



Maddy Parker and Fabio

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## Maddy Parker is Dedicated to Her Dreams

Through the USHJA Foundation “Making A Dream” Grant Program, this young rider takes home cherished memories and great experiences—and even gets to meet George H. Morris.

By Tricia Booker

It’s not many young riders who have the opportunity to ride and train on the FTI Consulting Winter Equestrian Festival circuit in Florida. But thanks to the USHJA Foundation “Making A Dream” Grant Program, Maddy Parker raised the bar of her equestrian experiences in 2014 and traveled to Wellington, Florida, where she spent a week shadowing trainer Stacia Madden.

“It was an amazing experience I couldn’t get anywhere else,” said Parker. “I was really excited when I found out I’d received the grant, and it was such an awesome experience—and everyone that worked so hard to put it together, I can’t thank them enough.”

In addition to the traditional hurdles riders face when they step into the show ring, Parker has one additional challenge to overcome. This 15-year-old from Waxhaw, North Carolina, was diagnosed with Crohn’s disease in December 2012, but seldom does she let this health issue keep her down for long. While Crohn’s can be debilitating—its symptoms often triggered by foods, and even more so by stress—Parker has found her passion for riding to be a stress relief. And while the past 18 months have been difficult as she tried to get a handle on her health, it has not stopped her from realizing her dreams of riding in the 3’6” equitation medals.

Parker’s “Making A Dream” request was to work with and alongside a top equitation trainer and to experience a higher level of competition. The USHJA Foundation fulfilled that wish and arranged for Parker to work with Madden, of Beacon Hill Show Stables, Inc., during Week 11 of the WEF circuit.

“It was a very action-packed week, with a lot of strategy going on for the [George Morris Excellence in Equitation class], with selecting the classes the qualified riders showed in, which horses they rode and preparing for the class itself,” said Madden.

While Madden had to balance a lot of variables during the week, she said that having Parker join Beacon Hill for

Week 11 offered unique opportunities. She was able to observe how the Beacon Hill riders prepared on their own for the George Morris class, walked the courses and warmed up without the assistance of trainers.

Parker also received a horse named Fabio for the week, generously loaned by owner Danielle Schwartz and trainer Mario Deslauriers.

“He was a great horse. I rode him Tuesday through Sunday and got to know him,” said Parker. “Throughout the week I took lessons, and Stacia helped me to figure out how he went. She also corrected some of my riding faults and helped me connect with Fabio so we could do well over the weekend.”

Parker’s progress with Fabio was impressive, so she was entered in the Pessoa/USEF Medal, ASPCA Maclay, the THIS Children’s Medal and the WIHS Hunter phase. At the conclusion of the weekend, she collected a seventh-placed ribbon in the USEF Medal to take home.

“As the week went by, you could see Maddy getting more and more comfortable, hanging out with the kids, walking the courses with them and watching the classes. What was neat about it was that as she was exposed to more training, got to know the new horse and was able to watch and see how the George Morris class ran and the caliber of competition, she ended up getting a ribbon. She’s a visual learner, and that was very apparent,” said Madden.

“I felt really proud that I’d worked so hard and that it had all paid off,” said Parker of her performances. “At home, we’re trying to find people to fill the medal classes so when you go down to Florida and there are 90 [entered in a class], it’s overwhelming.”

This was Madden’s first experience working with a “Making A Dream” grant recipient. “I think the program is amazing,” she said. “I think the people behind it are gracious and dedicated to the sport. There were a lot of different people down

here who came together to make this all happen. It took some planning and thought, but we wanted to take the time to make it worthwhile.”

## A Passion for Horses

Parker has been a dedicated rider since her early years. Her father Jason Parker recalled when he and wife Gerri realized their daughter’s passion for horses wasn’t merely a passing fancy.

“She started out cleaning stalls and learned horsemanship first,” said Jason. “Because of her age [then 7], they wanted

Parker is currently a sophomore in high school and an honors student, so she carefully balances her goals in school with her goals in the show ring. Although she is interested in working in the surgical medical field, she would love to continue competing on the equestrian front, too.

“I already qualified for the USEF Medal Finals and hope to qualify for the others and compete and do well in them,” said Parker of her immediate goals. She also has her long-term plans in line. “I really want to compete and ride for an



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Beacon Hill trainer Stacia Madden, right, and assistant trainers, from left, Krista Freundlich and Heather Senia helped Maddy Parker live her USHJA Foundation “Making A Dream” wish.

to get the kids into the barn and teach them about horses before they started riding. She stuck by that during a cold winter in Michigan, and we knew then we were in trouble.”

The family relocated to North Carolina shortly thereafter, and Parker began riding with Andrea Guzinski at Cedarhill Farm in Waxhaw, where she continues to train.

Initially, Parker kept her horses at home and cared for them herself. But when she was diagnosed with Crohn’s disease and began showing more competitively, her parents decided that boarding was a better option.

NCAA school,” she explained.

Parker’s experience on the WEF circuit was one more step toward those goals.

“It was very cool to watch the George Morris class and the other medal classes,” she said. “I thank [everyone] so much for the tremendous opportunity provided to me by the USHJA Foundation. Having the Ariat clothing and new [Charles Owen] helmet to wear was so amazing, and I’m very grateful. I experienced many great opportunities that I could not have anywhere else. It was amazing to do things like work side-by-side with Stacia Madden and meet George Morris!”

## “Making A Dream” Happen

The USHJA Foundation thanks all of those individuals and companies that generously donated goods and services to the “Making A Dream” Grant Program on behalf of Maddy Parker, including but not limited to:

**Devoucoux** (provided a loaner saddle for the week)

**Charles Owen, Inc.** (provided a custom-fitted Ayr8 helmet)

**Ariat International, Inc.** (provided riding apparel)

**Mario and Lucy Deslauriers** (provided a horse for lessons and competition)

**Sweet Oak Farm/Ali Sweetnam** (donated a stall)

**Stacia Madden and Beacon Hill**

**Show Stables, Inc.** (host and trainers)

**The Book LLC** (provided photographs)

As for the special challenge she faces with her health, Maddy remains determined to achieve all of her dreams and goals and offers words of wisdoms to others.

“I would just say to work through everything as best you can,” she said. “It gets hard sometimes, but if you work through it, it makes you feel better,” she continued, adding, “It’s important that other teens diagnosed with this disease understand that it does not have to stop any goals you have.”

Meeting and spending time with the idols she reads about in horse magazines and taking home a hard-earned ribbon from WEF will be long-lasting memories and inspiration for Parker as she continues on her path with horses.

Parker’s mother Gerri, who traveled to Florida with her, summed up the experience by stating, “A great end to a great week ... we can’t thank the Foundation and everyone who supported this venture for her enough!”