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Training to be a Jockey: a mother-daughter journey



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Debra DeShone never knew that teaching her daughter to ride a horse as a child would leave such a lasting impact. But it was this very act that led her daughter, Kelsey, to train and become a true equestrian, and picked to train as a jockey at the North American Racing Academy-the U.S.'s first jockey training school-founded by famed jockey Chris McCarron and located in Lexington, Kentucky: home of the Kentucky Derby. Only 13 people were picked to train here this year, and although it's only in its second year, it's the only jockey training school in the country- which made it especially important for Kelsey DeShone to get in.

"It was nerve-wracking," Kelsey, 21, says of the application process. "I just wanted to get in. because it's what I wanted to do since I was little and if I didn't get accepted it felt like all my dreams were going to come crashing down."

Loving horses since she was a little girl, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Debra always had an interest in horses, riding them when she would visit her relatives in Idaho. It was her passion that she passed down to her daughter and that has helped keep them connected. "I don't think we would have been as close as we are without horses," admits Kelsey. Driving to lessons, participating in 4H events and sharing an interest for horses and riding gave them a bonding experience that has lasted throughout the years, starting when Debra



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taught Kelsey how to ride at the age of three. "It was definitely a mother-daughter thing," says Debra.

The motherly instinct kicks in when talking about her daughter's ambition to be a jockey, but belief in her daughters abilities wins out. "I think 'oh god that's dangerous' and I think 'oh if you fall down or anything...'" says Debra. "But at the same time I have to think 'well how many people do it and don't get hurt?' It's kind of like riding on a plane, you kind of just have to think this happens hundreds of times a day and everybody makes it through."

So does fear ever cross Kelsey's mind? "It does," says Kelsey. "When I was interviewing [for the school] that's one of the main things he kept on telling me: how dangerous it was. He was like you know one jockey dies every year out of 1500 jockeys." But despite the risk, Kelsey is not afraid to reach for her dream. Her mom credits this partly to their faith in God and his protection. Kelsey credits this to pure ambition:



"when you have a passion for something it just excites you and you just want to keep doing it."

With the dream of being the first woman to win the Kentucky Derby, Kelsey certainly wants to prove herself as an accomplished rider. And naysayers? "I'll prove them wrong." Her mother has no doubt that she'll do it-despite the odds against her. "I know the whole horseracing world is kind of a good ol' boy network but I know she'll do it," says Debra. "I just want her to be happy and to get what she wants out of this."