

In 2013 my father heard an ad on NPR while listening to the radio one morning, that ad was for an equestrian facility that specialized in a type of therapy that used horses, hippotherapy, in Lyman, Maine called Carlisle Academy. At the time my mother had an interest in pursuing animal-assisted therapies, which sparked our initial interest in the barn, but upon further research, it looked to be somewhere I could ride as well. I have been riding horses my whole life, and we had been looking for barns in that area already for a few months in preparation for a move south from the mid-coast. My family moved to Kennebunk that following summer, in 2014, at which time I was just eleven years old, and we lived in a rental while we found and bought land to build our house, the land we bought and live on to this day is less than two minutes away by car from Carlisle, this was no mistake or coincidence.

I have been an equestrian for most of my life, I don't remember not riding, and for the past seven years I have been riding at Carlisle, there I have been given countless opportunities to ride with trainers and clinicians from all over the country and the world, and have been given a top-quality classical riding education. But beyond that I have been given so much more from this barn, I have gained perspective on the world and deep personal growth. Since I was thirteen years old I have been volunteering in the hippotherapy program, I have been sidewalking for physical and occupational therapy lessons every summer of middle and high school, and this past summer, before my senior year of high school I completed my horse handler training and tier-3 Apprenticeship certification. When I first started taking lessons at the barn I knew nothing about hippotherapy, I had never even heard of it, after years of volunteering my knowledge is strong enough to converse dynamically with the therapists and OT interns that come from college and graduate school about the students we work with.

Education isn't the only thing I have gained from getting to participate in the therapy program at Carlisle, nor is it the most important thing, while I may now be highly knowledgeable in the uses of horses for therapies and the ins and outs of how this program runs, I have gained a perspective on the world and what truly matters through this experience, and that could not have come without these programs being at Carlisle. Even though I volunteered my summers to the therapy program, I have been a competitive sports student and USPC member at Carlisle full time since I moved here. Riding isn't only my love and passion, but it is my sport as well, and as with any sport there sometimes come hard times, setbacks, failures, frustrations, and disappointments. I have experienced all of these, but the thing that got me through them all, all the bad days, and difficult lessons, every day in the summer when I would have a bad jumping round and come out of the ring past the covered therapy arena and I would see someone in a hippotherapy lesson, a kid with a disability, or someone who had suffered a life-changing injury, these people came to ride, and to gain in strength, be that cognitive, in motor skills or core, maybe entirely physical, whatever it was they were there to do something so much bigger than me, so much more important in the grand scheme of things than my poorly ridden jump course. To this day, every time I walk past that arena I take a deep breath, it's a reset, I can remember what is really important when I am so often stuck in my own head.

Throughout my middle school years, and high school developments the barn has always been my rock, the one solid constant in a sea of the changing world. It has and remains my safe and happy place, somewhere I know I will be able to let everything go and be in the moment. I have found such a support system from Nick and Sarah, and the entire rest of the staff, who have all watched me grow up and stood with me through the good times and the bad. My dad likes to joke and say they're my 'horse parents' but in a way he is right, and Carlisle has been like a home to me. I spent the most formative years of my older childhood at this barn, completely growing up there, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

There is a part of the barn, walking down the road from the main barns to the lower indoor arena, where you can stand at the top of the hill and look across the entire field and woods, to look out over that field, knowing how it feels to gallop through it, brings me peace. No matter the weather, if it is summer and beautiful with grass and wildflowers or freshly cut hay, or if it is spring flooded like a giant lake, fall with the mesmerizing leaves changing color every day, or winter when I have to stand close to my horse in case I slip on the ice and freeze my nose looking across the field, it is my favorite view. Carlisle Academy and the wonderful people that make it whole have made me the person I am, and my heart fills with gratitude every day. So thank you, to everyone who loves this amazing place the way I do.