

## A SPECIAL TRIP TO GERMANY

The day after Thanksgiving, Fregat and I set off on *our* first trip to Germany. Ten hours to the New York airport, nine hours of quarantine at JFK, seven hours in flight, four more hours of quarantine in Amsterdam, five hours in a lorry, and a six hour-time change later I arrived at Gestut Lindenhof (The Theodorescu's farm). Denny Callin and my mom had arrived earlier that day and were waiting nearby at the hotel to pick me up. Fortunately, I had been able to sleep in my own bunk bed in the cargo plane and the lorry so I wasn't that tired. That night I put my gear away, checked on the horse and had an early night to bed.

With one day of rest, Fregat was ready to rock and roll! My second day at Lindenhof I was able to train with George, and every day there after. We started our mornings off usually watching Monica ride her horses or until I was given the ok to ride. What a treat it was to see Monica ride and train with her father each morning. It was such an inspiration!

Though it was below 20 degrees most of the time, my lessons with George always warmed me up! "And again.....and again", I would hear him say, sometimes we would practice the same exercise for the whole lesson until the horse and I were able to execute it perfectly. "Think like a horse not a pedestrian", George would tell me when I was having difficulty making a movement happen. It would always make me laugh, but it always worked. Working with the Theodorescus was such an amazing experience! I have never met such warm loving people. It was very special to train with people who are so eager to share their knowledge and their love for the animals.



*Mary-Haskins Gray aboard Fregat training with George Theodorescu*

Almost a week later, Denny, my mom, and I were off to Dresden, my first overseas international competition. It was amazing! Although I knew it was indoor season, I had no idea the whole show would be inside. From temporary stalls, to vendors, to the warm up and competition arenas; all were under the same roof. It was crowded and a bit more busy than what I was used to. The horses and riders all had to be focused. I rode the open St. Georges and came

in 9<sup>th</sup> and was very pleased for nothing else than that Fregat and I made it through the ride cool and composed. It was an overwhelming feeling of nervousness yet excitement. That same day we packed up and returned to Lindenhof. It was all we needed for one day!

So for the next week I trained with George some more. I must have run through those Young Riders tests a hundred times. I was getting prepared to compete at the Waldfried Euro Cup Final at the CDI in Frankfurt. Surprisingly enough, I wasn't that nervous. Well at least not up until the silent four-hour car ride there on the day I was to arrive, check in, unpack, jog, and compete. I had no idea what I was about to witness.

We pulled up to the show grounds in the middle of down town Frankfurt and lots of tall buildings. The first horse I see unloading from the trailer beside me is Wall Street, Ulla Salzgeber's very incredible mount. That was the very first moment I realized this was all real. Though I was a bit anxious to get settled, things worked out in good time. I hurried my parents (my dad came over for the Frankfurt show) away and tried my best to get focused. I had a chance to ride in the main arena and was able to familiarize myself with the surroundings. The decorations were beautiful. Red poinsettias and Santa Clauses surrounded each letter. Red velvet curtains were hung with lights in the rafters of what looked like an opera hall type of coliseum. Sponsor banners were everywhere in the arena and even along the inside of the arena boards. Your horse either liked or didn't like these banners. We saw several horses that refused to take one step in that arena! Luckily, Fregat was brave and we made our way through all three classes, the Team, the Individual, and the Kur where I came in third, forth, and third and third overall. My goal was to make the Kur and just have fun with my music. So I was very pleased with my little man! Yet another awesome part of my experience was being able to see most all of the famous European riders and their current mounts as well as their trainers. It was so inspiring to watch and see how much the German public loved this sport and their local riders. That was really special to experience.



*Prize giving*

Overall my trip was incredible! I met so many nice people and had so many great experiences. I learned so much as a rider from just observing those around me. Seeing someone

you admire ride only makes you want to ride better. This was encouragement enough to make me want to excel as a rider. I left the Theodorescus a more educated and understanding rider. I learned to think like a horse not a pedestrian!

Mary-Haskins Gray  
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*Mary-Haskins Gray with trainer, Denny Callen*