



Announcements

Thank you, ODS, for the educational scholarship!

A New Equestrian Journey

From the time I was young, I loved horses, children and teaching. My life's journey consisted of teaching, administration and horses; but separately. I loved doing each of them. Only after career and family was I blessed to combine both: riding instruction for both children and adults. I have two students who are also para riders: one due to a stroke at birth and the other through an accident. Many of you know Lily Rhodes who is a young amputee. Lily rides in able body recognized dressage shows. Many weekends I watched her pack her mom's car with high point chairs, coolers, trophies, along with her ribbons. Lily is a fabulous rider and a positive, confident young lady. Others noticed this, too: the USA Equestrian para-dressage officials.

When Lily's accident occurred, I shared with her mom that Lily could be a potential para Olympian candidate. In November of this past year, USA para-dressage association contacted Pam as they were on a talent search. Lily and I were invited to the North Texas Equestrian Center. Kai Handt is the proprietor of the stable and Chef d'Equipe for the para-dressage team. Upon arrival I saw individuals with various disabilities but by Sunday I saw only serious riders. On Friday I saw individuals taking off prosthetic legs or being lifted from wheel chairs to ride. On Sunday I saw only the norm for getting ready to ride just as it is the norm for me to put on boots and a helmet to ride: thus; the beginning of a new learning opportunity.

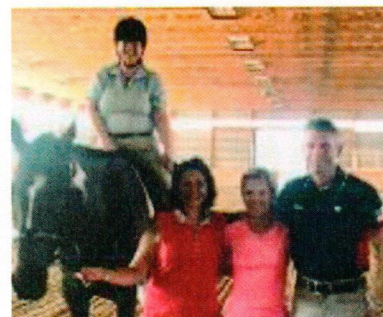
The Texas weekend began with videos of British Para-Olympians and the interworking of the USA Para-Dressage program. Mr. Assouline, now the USA para-dressage coach, had been the British Para Coach leading their country to many Olympic team and individual gold medals. In Britain under his direction, the para riders used their personal coaches as Mr. Assouline peer coached their personal trainers. At the Texas event I instructed Lily along with other riders while the new USA para Olympic Coach, Michel Assouline, observed (peer coached) my instruction.

With new found knowledge about para requirements, in January, Pam, Lily and I went to Wellington in order for Lily to be "graded." This process requires two therapists, one from the US and one from a foreign country, to evaluate riders into a categories called a "grade." The objective is to keep those in each grade to be as equivalent in disabilities for fairness in competition. Lily was graded as level "5." During the weekend, we were able to see a CDI competition for both para and able body dressage. It gave me an opportunity to see Grade 5 para-dressage riders perform the Grade 5 Para-dressage test which is basically a fourth level test without flying changes.

This led to another learning opportunity in which I applied and received a grant from ODS. In June I participated in the USEF Para-Equestrian Dressage Coach Pilot Program at Wheatland Farms in Virginia. It was the pilot program that will lead to officially becoming a certified USEF para coach. This program was part of the USEF/USPEA Para-Equestrian Dressage Center of Excellence Program. Prior to attending, there was on-line homework from the aspects of dressage riding and training, aspects of different disabilities pertaining to para-dressage, becoming certified in Adult and Pediatric First aid/CPR/AED, and lastly being certified in SafeSports training. The program began with classroom work pertaining to the structure of lessons: preparation/delivery/evaluation. It was followed by each day having a student of which we instructed and then critiqued by another of the fellow participants along with Michel Assouline who was the ultimate critic. The participants were instructors from many parts of the country who taught a wide range of disabilities. The environment was a great way to collaborate on teaching styles and creative adaptations concerning equipment. I had the unique experience of having a rider who was a professor who had lost most of her sight. It was my responsibility to teach her on a horse she had never ridden in an arena new to her.

This was such a wonderful learning opportunity on so many levels that I have applied to all my students. It also was an opportunity to meet new people. It is my intention of taking this learning and becoming a certified para-equestrian dressage coach.

-Roberta Clark



Suzanne Ament (blind rider), Ana O'Brien, Roberta Clark, USEF Olympic Coach Michel Assouline