

My adventure at the ICP workshops!
By Kathy Kerns, Area IV Adult Rider Coordinator

Okay, so Missouri doesn't exactly come to mind when one thinks of eventing meccas, but New Spring Farm in Columbia, MO, was the my destination. For the uninitiated, it is the home of one of our Athens Olympics superstars, Windfall. So it isn't the backwoods, although Tim and Cheryl Holekamps' house is nestled in their woods.

My adventure started early Tuesday morning – arrival time was 7:30 am, and didn't end until well into Friday afternoon. And I never got back to my hotel room earlier than 8:00 any evening. The four days were packed, exhausting, but absolutely a great time!

The 4 days were actually 2 two-day workshops, one on Dressage, the other on Jumping. Another Olympian, of the human kind, Phyllis Dawson, was our teacher for both workshops. I wish I could say I sucked her brain dry, but although I tried, I was only able to assimilate a tiny portion of the vast body of knowledge Phyllis possesses. Her eye for seeing what was wrong was phenomenal, and her kindness in coaching us to see it was also incredible. I'm sure we tried her patience multiple times as we fumbled through our lessons.

The "we" I'm referring to are the 5 candidate instructors who participated in each workshop. Three of us stayed for both, two others did only the dressage portion and another two did just the jumping days. Two candidates, Clare and Amanda, are also in Area 4, and Amanda is an Adult Rider, too.

As an added bonus we got to watch Brigitte Kettel pass her assessment. So now we have another ICP instructor in our Area 4 Adult Rider ranks. Way to go, Brigitte! By the way, assessments look scary tough.

That's not to say the workshops weren't scary tough, too. They were, but we were all in it together, and we all felt like idiots at various times, but I think we all had successes, too.

The first day set the tone: lecture and demonstrations from Phyllis, then we all took turns teaching a lesson. I need to mention here how super our demo riders were. They were unfailingly polite and mostly listened and NEVER laughed at us, at least not during the lessons. They didn't even roll their eyes. And they could have, more than once.

And now for my personal experiences. My first lesson was supposed to be with a nice little Appaloosa, who unfortunately turned up slightly lame. So the substitute horse and rider were one of the Holekamps' gorgeous Trakheners, and their professional rider, Michael Larsen! Talk about intimidating! Both horse and rider were far more advanced than a lowly Level I candidate instructor would normally teach. Arrgh! The good news is that I think I helped Michael stretch the mare's neck a bit better, and with a lot of prompting from Phyllis, I helped him use his leg just a teeny bit more effectively. Wow. Now I have a swelled head – I lived through it!

The next day, I had a slightly more reasonable horse and rider combination, although they were still quite good. It really takes concentration to see what needs improvement, and then figure out the right exercises to use to get there. And I found out my time management stinks. Bad Kathy. Get the lesson done.

Wednesday night, the Holekamps had a party and fed us immense amounts of yummy food. I definitely ate too much. And then we watched video of the Hong Kong Olympics.

Thursday was Stadium jumping day. Tami and her new horse were my demo team. Yeah, her new QUIET horse – who wasn't on that day. It was a fun time and I bet I could have challenged them quite a bit more. But again, my time management was crummy and it was 90 degrees out. That night we had a cross-country lecture from Phyllis, and we munched down Tim Holekamp's eggplant casserole. I need to get the recipe.

Friday was my scariest and most fun day of the four. I decided to teach what I'd never, ever, taught before – why not when I had Awesome Dawson watching my back? The Appy was back sound and I had Roxanne, a really great rider who hadn't evented but could obviously ride well, and she was willing to be my guinea pig. What a blast! We did a "behavior" exercise to get the Appy to act like a horse rather than an App, then a combination, a big drop and up bank, and the water. And Phyllis only had to slap me up the side of the head a couple of times.

I was humbled, elated, exhausted, melted, rained on, elated (oh, yeah, I said that), and I have such a sense of accomplishment. Phyllis has urged me to go on to take the assessment. I don't know if I will, since I really don't teach. But whether I do or not, I have such a strong sense of learning to ride from the other side now – I know I can help my own teachers and clinicians help me more effectively. I also know when they aren't worth my time or money and to move on.

There's so very much more I could tell you about the experience – the highs and lows and about my "cohorts in crime". But your eyes would probably cross. So what I will tell you is Experience It. If you can, participate in a workshop. It is expensive, so if you can't participate, at least volunteer as a demo rider or go as an auditor. The master teacher always makes sure the demo riders get a real lesson and learn something, even if we candidates muck it up.

What a tremendous way to spend four days! And as a final note, I need to say a sincere Thank You to Tim and Cheryl Holekamp for being such gracious and attentive hosts at their beautiful farm. If you're looking for your next superstar event horse, give them a call. And sign up for the next workshop!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!