



► BETWEEN ROUNDS WITH:

JEREMY STEINBERG

For Young Riders: A Guide To Growing Up

Our columnist offers a “commencement speech” of advice and support for those about to embark on a life with dressage.

My mother, who is just about to send her first book to print, has told me a few times I should put together the columns that I’ve written into a book. With her prodding, I read back through the last two years’ worth of columns to see what such a project would look like, and the column “Teach Your Children Well” from April of 2014 jumped out at me.

As usual with what I write, there were people who didn’t agree with it, but there was so much positive feedback, and it’s a column that people still mention to me. When I wrote that, I had just finished working for the U.S. Equestrian Federation as the youth coach, and I had—and still do have—very strong feelings about the way the youth in our country are raised around horses, in regard to their horsemanship skills, people skills, education level, focus on showing and scores, making

teams and the never-ending drive to do better, which serves as a curse as much as it does a blessing.

In the United States, kids are basically told that if they don’t do well at shows, they aren’t good enough—or their horses are not good enough—and some kind of sponsor, corporate or otherwise, will solve all their woes. This gives them a very unrealistic view on their future and sets them up for a type of failure that isn’t in their best interests. They look often to the future and ask themselves what will it hold, what can I become, and then what do I need to do to make that a reality?

I often hear them, without using words and more by their actions, asking themselves “what someone can do for them” instead of the opposite. It reminds me of the famous line from John F. Kennedy’s 1961 Inaugural Address: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

In the “Teach Your Children Well” column I talked about teaching a man to fish, so he can feed the village instead of giving the man a fish. Our youth must learn to fish if we are to raise a generation of self-sufficient riders and trainers—and good human beings.

I’m about three years off the USEF job now, and I still have a lot of contact with the kids I worked with during my few years there, their parents and their trainers. I still have many of them in private clinics and as regular students, and I seem to be an advisor on many decisions they make. I’m a sort of “goduncle” to many of them and love the job.

One question I’m repeatedly asked is, “How do I find a sponsor?” I’m always telling them to go to school, get an education, then a job and become your own sponsor. I say this seriously and teasingly at the same time. I wish our sport could be purely judged on





“Take this as a kind of commencement speech,” says Jeremy Steinberg, “whether you’re actually graduating, still in school, moving into the professional ranks or still just struggling through your junior and young riders years wondering what you want to be and where you want to go.” ISTOCKPHOTO.COM PHOTO

“If you’re going to call the horse business home, you have to understand it’s hard.”

still just struggling through your junior and young riders years wondering what you want to be and where you want to go. This letter is to you.

If you want to be a good rider, it doesn’t take money or sponsors. It doesn’t take an amazing horse or an expensive saddle. It takes time, dedication, patience and hard work.

There is far more to winning or becoming a top international team rider than that, and those above mentioned things create a winning ticket, but as far as becoming a *good* rider, one who advertises her education by the seat she has and the mouths of the horses she produces, it’s a simple recipe. Those with an educated eye can see a good rider stand out among hundreds by their skill and skill alone, not because of the horse they are sitting on. The best advertisement you can give yourself in the show arena or at home is not on paper or in lip service; it is in your seat, work ethic and dedication to the horse.

If you’re going to call the horse business home, you have to understand it’s hard. It’s part “show business,” sweat and tears, part joy and exuberance, but in the end, it’s all work. There is an obvious animal welfare and management component. Financial savviness is essential. Long-term thinking is a necessity, and a never ending stream of patience is required in dealing with your equine partners and human alike.

When you look at the horse world, where do you see yourself fitting in? You have to find a niche in

rider talent at any level, as is running, gymnastics, tennis, golf or other endeavors, but I understand the irony of that statement. After all, in order to change that, it would require removing the horse from the sport.

I still find it shameful that people buy horses in order to secure or at least try to secure an Olympic or team start. There’s no solution to this, but it saddens me. When kids are overlooked because they’re on Arabians or some other non-dressage breed that can’t get the scores or results, I get it, but it’s frustrating nonetheless.

“Teach Your Children Well” was aimed at the support staff, parents, trainers and bureaucracy that legislates, governs and runs the kids riding programs and educational path. It condemned, and I will continue to do so, anyone who blames the kids for poor riding when their scores aren’t there, instead of blaming the federations,

trainers, parents, educators and support staff for not raising better riders who have the needed skills to show and train.

The emphasis must shift to creating good horse(wo)men and well-trained horses and steer away from getting them “seen” or on “lists” at early ages. It is up to *us* to raise these kids well so that they have the skills, the upbringing and the wherewithal to not only survive the world of equestrian sport, but to thrive and prosper and be our next generation of superstars.

Support For The Struggle

This column is directed to the kids and young adults. You are the future of our sport, and you have a voice as well as a choice. Since we’re getting toward the end of the school year, and graduation is near for some, take this as a kind of commencement speech, whether you’re actually graduating, still in school, moving into the professional ranks, or

the industry so what separates you from the next rider of equal talent is obvious. How are you going to put together a long term plan of where you are now, where you want to be, and how do you make that happen? Are you a good communicator? How do you convince people you are good at what you do without coming across as arrogant? How do you self-promote without being narcissistic? How do you stand up for what you believe in without offending others? Can you disagree with a peer or elder and still have respect for them? Do you treat those you disagree with with dignity and grace? Can you walk away from a bad ride or day and come quietly back, better for it tomorrow? Do you view the whole process as a learning experience? Do you consider yourself an expert or a student? Are you a self starter and self educator? What interests do you have outside of the horse world that give you balance and help you relate to your clients and world around you away from the barn? What exceptional human beings do you know who can offer guidance and serve as a model? Who do you know who is also in your shoes?

You should be asking yourself these questions and more. They are things that help shape and steer the course of a career and life, whether horse related or otherwise.

If you're going to take the education route outside of the horse world and have horses as a hobby, don't be afraid to put the horses on hold for a time. You won't forget how to ride, and you'll probably never say you wasted your time on a higher education. Aim high. Horses are expensive, but do what you love. You'll need a job that allows you the ability to become your own sponsor, or you'll need a job you love so much you don't mind the sacrifices you'll have

to make to have horses in your life.

Know that you can't always have everything, and that is OK, but don't settle for a life in which you don't find love and daily joy. Many around you will tell you you are all winners, but they are lying to you. Life is hard, and work with horses is tiresome. We will not all win, and we will not all garner great fame, but we can and should enjoy the process and find the beauty in what's around us.

On any given day, there is only one winner, who may or may not conduct himself with grace and poise, and that behavior will burden his shoulders. There are many on that same day who will not win, nor place second, but the way they conduct themselves will be noticed and remembered for many days to come. Humility goes much further than pride and is never considered a sin.

I would not trade the world for the experiences I've had over the last few years with some of dressage's youth. Allie C., sending me the video of your mom was priceless, and I love feeling like I'm a part of your life knowing what lies ahead for you. Maddie B., following your career and dedication to become a doctor has been awe-inspiring. Kalie B., I can't believe how much you can fit into a day and how hard you work. Kaitlyn B., I hear great things about what an amazing teacher you are becoming in your own right, and seeing a rider like you evolve into a trainer is what it's all about. Taryn B., I will always and forever be proud of the amazing human being you've become. Emily G., I wish I rode and sat on a horse as well as you. Jamie P., you continually make the

decisions I wish I had made at your age, and I learn from you every day. Cassie B., I see so much of myself in you; keep your calm and stay focused. You have the horse world at your feet.

I see such amazing futures in store for

“Humility goes much further than pride and is never considered a sin.”

all of the young riders I've been fortunate to connect with, and I'm excited to have been a part, however small, in the creation of who you've become and are becoming. I couldn't be more proud of you all, as a group and generation of riders.

As a teacher, my job is only half of the relationship with any of my students and riders. The other half is up to you, and you all have exceeded any and all expectations on my end over the last few years. In your life, the guidance you seek from your student-teacher relationships will ebb and flow. At a certain point you will find you are the teacher or mentor. You will find yourself being the one asked about where to go, what to do, how to behave and for overall advice, not only by the next generation, but also by your peers, elders, parents and educators.

It's the greatest joy of an educator to see a student or pupil evolve to such an extent that they become the one educating. You will in turn become better schooled than those who came before you. Own that knowledge and be modest in its care. What you will become is who those before you always wanted to be. 🐾



COURTESY FRASER PHOTO

JEREMY STEINBERG was the U.S. Equestrian Federation Youth Coach from 2010-2014. He's a well-known rider, trainer and competitor based out of Del Mar, Calif. He's also a selector for the USEF

Developing Horse Program and one of five clinicians who works with the U.S. Dressage Federation in its Platinum Performance/USDF junior and young rider clinic series. He worked with longtime friend and mentor Dietrich von Hopffgarten extensively until his passing in 2004. Jeremy has trained and shown through the Grand Prix level. He now runs a small "boutique"-type training business and travels the country giving clinics. More information can be found at steinbergdressage.com.

“Don't settle for a life in which you don't find love and daily joy.”