

Gabrielle Spirk Dressage

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Communications-

After graduating from high school in 2016, I had just won State and Regionals in my division, on my own horse, with my trainer at the time. I wanted to continue this dressage trajectory and experience different training methods and teaching styles. With the United Kingdom being one of the top countries in the sport of dressage, much due to Carl Hester and Charlotte Dujardin, I wanted to find a working student position in dressage in the U.K.

I did all my own research, and sent out numerous emails to yards abroad, and tried to get any advice. This is where Gareth Hughes comes into play. I got a reply from Gareth Hughes and was fortunate enough to get some advice over the phone from him!

Gareth Hughes suggested reaching out to an up-and-coming competition team called Collective Equestrian. They had been, and still are students of his. So, that is what I did. I contacted Collective Equestrian and they accepted me based on riding videos and phone interviews. Unfortunately, we greatly underappreciated how difficult the Visa and Immigration system was for the U.K. and gaining the proper licensing to have international students. Because of this, Collective Equestrian recommend me to The Talland School of Equitation because they specialize in training international students and are known all over the country for being the best riding school. Collective Equestrian started as students at Talland and now they are a very successful competition yard.

Work Experience-

The Talland School of Equitation, Owners Pammy and Brian Hutton

Talland chooses one student a year for their scholarship program. I got accepted into the program and was the first American to go to Talland. In between exams, I worked on a yard of 96 horses and ponies, with students from all over the world. We worked six days a week and had one lecture and lesson a day (flat work or jumping). We were responsible for feeding, turnouts to fields, mucking out three times a day, grooming, tacking up for clients, annual trot ups, night checks, and the overall health of all the horses and ponies at Talland. After six months of being there, I was put in charge of the team of students and the daily running of feeds, tack ups, and turnouts. In addition, at this point in my exams, I was teaching three to five lessons a day and lecturing the Pony Club. I learned so much from our yard manager and the experienced trainers at Talland. They put the reality into how efficient and meticulous you must be to run a yard of that size and stature.

Hawtins Stud, Owner Judith Davis

After a few months of being at Talland, I reached out to this amazing facility in hopes of gaining some experience with top-class breeding and training competition horses to an international level. On my day off from Talland, I went to visit the facility and got the opportunity to ride a 4.5 y/o gelding in training and a 7 y/o mare who was already produced. Hawtins did offer me a young rider's position after I finished my course at Talland, but unfortunately visa restrictions became difficult to navigate without the proper licensing. I am grateful for the experience.

Eilberg Dressage, Owners Ferdi, Geri, Maria, and Michael Eilberg

After 10 months of being at Talland, again I researched, and reached out to the Eilberg family. I took a long weekend and two days off from Talland to go work on their yard in the middle of December in the snowiest year the U.K. had seen in years. I got to work on the competition yard and on the breeding yard with some of the foals and brood mares. I got lots of practice with making big, fluffy straw beds and making proper banks. We had daily feedings, mucking out and grooming to do for Maria and Michael. After a day's work, I got to have a lesson on a 5 y/o gelding with Michael Eilberg. At the end of my stay the Eilberg family invited me to have dinner with them and the whole team. That is something I will never forget.

Louise Davison Dressage, Owner Louise Davison

Louise Davison's yard is in Tamsworth, U.K. which was one of the closest and most realistic yards I could get to using the train since I did not have a car or license for the U.K. Louise has a beautiful facility and has a group of competition horses on her main yard, and a group of brood mares, foals and yearlings in fields down the road from the main yard. Louise had two other girls that worked for her when I was there, and we had the usual yard duties, in addition to grooming and checking on the brood mare fields. I got to have a few lessons on her 4.5 y/o mare.

I also got the opportunity to go with and trailer one of her competition horses to Carl Hester's yard for a lesson and watch on the sidelines. When I was there, I saw Blueberry, or Valegro, in the cross ties! After the lesson, Louise told me that Carl had asked her, "...who is that American with you...?" I'm so glad I wore my regional jacket that day. Again, this is such an amazing memory that will always stay with me.

Unfortunately, my time was very limited with Louise because of transportation and the need of someone regular.

Mane Imports LLC, Owner Yasmine Becker

Once I finished my course at Talland, my Tier 4 Student Visa forced me to go back to my home country. I had tried to extend or switch my visa, but that was not an option. I still had my horse Chi back in AZ, U.S.A. It was one of the hardest decisions I've experienced so far, but with

much thought I decided that Chi should be sold to someone that could take care of him well into his retirement years.

In this same time, I continued to look for another position, but this time in the states. Yasmine Becker was looking for a working student to help her with her own horses and clients. Two months of being in the states and I had sold my horse to his forever home, and got flown out to Oakland, CA for an interview. That same day I went to the barn with Yasmine and her working student at the time, Sandra. I was given three horses to ride, all in completely different levels of their training.

The first horse was Delibrus, one of three of Yasmine's horses. He was a 16 y/o gelding trained to PSG that was fully produced by Yaz. He is a particularly difficult horse to ride because he is classically trained, and that was the first time in my career that I started to understand the true meaning of "throughness." The second horse I rode was a very talented 8 y/o client's mare training at Fourth Level. The last horse that day was a 5 y/o gelding going 6 y/o. He was a client retrain. Yasmine was classically trained in Germany and Sandra is an incredible rider from Germany.

I was with Mane Imports LLC for six months, and in those months, I got introduced to the German Training Scale and was an assistant instructor. I was given a lesson by Yaz every day either on Delibrus or a client horse. On the days Yaz would stay home, I would go to the barn and teach lessons, and exercise/lunge either client horses or Yaz's three horses. In addition to Delibrus, Yaz had Fin and Flirt. Finny was a 9 y/o German bred gelding training at PSG. Flirt was also a German bred gelding, 11 y/o training Grand Prix.

It's notable to say that we regularly would travel to clinic with Nick Wagman. Yaz also got invited to ride Flirt in a George Williams clinic. I was able to ride Delibrus in a clinic with Yaz's business partner and mentor in Germany, Peter Borggreve.

Qualifications-

BHSAI and Stage 4 Care and Flat

From February 2017 to May 2018 I did an intensive course through the British Horse Society. Exam Stages 1-3 gained you your Assistant Instructor qualification, or BHSAI. I was eager to learn and gain all the experiences/qualifications I could while at Talland, so I applied for my Stage 4 exam towards the end of my stay.

Exam Stages 1-3 included tests in Riding, Stable Management and Care Theory.

Each stage of riding included Stadium Jumping, Cross Country, Dressage and Lunging. Jumping courses had varying heights, striding and levels. For each riding test, you rode three horses and assessed their strengths and weaknesses and gave a potential training program for the horse. Lunging was done with one horse, and the same theory material applied to this section of the exam.

Stable Management and Care Theory Exams 1-3 progressed quickly but had a variety of theory knowledge and requirements. This included in depth knowledge of horse behavior, handling, equipment/tacking up, grooming, grassland management, shoeing, health and safety, anatomy and physiology, ailments and vices, fittening and conditioning, and confirmation.

Stage 4 Exam continued with the riding and stable management care theory, and focused particularly on creating training programs, fittening and conditioning for a competition horse, knowledge of all roles of the horse's systems and how it pertains to training, breeding/foaling, and being proficient and efficient enough to run your own yard.

Acknowledgements-

To all my previous horse trainers who have shaped me into the horse woman I am today:

Riding school- Twin Acres School of Riding, Owner Janice Kruglick

Jumping Trainer and Produced Thoroughbreds, sold us my first horse Chi- Ira Shulman

Eventing barn- F.B.E.T.S. Owner, Frederic Bouland

Eventing barn- Four Peaks Farm, Owner Barb Crabo

Dressage barn- Missy Gilliland Dressage, Owner Missy Gilliland

Dressage barn- Kemah Farms, Owner Kristy Doty

International Riding School- The Talland School of Equitation, Owners Pammy and Brian Hutton

Dressage barn- Mane Imports LLC, Owner Yasmine Becker

Clinicians- Kim Severson, Jessica Wisdom, Siegfried Winkler, Peter Borggreve

Thank you for your time and consideration.