

Lizzy Traband

Follows Her Dreams— Wherever They Lead

After receiving the inaugural USHJA Foundation “Making A Dream” scholarship, this junior rider traveled to Wellington, Florida, and further expanded her horizons.

By Tricia Booker

In many ways, Elizabeth “Lizzy” Traband is a typical 12-year-old. She loves her horses, dreams of competing in the Olympic Games one day and adores her equestrian idols. But upon closer examination, Traband, of Centre Hall, Pennsylvania, stands out from the crowd.

In addition to her talents in the show ring, Traband has made a name for herself in the trick-riding arena. As a performer in Tommie Turvey’s “Night Of Amazing Horses,” she’s appeared throughout the country performing bridleless exhibitions on her ponies and horses, and she was a demo participant at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games.

Traband’s passion for teaching others also led her to establish her own business, Taiji Horsemanship. As a clinician and instructor, Traband teaches horsemanship to younger children and has developed a DVD training series offering such topics as “Sensory Training,” “Balance Exercises,” “Flatwork For Bridleless Riding” and “Training The Bow, Lay-down And Sit-Up.” She’s become such a popular trick rider that her pony, Toby, became a coveted Breyer model in 2009.

Traband’s story wouldn’t be complete, however, without one additional fact: She’s achieved all of these feats and more with just one hand.

“Because Lizzy was born without a left hand, she’s really had to become more of a problem-solver,” explained her mother, Annette Traband. “She’s learned early on not to accept limitations. You have to endure difficult times, face challenges, and you can’t let the chal-



DREAMS COME TRUE

The USHJA Foundation “Making A Dream” Scholarship Program is philanthropic in nature and extends opportunities to individuals with unique circumstances who seek a special experience in the sport of hunters and jumpers. Each experience is custom-designed depending upon the specific interests of the recipient who will receive the resources needed to help in “Making A Dream.”

Unique circumstances recipients might face include physical or other special challenges, as well as extreme financial or resource limitations.

Any USHJA member—junior, amateur or professional—may be nominated for the scholarship. Nominations may be made by any USHJA member, parent, friend or medical professional. An individual may only be nominated once per year, and a person may win only once.

USHJA Foundation President Lynn Jayne was thrilled that Elizabeth “Lizzy” Traband, the inaugural recipient, was able to make her dream of competing on the FTI Winter Equestrian Festival circuit in Florida come true.

“Lizzy was kind of the inspiration to create the program. She’s a delightful child. We were happy to be able to give her this opportunity,” said Jayne. “We’re hoping to help future recipients reach their dreams too, which doesn’t necessarily have to be riding, just a dream they’ve always had regarding horses and our sport. We’d love to be able to help people in all different types of dreams, maybe ones that they wouldn’t be able to fulfill on their own.”

lenges get you down. Just because you have to do something differently doesn’t mean you can’t do it.”

When watching Lizzy in action, whether having a flatwork lesson, back at the barn or hanging out by the ring, you quickly see that the tasks we take for granted Lizzy does, too. She rides confidently with a sling-like device that allows her to hold her horse’s left rein, and she’s flexible and creative in putting on her half-chaps solo.

But Lizzy does admit that her handicap has inspired her to work harder to reach her goals.

“I think I’ve had to prove myself in some cases,” she said thoughtfully. “I’ve had to get out there when I’ve fallen off and put a grin on and say, ‘That’s ridiculous. I can do this.’ I guess you could say ‘prove myself,’ but [also] show

that I have everything that anyone else in that ring has. And show that anyone who works hard enough can get there.”

Hard Work Pays Off

Lizzy’s dedication to her horses, talent and gregarious nature were on display during the WEG, where she caught the attention of the professional hunter riders representing the United States Hunter Jumper Association in the International Hunter Derby demonstration.

“She was just so engaging,” recalled trainer Louise Serio. “So after meeting her, we started discussions with the USHJA Foundation. The Foundation is always looking to start programs that benefit people, so we talked to them about a scholarship or grant program that would allow kids like Lizzy to come down to Wellington and ride.”



Lizzy Traband used her USHJA Foundation “Making A Dream” scholarship to compete on the FTI Winter Equestrian Festival circuit with her mount LaSanta.

Traband added, “It means a lot that I helped to inspire this scholarship, because there are more kids out there in the same situation. They have the talent and motivation and really want to get the support to do it.”

The USHJA Foundation Board of Directors will review nominations and select recipients throughout the year. Nomination forms are available on the USHJA Foundation website (www.ushjafoundation.org). For more information on the “Making A Dream” scholarship, or on how to contribute to the USHJA Foundation, please contact Whitney Allen at wallen@ushja.org or (859) 225-6707.

With her USHJA scholarship funds, Lizzy spent two weeks training and showing on the FTI Winter Equestrian Festival circuit in Wellington, Florida, during the month of February. Littlewood Farm and Dave Burton Jr., donated the use of a stall, she received lessons from trainers such as Louise Serio, Lynn Jayne, Val Renihan and Liza Towell Boyd, and accommodations.

Lizzy took her own horse, LaSanta, to Florida and concentrated on honing her skills aboard the 10-year-old Holsteiner. She earned ribbons in the 12-14 Equitation division and also competed in the Children’s Hunter section.

“I think coming down here, and especially watching the horses, has given me ideas for what my horses at home will enjoy,” said Lizzy. “It’s definitely

SEEKING INDEPENDENCE

Being born without a left hand has presented some balance issues for Elizabeth “Lizzy” Traband when she’s in the saddle, but with patient coaching and solid fundamentals, she’s excelled.

“We spent years with her on the longe line,” said her mother, Annette Traband. “When she started to ride, she’d have days of frustration. She probably doesn’t really remember back that far, but it was tough. Then I remembered this bridleless drill team from California—Foxfield—and I started having her work toward riding her horses bridleless.”

With simply a strap or wire around her horse’s neck, Lizzy now takes her mounts over fences, gallops intricate patterns and performs other trick-riding maneuvers primarily using her voice and slight shifts of her weight in the saddle.

“In the beginning, we’d work on having her change her hip angle to change her horse’s frame, for instance,” said Annette.

“Looking back, the slow start she had and the time we spent on the

given me a broader range of ideas.”

Lizzy was also impressed with the sheer size of WEF and the intensity of the competition.

“I really see now that the harder you work, the more you get out of it. I’ve definitely learned that,” Lizzy reflected. “The earlier you get up, the harder you work and the more you groom your horse, the more opportunities you’re going to get—lessons and good jobs, for instance. So work hard. It pays off one day. And that’s a pretty good thing.”

No Challenge Too Great

Indeed, Lizzy’s hard work and dedication to her horses come naturally. As the only child of Annette and Mark Traband, Lizzy grew up on the family’s Carousel Farm, a Trakehner breeding facility in



Lizzy Traband’s equestrian talents also extend to the trick-riding arena.

BARRY BLAND

longe line was almost a blessing in disguise,” she added. “People don’t realize how much they depend on the reins to ride their horses. If you’re dependent on the reins and slightly nervous, that really translates directly to the horse. An independent seat and using the reins independently is truly an art.”

central Pennsylvania. It quickly became evident to her parents that Lizzy had inherited a passion for horses, and so they encouraged her to find her niche.

“We really changed the format of our business to accommodate her goals,” said Annette, who discontinued their breeding program to focus on training young horses. “She loves horses and she loves what she does. We’re blessed to have a family farm available for her where she can ride, and she’s spent her life taking advantage of all the opportunities she’s received.”

In 2010, the Trabands showed three horses at the International Hunter Futurity Finals in Warrenton, Virginia, and it was Lizzy’s first experience competing in a national-caliber horse show. Shortly thereafter, they sold one of their

6-year-old homebreds, Mattinee Scho, so Lizzy could purchase LaSanta and a jumper prospect.

Lizzy took advantage of her time at WEF and soaked in all she could, behind the scenes with veterinarians and shadowing the professionals back in their barns.

“Not only is she a great kid who rides well, but she also sits at the ring all day and watches and then she helps set jumps,” said Serio. “She’s right there with you, just trying to absorb things and learn things. She wants every bit of information that you can give her.”

While allowing Lizzy to catch her breath during a flatwork lesson one afternoon in Florida, Serio discussed the USHJA Foundation “Making A Dream” program and Lizzy.

“It’s been a great experience for me to reach out and help someone,” she said. “I think it’s fantastic, because the program was left broad enough that it can reach out to a lot of different people.”

Back at the barn, Lizzy talked about her experiences while she untacked her tall, gray gelding.

“I think the best part about this is: Giving someone an education is the best gift you can give anybody, because that education can go such a long way in every direction,” stated Lizzy. “Who knows? In 20 years, maybe I’ll be coaching a rider and I’ll be able to take something that I learned when I was 12 years old and pass it on, and hopefully they can pass it on.”

“I want what I’m learning to make a difference,” she continued, “and make it a better world and pass on more knowledge. Because when people are educated, they can make better decisions, which can make their horses happier and everyone happier.”

Annette sees the USHJA Foundation scholarship as a major turning point in Lizzy’s equestrian education. While the family has always supported Lizzy’s goals in horsemanship, Annette said they never could have afforded a

two-week trip to show and train on the Florida circuit.

“I think she’s at an age where this could make a huge impact,” she said. “We never pushed her to ride when she was little. We didn’t do the pony thing or the competitions. So this has been on her own terms, and this is really important to her. So I think the skills that she’s picked up in the past two weeks will really solidify her equestrian foundation at a critical time for her to move forward.”

As Annette stands ringside watching Lizzy turn LaSanta toward the barn after her lesson, she pauses, deep in thought.

“We’ve never discouraged her with the horses. And to be honest, she’s done more with the horses than we ever thought possible,” said Annette. “What horses have taught her is the greatest gift. So now, we just go with it, wherever it leads.”

“MAKING A DREAM” CONTRIBUTORS

In addition to those mentioned in the article, the following people and organizations contributed to the USHJA Foundation’s “Making A Dream” experiences for Elizabeth Traband

- *Mark and Catherine Bellissimo—provided daily admittance to the International Club and WEF apparel*
- *Anonymous donor—gift certificate to Beval Saddlery*
- *WEF Academy and Rosemary Bertin—additional riding opportunities at the academy*
- *Jen Burger—tickets to evening dressage freestyle, dressage extravaganza at the Players Club and tickets to the World Championship Hunter Rider Palm Beach Hunter Classic Spectacular International Club*
- *Deb and Bill Smith—local Wellington, Florida, residents who provided housing for Traband and her family*