



Senior Essay Award by Amy Pitts, Marist College



Many claim a child learns everything they need to know out on the playground, but not for me. I learned everything at the horse barn. Playgrounds are where kids get to interact with each other and learn important life skills, like sharing, cooperating and making friends. I was always the little girl who could be found hanging on the monkey bars perfecting my climbing skills or in the sandbox constructing a castle. I was never the type who organized a game or played with a big group of kids. Basically, I did not learn the necessary life skills on the playground because I was shy. Instead, I learned them at the local horse barn and by competing in the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association (IHSA) at Marist College.

I have been around horses all of my life, starting with a pony and moving up to a calm 26-year-old lesson horse. Then came my own horse at age 11: Bella, a 9-year-old, 16-hand thoroughbred. Bella had an abundance of energy and was very dominant. It was my responsibility to train her to recognize me as her leader and partner and to take directions from me. Through this process, Bella taught me the importance of leadership which helped me to become and I've become a confident, calm leader who helps guide people.

Before college, this sport that I grew to love so much was a joint effort between horse and rider, rather than a team effort between multiple riders. I had never been on a team and I did not know what it felt

like to be a part of something bigger with a common goal.

Through training, working hard, and practicing with my own horse, I realized it was on me when I succeeded or failed. Then I joined the Marist Equestrian Team through which the IHSA gave me teammates to train and grow with. It was on each of us, as individual team members, when we succeeded, as well as when we failed. As a group, we needed to learn how to communicate, grow stronger together, and compromise for the success of our team. Using the leadership skills Bella taught me, and the opportunity IHSA gave me, I became the treasurer of the team, which deepened my commitment to my teammates. This role gave me the opportunity to learn organizational skills and money management and to reinforce leadership skills. These are all traits that became invaluable during my two different summer Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU).

They are also skills that helped me obtain a position as the head math tutor in Marist and helped me become the president of the Association for Women in Mathematics and an honors math society on campus.



Horsemanship is about building a connection with your horse, and Bella pushed me to take risks and try things I normally would be scared of in the ring, in the classroom and in the community. IHSA is about building life-long connections and support systems with teammates who all share a passion for the sport.

I have learned that horsemanship is not just about training the horse but also training people, including myself, to be better partners. It is about harmony, resilience, trust and cooperation. It is a dynamic process where one individual helps others to be better, whether horse or fellow teammate. As I prepare to leave college life and begin my time in a Ph.D. program at Columbia University studying Biostatistics, I will take the lessons that I learned from horses and teammates with me as I enter a new show ring.

Amy Pitts is from New Haven, Vermont.

