doing serpentines with transitions, canter/walk/canter on the center line, making sure we were straight at each transition. I headed home from that lesson feeling on top of the world with our progress.

In subsequent lessons we worked on exercises down the quarter line and center line to improve her responsiveness to my aids. She had me ask for one stride left in shoulder in, then straight ahead, then one straight in shoulder in right which helped to make her to react quicker and me to ask quicker. We did transitions forward and back, which helped with engagement.

Another lesson included a lot of canter work to improve collection. We cantered across the short diagonal then at the quarter line did a quarter pirouette back to the centerline and pushed the canter bigger, then at the next quarter line another quarter pirouette, then bigger canter. This

helped us to keep the engagement as she sat more. These helped with our tempi changes, which are a challenge for us.

I plan to clinic again with Karen in the Spring as I found her style to be very positive and straight forward. When I told her at a break in our first lesson, that I was terrified at the big canter work and why. She said she appreciated my comments, but that we were doing just fine. And she was right.

Thanks to LPSDC for the financial assistance. I encourage others to take advantage of this opportunity offered by the Club.

Road To Kentucky by Christine Erikson, November 2016

How do I begin to tell you about my Road to Kentucky and the USDF Dressage Finals? It all involves a lame horse, a fantastic generous trainer, a magical pony, strategic focus coaching, unexpected medical diagnoses, incredible friends and a lot of planning (and money).

But let's start from the beginning, shall we?

In 2015 my then 20-year-old half-Arab was starting to show signs of old age and we had periods when he couldn't be ridden. I realized that he will never be able to take me to my goal, to get my USDF Bronze medal. So, what do you do when what you have is a horse, the one you love more than anything and you worry that trying to push him forward might make him feel worse than he is now?

Along comes my trainer for many years, Beth Anderson-Ness, and she offers up her pony Allegria for me to ride, to use for my own development as a rider and advancement. At first I have to admit I was a bit skeptical, a pony? No, I am too big for her! But it only took one ride and I was completely sold! I felt like Ally and I connected right away. I never liked riding big, tall horses and since I'm no longer a "spring flower" she felt comfortable and safe, and that is very important to me.

So what started as a schooling situation turned into an exciting start of the 2016 show season.

Beth was so generous allowing me to take her to a few shows and we had some wonderful successes!

A few years earlier I had Cynthia Collins/Luna Tunes Freestyles create a First Level freestyle for my Arab, one that I really didn't get to ride much, so I thought, why don't I try riding it with Ally and see if it works? Well, at our first show in May we scored an 81%!! The summer went on and we did really well and the decision was made to go to the USDF Region 6 Championships since we had qualified. We qualified with our 1st level Freestyle and 2nd Level. I was excited.

But on July 26, I received the news after a routine mammogram, that I had breast cancer and everything came to a halt. It's kind of funny, but when the doctor told me, my first (honestly) thought was "I won't be able to go to Championships!"

But with the help of a great group of doctors, my family and a fantastic support from my "horse village" I was riding my freestyle at Championships two weeks after my surgery, and I won!!!

That victory lap was so sweet in so many ways!

But that was just a start. My invitation to the Dressage Finals promptly showed up in my email inbox and I started to dream! And so did a lot of my friends! When you live in Washington State it's a daunting (both logistically and financially) task to even think about taking a horse to Kentucky. I had never taken a horse further than Oregon.

But in less than a week a fundraiser was planned, a GoFundMe account opened, a Facebook Page "Road To Kentucky 2016" was up and running, an application to the USDF Region 6 Travel Fund grant was mailed in and the dream was starting to become reality.

There was only one piece that was clouding the plans. While all this was going on I started my four-week radiation treatment and I was due to be done a week and a half before I had to leave for the Final's with no idea of how I would be feeling at the end of the treatment, slightly scary.

Both of us made it safely to Kentucky. I flew and Ally was in the fabulous care of Brooke Voldbaek and Pirouette Enterprises. It took four days for them to get there.

Arriving at the Kentucky Horse Park is a day I will never forget. Everything was huge and so beautiful. Tons of fantastic horses and riders (and yes, we were by far the smallest team, in size, not in spirit!). At first a bit intimidating since this was all new to me, national competition, different ball game! The weather was beautiful and brisk! Clear

blue skies and I was so grateful that none of my rides were at 8:00 a.m. in the morning.
(think frost)

My first ride in the open competition was Friday and I can't say we nailed that ride. Fatigue from my treatment set in and my sweet little pony kindly "obliged" by working less too. Remember sitting alone at my hotel feeling a bit discouraged, scrolling through my Facebook and a dear friend wrote something that changed my mood around completely;

"You're down in Kentucky competing after undergoing radiation, you've already won!"

Championship ride was Sunday and me and Beth, my trainer, who had arrived a few days earlier, had figured out our warm up to be as effective as possible, without draining all my strength. My class was big, 26 riders and I was riding as the 6th rider from the end.

The fairytale ending that I kept dreaming about was to be in the Top 10 group. I so badly wanted to check off an item on my bucket list, to ride in the Alltech Arena, and that would be my only chance. As I saw my score after the ride, I knew it was competitive, and with the speed the scores were published I knew I would be in the Top 10 group. Never did I dream we were to place third!

It's hard for me to describe the feeling I had that day and still do every time I watch the videos, pictures. It was by far one of the best days of my life.

Even though me and miracle pony Ally no longer is on "our road to Kentucky" I realize that we are ALWAYS on a road to somewhere/something. My cancer journey will continue for the rest of my life. Lots of decisions, some hard ones, has been made and it's all in the hands of something greater now.

I could never have done this without my Starr Valley Farm peeps, my family and supportive medical staff. As I was last year, I look forward to a new show season with a new second level freestyle, but this year I know better to embrace every single day because you never know what is in store...

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