

My Journey

INTO HORSES



LESLIE L.

How It All Began

It was all my mother's idea she wanted me to find something to occupy my time. To be honest I wasn't even a hundred percent sure that I wanted to ride, but by the end of that first lesson I was hooked.

This was at Baywood Farm in Apex, North Carolina where me and my friend Chase would spend our Saturdays together doing barn chores to earn a free ride.

It was our sanctuary. We had so much fun taking care of the horses together and getting to ride in the afternoon. It was a perfect way to spend the weekends, but more importantly it instilled responsibility, grit, and hard work in me from a young age.

From there, I began taking lessons at Five Star Farm with former Olympian Monique Kent and purchased my first horse when I was 15 years old a 3 year old bay Quarter horse I named Milo.

That year I spent working at the farm doing barn chores in exchange for a free lease and I broke in my first horse.

Volunteering in Therapeutic Riding Programs

This is also the place where I first began volunteering in a Therapeutic riding program that I'm happy to announce is still operating.

Horse and Buddy in New Hill, North Carolina taught me a lot about being compassionate and developed great empathy skills within me. It also opened my eyes to the healing abilities of horses and how they can be such a great tool for those affected by disabilities.

I enjoyed volunteering within the therapeutic riding community so much I continued to volunteer at Blazing Saddles Therapeutic Riding Program in Boone, North Carolina when I was enrolled at Caldwell Community College completing my Associates Degree.

From there I enrolled at Averett University attaining my Bachelors of Science Degree in Stable Management and I got to participate on the IHSA show team competing across North Carolina and Virginia.

Being at Averett taught me so much about how to maintain the horse's wellness, the biomechanics of riding, and I got to ride awesome horses with different trainers.

Graduating Averett University

Averett was one of my best riding experiences because we got to ride top performing horses, learn from experts in the industry, and I got show across the region from Virginia Intermont to Chatham Hall through the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association.

Before graduating I also did an internship at Tanner Horsemanship with Pam Tanner who is a local horse trainer that primarily focuses on preparing horses for trail through desensitizing techniques and a gentle hand.

I loved working with her because she has such a gentle feel and had the ability to develop a soft connection with most horses effortlessly.

After graduating Averett, I welcomed my first child and took a break from horses, while I dove deep into motherhood.

When I returned to the horse world I did a working student position at Pura Vida Farms in Bahama, North Carolina owned by veterinarian Ellen Ziemer and known for producing top sport horses.

Working at Breeding Barns

At Pura Vida Farms I was responsible for caring for horses in training along with other animals including a large herd of goats, cows, and pigs.

From there I did another working student position at Hidden Hill Farm in Bahama, North Carolina a popular warmblood breeding facility.

This was an exciting experience working hands on with broodmares, stallions, and foals.

Working with horses at this level requires tenacity and an acute level of awareness that only elevated my intuition.

I even got to participate in foal inspections that Summer, which was an exciting learning experience.

From there I began working with Baily Whitfield at a small farm on the west side of Chapel Hill. There I did barn management chores and worked as a groom.

Becoming a Certified Riding Instructor

I enjoyed working with Baily as she introduced me into the world of Saddlebreds, which was a breed I didn't have much experience with up to that point.

Following that I transitioned into working at Ride The Sky Stables when they were located in Chapel Hill as a riding instructor.

Teaching has always been my greatest passion I love connecting with people of all ages and helping them progress to accomplish their riding goals.

At this farm I had the opportunity to teach riders how to ride using bitless bridles. This was a great turning point in my understanding of how to aid horses through gentler methods without the use of a bit.

Working with Andi Furnari was a great learning opportunity to continue honing my teaching techniques and I was also able to gain recognition by the Certified Horsemanship Association as a level 4 English riding instructor.

Getting certified by the Horsemanship Association was a great accomplishment for myself and I was proud to be able to accomplish the highest recognition upon my first attempt at being certified.

Afterward, I became an instructor at Mane Event Stables in Chapel Hill where I was able to continue teaching students of all abilities in the art of riding.

One of my greatest attributes as a riding instructor is my ability to read horses and connect with riders in a way that boosts their confidence, strengthens their position, and helps them accomplish their riding goals.

That year I also welcomed my second child, but was able to continue teaching a former student from Ride The Sky and her mother at a private horse farm in Hillsborough, North Carolina where I continue to instruct them and my own daughter on her favorite horse Blaze.

Going forward I am aiming towards developing my own riding program where I travel to help horse owners develop a better connection to their own through mindful horse techniques.

My Training Philosophy

My goal is to help riders improve their mind body connection to develop a confident balanced seat by incorporating meditation and yoga practices in our lessons.

For the rider I like to use stretches and exercises both in the saddle and on the ground to help the rider develop their mind body connection and to understand how to apply aids with good timing to get great results.

Secondly, I like to focus on helping you build a solid foundation with your horse through ground work to develop their mind, improve focus, and build trust.

Lastly, I like to systematically develop the horse independent from the rider through lunging, gymnastic work, and desensitizing exercises that will improve your horse's athleticism reducing the risk of injury for your equine companion.

I've help hundreds of riders across North Carolina and look forward to guiding more students in the art of mindful riding.

My hope is to be able to offer workshops and private sessions aiding riders in developing a better connection and understanding of horses.