

Jimmy Wofford Clinics
Tri-H Stables, Bozeman August 22/23
A report by Yr Humble Srvnt,
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This won't be quite the usual sort of clinic report, because I'm not the usual sort of clinic rider. Oh, I can jam on the dressage pants and go out in public without stressing about it too much, but, to go out and JUMP, in this clinic with this particular teacher, Jimmy Wofford, multi-Olympian and coach of many, many others, was a huge goal of mine. And therein lies the story.... (This will be boring. I suggest you go out and cut the grass.)

Jumping... something I did as a kid, on my first horse at age 9. Bareback, halter, roached mane. Nobody to tell me how to do a "release" or what to do with my legs or eyes. First lesson at age 17, from an instructor who wanted me to grip - vise-like - with my knees. Didn't keep me on the little mare I rode that year, who would stop at fences and send me on over them, usually taking whole bridle with me. Getting to college at Sweet Briar, VA, was cataclysmic: "oh, one of those riding off her knees...." and into the beginner group I went. Discouraged, I didn't ride at all for years - even though I always had horses. A move to North Carolina brought immersion in the horse world - Tryon has foxhunting, carriage-drivers, show hunters, dressage, hunter paces and trail riders. New horses for me - usually about half-broke TB mares. Running and jumping through the woods, over coops and logs.

The decision to take some lessons, at age about 35, came about because I'd been hanging out at the hunter shows and thought maybe I should learn to do it the right way. Another half-broke young horse (Stinky, actually) and a teacher who never, ever said anything positive, and who wanted me to grab mane, and hounded me mercilessly about "missing the spot". Finally I decided that it was clear that I was never going to "get it" and I sold my jumping saddle, quitting jumping entirely, after two years of twice-weekly hacking home in tears. I had thought I had to persist - to not give up. (The real lesson: never take lessons from a woman whose barn help calls her "Little Hitler"!!!) And, not to whine about it, but, I'm never going to "see a spot" because I've only got one eye that works, thus, no depth perception whatsoever. (Cover one eye and try to parallel park.) Taking up dressage - fortunately with Sue Terrall - was in the long run a very positive force in my riding life. To learn to ride with my seat, behave as if I had no hands (only elbows), to use my "front-line" to have such a real connection through the saddle - should have done that first..

Moving to Bozeman in 2002, taking up Parelli, learning to really communicate with Stinky, discovering I lived a couple of miles from Sophie Clifton. She did me the enormous favor of sending me to Clete Linebarger (Bozeman chiropractor who can, if you're serious about it, change your life in ways far beyond your riding.) One day I rigged up a cross-rail, and during the Sophie-lesson I asked her to take a look at us popping over. "You've got a good natural seat - of course you can jump", she said. A few lessons and I was hooked - she kept telling me things I was doing right. (Never heard THAT before!) I could jump a little again - but - only from trot. Canter to a jump, even if only a foot high - gave me the terrors. I'd got to where, years before, I could absolutely NOT canter to a fence of any size, for worrying about that damn "spot". Trotting got me in better - I'd have trotted the pasture fence but ask me to canter an 18-inch jump and I'd break out in hives. A year of mucking about with Stinky, who had suffered through "Little Hitler" with me and who had earned the right, at age 16, to not have to

jump anymore, brought me to the point, finally, of deciding I needed a Schoolmaster. Enter.... Queen of D'Nile. Jewel. Sheila Smart's fabulous Preliminary event horse. Holsteiner/QH, inherited Daddy's body and jumping ability and Mama's brain. Jewel's a jumping machine - and for a year and a half she scared me spitless. Point her at something and hang on; she once took off 8 feet in front of a 2-foot cross-rail. The best of the deal was that Sheila, as teacher, came with the horse and she understood how abjectly terrified I was of cantering jumps. She let me proceed at my pace - though Jewel sometimes seemed to have another agenda. Vicky Busch lessons (let go in the hip-flexors), hours of galloping 'round my huge round pen and getting accustomed to the speed and power, 1,000 little bitty gymnastic lines that got me riding on my irons and off my knees, Edee Weigel giving me permission to have long, short and chip jumps. Poor Sheila.... enduring me nearly throwing up after cantering - painfully slowly - around four 2-foot jumps. Heart-rate astronomical, anaerobic. She probably never knew how relieved I was when a lesson was cancelled... Enter... Tim Herzog, Mental Skills Coach. I thought if anybody needed ?mental skills? it was me. Off I went to acquire some. After painfully re-living all the negative influences in my riding life, (he's a wonderful therapist) focusing on the positive, we developed a plan. Goals... tiny, attainable goals that he kindly said I did not have to share with anyone. (Not even Sheila.) Months of talking about all the negativity I've endured. (Here's one: I can't call my Dad to tell him about the Jimmy Wofford clinic because he'll say, #@#&@?? Didn't you jump any real jumps??) Trying to turn that around. Tim came out to my place to watch a couple of lessons, and he and Sheila each better understood how to help me with my fears. A big part of it was capitalizing on my ability to fix an image in my tiny mind and conform to it. (Like the photo I have of Edee, clearing a BIG fence, is one that I call up often because her position is PERFECT.)

To get to the point of riding in the Jimmy Wofford clinic took 6 years of painful, nerve-wracking work and countless hours of heart-pounding lessons. A fabulous 49th-birthday present - Jewel - to myself. The patience of a saint on Sheila Smart's part. The few days before the clinic itself... let's not discuss. And it's taken almost a week for me to decompress, though I still feel like I'd like to sit down and cry for a while just to get the last of it exorcised. Thanks so much to those who said they thought I rode well, I wouldn't have been there at all without Tim Herzog's help and their constant support. He helped me develop the skills - mental skills - that I needed to not only get through the two days but learn something - and - even enjoy it. When Jimmy Wofford asked us to gallop around a corner and over the oxer-to-vertical 4-stride, "attacking" the landing, instead of that internal screaming for mercy.... the image in George Morris' book of Frank Chapot, jaw set, riding aggressively to a huge oxer, flashed into my mind and that is exactly what I did. And when I badly fluffed my first attempt at jumping a corner fence, I just laughed and went around again and did what he told me to do. (A year ago I'd have obsessed over the "mistake" and not let it go.) The other clinic participants had a good time and learned stuff. For me, it was several orders of magnitude more.

Next month I'll bore you with some of the techniques Tim Herzog used, and let him talk a bit about it, himself. I warned you - you could have had the lawn done by now....