

By Kaleigh Holroyd

When Just World International's Jessica Newman put out the word on Quito in late December to jump, junior show-jumping rider Kaleigh Holroyd of Roxbury, Connecticut asked, "how high?" and went to work.

"It started out on a first-come first-serve basis and there was a lot of interest. I happened to get lucky and reserve a spot but was doubtful my parents would allow me to travel out of the country, much less Quito, Ecuador. Eventually, they gave in, said the 16-year-old, but I knew it was going to mean a lot of work."

"I'd read about and talked to teens my age who had ridden and shown at horseshows abroad, and though I had no prior expectation of getting the same opportunity, when I read Jessica's email, I considered it a chance of a lifetime to meet others outside the U.S. and to ride for Just World. So I gathered up all the information, as much as I could, to persuade my parents to let me go. They had lots of questions and spoke with

*everyone*, like Jessica, Just World's founder and executive director, and Emily's parents (Emily Pope also participated). Even my little brother chimed in with his own concerns, telling me everything he had learned about Ecuador from his Geography teacher. Still, I knew my family and my trainer, Eliza Lehrman, had confidence in me and felt that my skills met the criteria for competing at the II Copa Internacional!"

Work, like her attitude of how-high, started immediately as Kaleigh responded to Newman's invitation to represent Just World's USA junior delegation and compete at the II Copa Internacional Mitad del Mundo (Center of the Earth) International Horseshow in Quito, Ecuador from January 27 to February 2.

"Since both of my parents work a full day, it was up to me to take the initiative and make sure I had everything ready for the trip. I couldn't rely on anyone else to get *everything* done for me.

"It was especially challenging to get and be ready because it

happened to be the same week as my mid-terms, so I had to study while getting everything together. I also needed to get written approval from USEF to compete at an FEI show. I went to the USEF website and found the forms. I had to work quickly, filling them out, send them in and get them back. Well, everything was sent in and approved, *just in time!* I checked that off the long list of things to do aside from preparing myself for the riding.

“Next was coordinating travel and meeting up with my trainer & escort. Titi Mills was in Florida and, I have to admit, at first, it was a little challenging to think about training with someone else in a different country, riding unfamiliar horses and their owners I’d never met. We arranged to meet in Miami and from there, we would fly together into Quito. Nevertheless, I was very excited and was just beginning to prepare myself for a long haul, from Connecticut to Miami to Quito Ecuador,” said Kaleigh, who enthusiastically counted and marked off the calendar the dwindling days until departure.

*The day finally arrived!* But, as Kaleigh would learn, the challenges and obstacles did not end there.

"We arrived in Ecuador later than planned, so we missed the random drawing pairing up horse/rider teams for the next day's competition. Early the next morning, we arrived at the venue and had only about 20 minutes to meet our teammate, ride and get to know our horses before competing."

Although Kaleigh had ridden in horseshows in California, Arizona and throughout USEF Zone 1 since she was about three, nothing she had learned before prepared her for the variety and flavor of international competition.

"I had never seen a horse show run like this *one*. The atmosphere was totally different from all the shows I'd done in the United States. The main focus seemed to be social and have fun while being competitive. The care of the horses was so laid back, and it was such a stress-free environment, it was a refreshing experience to learn how the rest of the world does things, in this case, South America.

"Each day of competition got harder and asked more questions throughout the courses. I had the disadvantage of not being able to see either of my horses complete their course past the third jump. Both of my horses were eliminated in the first half of my pairing, so I knew my job was to take the horses around the whole course confident that we were going to make it around, and even though I knew we were out of serious contention, we did go well so I felt good about that." Kaleigh and her teammate finished up 16<sup>th</sup> out of 52 competitors.

And so, what did Kaleigh's new international friends think of the Americans?

"The American girls were known for being neat and tidy with our hunter hair and polished boots. By the end of the show, we were

also known for our riding. We gained confidence in our riding in Ecuador, and represented Just World International and the United States with what I feel showed great competitiveness and determination."

After the day's jumping competitions were wrapped up, with the qualifying teams set in place for the next day, there was also time for fun and mingling outside the ring: to be *a junior American ambassador* for Just World, a charity organization helping fund basic services for third-world children, which she had joined in January 2008.

"Every evening, there were parties for the riders and trainers so all the kids got the chance to mingle with people from other countries. They even had a colorful parade for all the delegations, us waving the American flag to the spectators.

"I came home with new friends from all over the world! We also gained an understanding of the South American culture with its music and festivities," said the sophomore, who attends Holy Cross High School.

Equal to the anticipation of going to Ecuador was the dread of coming home. The trip and time, like Kaleigh's means of transportation, had flown by so fast and meant so much.

"The night before we came home, I realized I didn't want to leave. I remember walking out of the barn the night before with tears welling up in my eyes all because the experience was over. I wished I was still counting down to when we'd leave for Ecuador!"



Left to right, Titi Mills, Kaleigh Holroyd and Emily Pope



Left to right, Emily Pope, Titi Mills and Kaleigh Holroyd



Coursewalk. Left to right, Emily Pope, Titi Mills and Kaleigh Holroyd