



TIK MAYNARD

IN THE MIDDLE

**ARE THE
HORSEMEN**

He studied the horse, and human nature, and how the two can find balance.
And in that journey, he may have found himself.

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CHAPTER 2

“Not Many Decent Stables Are Interested in Taking Working Students”

The next two weeks I was on a computer more than I was on a horse. Not only would this “working student thing” take some research, but the editor of *Gaitpost* magazine—“Canada’s Greatest Little Horse Mag!”—had replied to a query I’d sent out:

Sorry for my delay in responding. Your article is interesting, and I would like to run it if I have room. Do you have any photos of yourself you could send me?

I did have photos, and I sent them. I called the first piece “Chapter One.” If there was going to be a “Chapter Two,” I needed to figure out where I was going.

I wanted to achieve two things: the experience of living somewhere completely different and the chance to improve my riding. Becoming a working student—a notoriously difficult and unofficial apprenticeship of sorts, relied on by many in the horse world to both staff barns and provide mentorship—could offer me both.

As a child, riding to me was what church might have been to

other kids: something necessary and good, but not something I had chosen. My mother was a dressage rider and my father a show jumper; for both of them, horses were a career and a passion. At various times in their lives they had competed, taught, judged shows, owned tack shops, run a riding school, and even authored a book on equine photography. I spent many weekends with my dad competing horses and watching others compete them. I spent many car rides with my mother, debating riding theory.

In our family, when we talked about riders, character was as important as skill. And we used words to define that character: Were they *kind*? Or *cruel*? Were they *thoughtful*? Or *hasty*? Were they *professional*? There were always riders whom we looked up to as a matter of course: German dressage master Reiner Klimke was like an apostle in my mind. The American equitation king George Morris, as well. There was this almost unconscious notion that being a *good rider* was something important.

For years I had been putting off the decision about whether to commit to riding wholeheartedly. Now, if I was going to continue to ride, I wanted it to be *my* decision. I did not want to just *happen* to have horses in my life. I wanted to have to fight for them. To earn my way. To brawl with fate if needed!

And what discipline to choose? Show jumping was the sport in which I had the most experience, but I was curious about cross-country riding, part of the sport of eventing. It seemed more real and unfiltered, like swimming in an ocean instead of a pool.

At first, by not picking a particular riding discipline, I thought I might make the task of finding a working student position with some well-known trainer simpler. But as with any good dessert menu, I found that more choices only made the decision more time-consuming.

I began by talking to people who knew people. Although I had

grown up around horses, I soon found that I was ignorant of the real Who's Who of the international equestrian scene, especially outside the world of show jumping. A friend was shocked that I had never heard of New Zealand's eventing hero Mark Todd (which was indeed embarrassing since a quick Google search revealed he was named "Rider of the 20th Century" by the Fédération Equestre Internationale, the governing body of international equestrian sport).

Once I started asking around, suggestions that were at first welcome came fast and often contradicted each other, and I was quickly overwhelmed and confused.

Let me give you an example:

Johann Hinnemann was a legend in the sport of dressage. Besides winning a bronze medal on Ideal for Germany at the World Championships in 1986, he had trained many top horses and mentored some of the best riders in the world for almost half a century. At one point or another he was national team coach for Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany, and he co-wrote *The Simplicity of Dressage*, a book published in multiple languages that clearly explained the structure and program needed to bring along a dressage horse.

To some, Hinnemann could do no wrong. My parents in particular, both dressage enthusiasts, praised his training, so naturally he made my long list of possibilities. But when I asked another local dressage instructor about him I was shocked by her answer: "He rides okay, but I don't think you two will get along well at all. You should go to Kyra Kyrklund. I hear she's training in England now."

Everybody had an opinion about where I should go, where I shouldn't, who was hard to get along with, who was good, who was mean, who was overrated, and who was the "real deal."

Thankfully, another friend of mine suggested I check out Euro-dressage, a popular international website, where "want ads" for

working students and grooms were posted. Immediately my search for a trainer seemed infinitely easier—within ten minutes I found that Germany’s Ludwig Kathmann, Katrin Bettenworth, and Nadine Capellmann, and the American rider Leslie Morse, were all looking for riders. Even though I had never heard of them, I immediately sent off my equestrian résumé, along with a three-minute clip of me riding. I was uneasy about the video, but everyone who knew anything about the working-student selection process assured me it would be fine: “Trainers aren’t looking for perfection. They are looking for potential.”

My list of possible working student positions was long. I started eliminating names rapidly and ruthlessly. My criteria become clearer as I went.

One: The barn must be in a central riding location, someplace like Florida, Kentucky, England, or Germany.

Two: The trainer must have a deep understanding of the classical foundation of horse training. Riding has its classical adherents, always following the time-tested ways espoused by European masters, and it has its innovators. I wanted somebody who went “by the book.” I believed the old way was the best way.

There were also people who talked about styles—French dressage versus German dressage versus Spanish dressage, for example. But I believed it was simpler than that: There is good dressage and bad dressage.

Three: The person must be a leading rider or trainer in whatever discipline he or she practiced.

Although I was tempted to include Western trainers, I decided to limit myself to the three Olympic disciplines—dressage, show jumping, and eventing. This was partly practical (it was in these areas that I had connections that might prove necessary in landing a position) and partly emotional (trying a Western discipline, like reining or cutting, would have been *way* out of my comfort zone).

The hodge-podge list of elite riders and trainers from around the world who ultimately made my short list included: show jumper Ian Millar (how could he *not* be top of the list for a Canadian-bred young rider?), dressage trainer Johann Hinemann, eventers Mark Todd, Leslie Law, and Karen and David O'Connor, dressage riders Kyra Kyrklund, Leonie Bramall, Andreas Helgstrand, and show jumpers John and Michael Whitaker and Beezie Madden.

I would later look back and see this was an incomplete and unsatisfactory inventory. Obviously, there were many talented and illustrious individuals I did not ever consider. Omissions were almost entirely due to ignorance. My “greenness” was something I was aware of and not proud of, but I was hell-bent on adventure and gave myself no marks for research or comprehensiveness, only for originality and perseverance.

It was time to again send off applications (noting my hasty appeals via Eurodressage had not yet met with success). I underestimated how tricky completing this task would be. For many of the trainers, I could not even find an email address—I had to source them through friends and connections. I sent off about five emails, nervous about the kind of response I would receive. (In some cases, silence was to be my only response.)

But then, the next day:

Hello! Great to hear from you! Unfortunately, we don't have any spots at present for working students. However, I will definitely keep you in mind, and if I hear of anything I'll get right back to you! Take care!

That was from Leslie Law, winner of the individual gold medal and team silver in eventing for Great Britain in 2004.

I was undeterred. I had another response! It was from Leonie

Bramall. I had included Bramall on the short list because she was Canadian, she went to the Olympics, and she had become one of Europe's top trainers. She had trained with Hinnemann for fifteen years; that kind of loyalty, or staying power, is rare. Bramall was living in Germany, but she grew up only blocks from where I lived in Vancouver. I thought this personal connection might swing me an invitation.

However, her email was succinct and foreboding:

As things look with us we are full until the end of the year...not many decent stables are interested in taking working students.

But then, my third and fourth replies were much more promising. Johann Hinnemann and the O'Connors were both interested in seeing a video of my riding. I sent a movie clip by email to Hinnemann in Germany and a DVD of me jumping, performing basic dressage, and riding cross-country to the O'Connors in Virginia.

And the waiting game began.

I didn't hear anything for three long days. When I felt cooped up I went for a run. When I needed inspiration I read. First, *Life of Pi*, for fun. Second, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which was no laughing matter. I visited with our horses: Sapphire, a dark bay mare, nuzzled my hand. TJ, a big lanky gelding, threw his head and stomped his feet. When he was hungry he let us know! I ate little. I often lost weight when stressed or depressed.

When I finally got two invitations, they came within hours of each other. Johann Hinnemann was the first to respond (actually, it was his secretary, but seeing as he had thirty-five horses in his stable, I was sure he had more important things to do). I read and reread the letter. Although the wiser part of myself said, *Wait and see what other offers you might get*, my hands typed out an instant and enthusiastic reply, ending with: "When can I come?"

It was almost involuntary, my saying, “Yes!” Like a girl who plans to wait and see what kind of offers she gets to the prom...but then goes with the first boy who asks.

It would happen that right on the heels of my answer to Herr Hinnemann, Leslie Morse, one of America’s top dressage riders (who I’d contacted in my initial flurry of online applications) offered me a job in California. I wondered if I had made the right choice. Despite her blatant warning that it was a sun-up to sundown job for the committed only, my mind conjured images of sunny, sandy coves and margaritas by the pool. Everybody gets a day off now and then, right?

With the Beach Boys’ “California Girls” running through my head, I had an epiphany.

Going to only one place as a working student would not be enough.

If I was going to make this one year worthwhile, it should be a tour.

Sure, there was value in staying with one trainer for a year or longer; however, improving my riding was only *one* of my two criteria—the other being to experience living somewhere completely different.

Johann Hinnemann’s stable in Germany would be my first stop, but why not do a little more research, and send out more applications? I could potentially train with three trainers in the year ahead, each one for four months. Why not learn at a dressage barn, a show jumping stable, *and* an eventing center? Well, *why not?* If I was really serious about improving my riding and seeing the world, to me, there could not be a better way.