

A close-up photograph of a young girl in a dark riding helmet and a woman smiling. The girl is wearing a blue ribbon around her neck. The woman is wearing a white shirt and a necklace.

Cover Story:
Forget Me Not Farm
Dominates the Pony
Ring in Wellington

GF FORGET ME NOT SHOWS ONE OF HER MANY TRICOLORS (THIS ONE AT THE WINTER EQUESTRIAN FESTIVAL) ON HER WAY TO WINNING THE USEF HORSE OF THE YEAR TITLE IN THE SMALL PONY HUNTERS IN 2014.

In 2014, it was hard to miss Stefanie Mazer at the pony ring. Recognizable by her long striking black hair and looking impeccably polished at all times, she trained ponies out of her Forget Me Not Farm to wins from the Winter Equestrian Festival to USEF Pony Finals. Forget Me Not Farm's banner year culminated in the USEF Horse of the Year Awards for two young ponies- True Colors (Grand Green & Medium Green Pony Hunter) and GF Forget Me Not (Small Pony Hunter).

While awe-inspiring on its own, this is only one facet of Mazer's business and equine passion. Out of a brand new 10-acre facility in Wellington, Mazer, who has her doctorate in Psychology, also runs HorseWise, where she works with adolescents with behavioral issues on what she calls equine experiential learning.

Forget Me Not Farm is designed to be optimal for both the horse show and the equine experiential learning programs. HorseWise and the Forget Me Not Farm show program are separated on the farm and scheduled independently but, with the design of the farm, include dual-feature aspects as well. For example, the 90' diameter covered round pen can be ridden in during rain showers or excessive heat, but is also a safe and contained space for experiential learning unmounted work.

Mazer has been riding all of her life, attending the McDonough School (MD) and training with Street Moore. For high school, she attended Oldfields School (MD), where her riding career often took a back seat to lacrosse and her studies. While attending Rollins College, she began to train with Bill Schaub and show seriously again, and then trained with Karen Healey while in graduate school in California. She saw success in the amateur hunters and jumpers on the east



coast, but it was her focus in the 3'6" Adult Medals with Healey that brought together years of horsemanship.

Mazer continued pursuing her career in Psychology while competing as an amateur. After completing her Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) at the California School of Professional Psychology, she moved to Johns Hopkins (MD) to teach. While at Hopkins, she taught a few lessons on her own horse and started to explore different teaching methods based on her own experiences.

Mazer remembers the frustration she often felt as a kid being told what to do and not understanding why, so she teaches her students skills as well as offers them an understanding of why she is teaching. "It was really a reflection of myself being a kid and not always understanding why to do what I was asked to do," she says.

After moving to Florida, Mazer established HorseWise – now a successful program for kids and teens with behavioral issues – teaching out of several local barns. Pretty quickly, the regular show customers of these barns recognized her talents and wanted their show riders to be

part of Mazer's education-based approach.

Her effective communication and research-based teaching style were discovered and suddenly in demand from families showing on the horse show circuit. After several clients bought ponies and horses for her to train, Mazer branched her business into two parts and rented stalls from Linda Evans at Orion Farm in Wellington.

Mazer laughs when she remembers, "When we first moved to Wellington, I was mucking the stalls, caring for the horses, doing everything. I didn't have a huge plan on where the training business was going, so I just did all the work myself. It quickly became apparent that Forget Me Not Farm was growing exponentially. We started horse

showing more and I hired a staff and in the past couple of years we started building our own property so we're able to train not only the horse show animals, but also offer equine experiential learning on-site. Right now, we are working on the TEACUPS (Teaching Empathy and Compassion Under Pet Supervision) project which offers an opportunity for everyone to come to the farm and learn skills and life lessons through being with animals."

The journey to the equine experiential learning was anything but defined. As Mazer started her Masters degree in Counseling at Loyola Marymount University in Santa Monica (CA), she happened upon a book called *It's Not About the Horse* by Wyatt Webb. "I read the book in one night – I was so enamored with his work. Webb was working at Miraval and I went on a retreat to see what he was doing with horses. I had been involved with horses my whole life, but seeing how he connected horses and



people, I decided that that was what I wanted to do."

As it was mostly horsemen (and not psychologists) studying the effects of equine interaction on human behavior, there were not any measurable scientific standards in the field at the time. Since doctoral research is psychology should be measurable and most of this was theory at the time, Mazer had to not only conduct a large quantity of independent research and figure out novel ways to quantify results, but also convince her doctoral committee and the psychology field at large the merits of her work.

Through a system starting a therapeutic alliance between a therapist and a client, Mazer was able to study data of equine interactions and give concrete data and scientific validity to equine experiential learning. Many psychology programs offer certificates and the research has since grown to mainstream acceptance as a result



of her research and analysis as well as confirmations from federal grants to both psychologists and horsemen.

Mazer's research, schooling, theory, and practice informs both of her programs. All students can learn from the skills taught through the skill-building of equine experiential learning – teaching kids through experience about responsibility, accountability, mindfulness, communication skills, empathy, cognitive flexibility, looking at things from different perspectives, assertiveness skills, and self-awareness.

Forget Me Not uses a structure reminiscent of school: the program clearly defines objectives and evaluates what modifications need to be made in order to stay on track. Mazer meets these goals by staying small and only having a few customers. She says, "I believe in quality over quantity and the business has wanted to grow to a point where that would be challenging. We want to keep the program small and have kids that are very serious about the learning process as well as very committed. We are a goal-driven program – our parents have goals and want to see their kids meet their goals. They want their kids to learn lessons, so we work on life lessons, not just riding lessons."

She continues, "With horses, it's hard to evaluate competencies. Defining objectives to show a series of competencies can be abstract, but it is my job to find ways to measure them and evaluate success. I'm constantly thinking about the learning process. I was giving a lesson and I was riding one of the ponies while I was teaching and I showed the walk-to-canter transition and then the downward transitions. By demonstrating the movement (and not just telling it from the ground), I realized my student was a visual learner because, from

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that point on, learning came so much more easily to her. Every lesson teaches me more about physical intelligence and about how students learn, how they think, and how they use their instincts."

The learning process applies to the ponies just as much as the students. Both GF Forget Me Not and True Colors were purchased as young green ponies for their owners, who were on the leadline at the time.

GF Forget Me Not taught owner Mia Green to trot, canter, do lead changes, jump, all while being made up. With Mazer's training at home and pony jocks at horse shows, GF Forget Me Not was able to be kept ahead of Green's progress and consistently and confidently matured as a young pony.

Mazer smiles just talking about her. "Mia stepped up from Short Stirrup this Fall on her and was Champion her first weekend in the Children's. She's going

to take her through the Small Pony Hunters and will probably stay in the barn for other kids – she's a wonderful, wonderful pony."

While riding their green ponies, Forget Me Not Farm is also full of, as Mazer terms them, "training wheels" ponies. Pony veterans such as Miss Australia and Deja Blue help students move up, show, and practice.

As a part of the learning process out of the saddle, all of the Forget Me Not Farm riders are part of Belle & Bow Equestrian's Belles Program. As a "Belle," the girls are responsible for maintaining all A grades at school, being positive leaders in the barn and classroom, and will also often work with Belle & Bow to raise money for charities including Just World International.

Forget Me Not Farm truly impresses from every aspect. While it is advancing the sport through optimal learning and serious competition at the highest levels of the sport, it is also sharing this experience with children who wouldn't otherwise have the chance to learn with the animals we all could not live without. This is the future of our industry.





Forget Me Not Farm 2014 Highlights:

National Honors:

- USEF Horse of the Year Grand Champion & Medium Green Pony Hunter 2014 – True Colors
- USEF Horse of the Year Small Pony Hunter 2014 – GF Forget Me Not
- Winner, Medium Green Pony Hunter Over Fences, USEF Pony Finals – True Colors

South Florida Hunter/Jumper Association (SFHJA):

- Stefanie Mazer – Trainer of the Year
- Champion Small Pony Hunter – GF Forget Me Not
- Champion Medium Pony Hunter – True Colors
- Reserve Champion Green Pony Hunter – True Colors
- Champion Short Stirrup & Cross-Rails– Deja Blue – *Mia Green*
- Reserve Champion Short Stirrup & Cross-Rails – GF Forget Me Not – *Mia Green*

2015 ESP Holiday Circuit Overall:

- Champions: Nicole White (Short Stirrup Equitation), Isabelle White & Deja Blue (Cross Rails)
- Reserve Champion: Unforgettable (Green Pony Hunter), Nicole White & Deja Blue (Short Stirrup)
- Class Winners WEF 2015 so far: Unforgettable, True Colors, Deja Blue, & Bubble Wrap

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