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A Coach-someone who motivates-My California coach and trainer Meredith Bullock by Zazou Hoffman

My first experience in competitive riding was with Meredith Bullock. She has been my trainer since I was 5 years old and I just turned seventeen. That's longer than most can say! I remember my first little show at Atlasta Ranch and my first big show at Pebble Beach like they were yesterday and all the Turkey shows in Santa Barbara as well.

She is the kind of trainer who in many ways is more essential to our sport than any of the well-known national and international horsemen who claim the spotlight. Meredith Bullock is the trainer who comes to our canyon three days a week (rain or shine), after a long day of teaching in public school, to give riding lessons to children and adults because she loves the sport. Her inner fortitude and resilience is what she imbues in each of her students. Her work ethic and progressive approach to unlocking talent in horse and rider are rare and noteworthy. She approaches the competition ring the same way she approaches her recent diagnosis of breast cancer, with an unrelenting will to succeed. George Morris has said that the trainers who teach at the smaller venues throughout the country are the backbone and foundation of equestrian sports. They often live their lives without receiving the recognition that they deserve. In the Horsemastership sessions, Mr. Morris asked me who taught me to ride. When I told him it was Meredith Bullock, he said that trainers like her are important. Then he inscribed a book that he authored thanking her for her for giving me the tools with which to build my riding skills. I was awarded the Ronnie Mutch Working Student Scholarship based on riding videos that I submitted. In all of them Meredith Bullock trained me. When I arrived in Wellington, Florida to work with well-known Equitation trainer Missy Clark I was told that my seat and position on the flat and jumping were "just right". Missy has never once had to ask me to change it. That is because Meredith Bullock taught me correctly.

Meredith grew up riding and training horses at Onondarka and then the Foxfield Riding School in Westlake Village, CA. As she developed into an eloquent and well-respected rider herself she was offered horses to bring along and show. When she aged out of her junior years she chose to go to college at the University of Puget Sound in Washington State and get a teaching degree, specializing in history. When she returned to Southern California she took on a teaching position at Foxfield, teaching all levels of riding. She brought the same communication skills and patience to Sullivan Canyon when she became one of the main trainers there. In the past 30 years she has taught students from walk-trot to the Junior Jumper division, always stressing the basics of correct riding. Teaching has been her way of giving back to both the educational community as well as the equestrian community.

In addition to teaching, Meredith Bullock has inspired me and all her students to open their minds to new experiences, to attend clinics and learn from the Masters, to enter

Derbies, to go to Moorpark and practice over the cross-country course, and go to Las Vegas to watch the World Cup. When I received an invitation to compete in Bogotá, Colombia, she is the one who told me to “go for it” and then personally took time out of her busy schedule to accompany me. She also made sure that the entire American team had matching jackets with our names embroidered on them. Her heartfelt generosity is remarkable and unimpeachable. If only she could be cloned to teach future generations of equestrians till the end of time, the world would be a better place.

Meredith and I most recently went to the Industry Hills Horse Show, where we had a ton of fun. It was so great to be reminded of how her wonderful lesson program translates to the show ring. We went with a jumper project, a Seattle Slew offspring, but more about that next time...never dismiss the American thoroughbred.

Zazou Hoffman is an accomplished junior hunter/jumper rider from Santa Monica. She spent the fall in Vermont, where she was a working student for renowned trainer Missy Clark. California Riding Magazine is pleased to have this hard-working young rider as a regular columnist. She can be reached via e-mail at barnum1126@adelphia.net.