

Gearing Up for Omaha's 2017 World Cup Finals

Dressage

WEEKEND DAY

October 2016

**HIP ANGLES
AND BALANCE**
*with German-based
Trainer Judy Allmeling*

*Charlotte
Bredahl-Baker:* **FIND
AND FEEL
THROUGHNESS**

*Plus: Charlotte's Life
Beyond the Arena*

**DECONSTRUCTING
THE 10-METER
CIRCLE**

*Inside the
Rider's Home:*
**FUNCTIONAL
EQUINE DECOR**





LIFE IN THE ARENA AND BEYOND

WITH CHARLOTTE BREDAHL-BAKER

This accomplished rider finds purpose in sharing her knowledge with a younger generation in and out of the tack.

By Lindsay Paulsen

As a former Olympian who is now an international dressage judge and the current assistant coach of the USEF Youth Dressage Program, Charlotte Bredahl-Baker has a resume that seems almost as lengthy as the physical distance she traveled from her birthplace in Denmark to her current home in Santa Ynez Valley, California. But ask the humble equestrian what she considers to be her most significant achievement, and she'll answer with a response that might seem unexpected for such an accomplished dressage rider.

"I think raising two foster kids and mentoring many others is probably the most important thing I have done," she said decisively. That statement carries significant weight as her list of proudest achievements also includes riding on the 1992 U.S. bronze-medal-winning Olympic team in Barcelona and acting as selector for the

past three Olympic Games. And as she first arrived in the United States knowing very little English, with just a suitcase in hand, she's proud of the fact that she has come by her success honestly.

Charlotte was born and raised in Denmark and began riding lessons when she was 9 years old at a riding school near Copenhagen, where she worked cleaning stalls in exchange for her education. After her family moved to the Isle of Moen, her opportunities to ride were limited, so she went knocking on farmers' doors in search of horses to ride. She later worked at a farm that bred and raised trotters. At age 19, she moved to California, got a job as a groom and worked her way up to the position of assistant trainer and manager at a large equestrian center. She worked with a Danish *Bereiter* to import horses and began developing horses at the upper levels with the assistance of Hilda Gurney. She also worked with riders such as Robert Dover, Klaus Balkenhol and Guenter Seidel. Some of her most notable mounts include Copenhagen, Lugano, Monsieur and Komo.

Life in the Valley

In 1989, Charlotte was invited by natural horsemanship expert Monty Roberts to visit his farm, Flag is Up, in the Santa



Charlotte Bredahl-Baker with husband Joel Baker at their farm in the Santa Ynez Valley

Amy May



Charlotte mentors 12-year-old Aiden, who rides her American Quarter Horse, Reagan

Ynez Valley to perform a Grand Prix *pas de deux* at a fundraiser along with her colleague Kamila Du Pont. "We stayed with Monty and his wife, Pat, who has become a very close friend," she said. During their visit, she fell in love with the valley and moved there within a year. More than 25 years later, Charlotte and her husband, Joel Baker, a financial planner with a passion for polo, still feel right at home. "I love this area because it is beautiful and very horsey," she explained. "The people here are very down to earth and not easily impressed. They care about each other, and the community is very tight-knit. My husband and I have lived here a very long time and can't go too many places

without meeting people we know. We really enjoy that."

Charlotte's life in the valley is a full one, and each day is dedicated to undertakings that keep her mind and body active. Her success in dressage seems to be a reflection of her greater ability to coordinate and balance several efforts at once as she devotes herself to not just riding and mentoring youth, but also to exploring ballroom dancing, tennis and Pilates and making time for family and friends.

By 8 a.m. each day, Charlotte is usually on her first horse, riding two to three other horses back to back. Teaching lessons is up next on the agenda. The kids that she mentors come

either during the mornings on weekends or when school is out. Following her scheduled lessons, she finds time for lunch with a few girlfriends or a Pilates session. She then retreats to her office until 5:30 in the evening to respond to emails, schedule clinics, make travel arrangements or participate in conference calls. She also spends a portion of that time watching videos of Juniors and Young Riders who are hoping for some feedback on their performance. According to Charlotte, she and her husband will eat something light for dinner before their evening tennis game at 7:15. Days off are a rarity unless she happens to find a spare day in the midst of her travels. Teaching clinics and being available for youth riders at shows keeps her on the road often and she still judges internationally, although not as frequently as she once did.

Guiding the Next Generation

Throughout her career with dressage, Charlotte has maintained a similar passion for working with children. "I have always loved working with youth," she said. "Even as a teenager, I had a dream of having an orphanage on a ranch with horses and other animals. Growing up in Denmark I was very close to my sister and brother's kids and realized I didn't need to give birth to children in order to love them just the same." It was then that she decided she either wanted to foster or adopt children. "I never had a desire to become pregnant. But I find it incredibly gratifying to know you are making a difference in someone's life, and typically, you can influence youth a lot easier than adults."

All of her life she has been involved with youth at different levels. When she lived in Los Angeles during the early '80s, she was involved in the Special Olympics and a tennis association for people living with mental disabilities. Later in life, she and Joel raised two foster kids. Zach, who is now 25,

became a part of their family at the age of 9, and Tyler also now 25, joined the Bredahl-Bakers at the age of 14. Zach is now living in Iowa and stays in very close touch while Tyler just became a father. "We are proud of both of them," Charlotte said.

Their family was also very involved with an organization called The Compton Posse and through it have introduced kids to dressage by allowing them to come stay with the family on weekends. "The leader, Mayisha Akbar, did an amazing job with these kids, who were raised in an area with lots of gangs. The horses really changed their lives," she said.

During the past 14 years, Charlotte has also worked with a local mentoring program in Santa Ynez. Most recently a 12-year-old boy named Aiden, has come into her and her husband's lives. "Aiden is actually the first one from that program who is horse crazy. He just wanted to become part of my life and he loves the horses, the riding and tennis as well. I love him like he is my own." According to Charlotte, Aiden has a great father and grandmother but his mother is not present.

When kids come to her through the mentoring program, she says it is a given that there is no charge for riding. In other cases, if she sees a child show a great interest in horses beyond just riding, she is more than willing to provide him with the opportunity. According to Charlotte, in most cases the parents don't have money for lessons or the kids are very young and don't need serious lessons. If the kids are older, she will let them work off the expense of lessons.

For Charlotte, it all comes down



Amy May



Kathryn Burke

Above: Charlotte and her 11-year-old Danish Warmblood named Hamilton ("Leo"), also pictured on p. 40

Left: Charlotte and Joel at home with pets Rocko, Josephine and Sierra.

to their attitude. "If they really show appreciation, there isn't much I wouldn't do for them," she said. "But they have to show they are super motivated."

Charlotte says she currently has some wonderful young ladies with eager attitudes working under her wing. "Unfortunately for me, but good for them, two of them are going off to college this fall," she said.

One of the young women is Francesca Sheld, who has been riding and competing on Charlotte's American Quarter Horse named Reagan. "She showed him through the Juniors, but can ride through a very decent Prix St. Georges test at home," Charlotte said. "Now I have to find another perfect rider for Reagan. Most likely it will be Madison Wagner, who has been



Kathryn Burke

Charlotte, pictured with instructor Derrick Curtis, takes dance lessons on a regular basis.

“Grease-”medley freestyle again, this time on the 11-year-old Danish Warmblood Hamilton (“Leo”) for a special local fundraiser in the Santa Ynez Valley, where Olivia Newton-John was present to watch the performance. “That was so special for me and the audience,” Charlotte said. She plans to continue training both Chanel and Leo to be solid Grand Prix horses just because she loves the process of training. “I am not saying I will never compete again, just that it is not at all a priority.”

Now her priority is to be the best U.S. assistant youth coach she can be and help as many Young Riders as possible.

An Active Lifestyle

While some might be exhausted by just the thought of Charlotte’s daily commitments, it is the kind of system under which she thrives. “I have always been obsessed about being active,” Charlotte said earnestly. “I used to ride 10 horses a day as a professional and then go play tennis for a couple of hours in the evening under the lights. I am also very ADHD and I have a very difficult time sitting still. That caused me to be very unhappy in school. I am so much happier when I am active.”

Not only is she happier when she is active, but her fitness level has obvious benefits for her time in the saddle. “I think it is incredibly important for your riding for you to be super fit, especially in your core. I think you owe it to your horse as well.”

When she is at home, she does all four sports—riding, dancing, tennis and Pilates—every week. “It feels great to be fit,” she said. “At 59, I feel as strong as I did when I was 20. I believe the older

wonderfully supportive and has helped Francesca at all the shows.”

Another horse, named Westpoint, is also owned by Charlotte and is currently ridden by Junior rider Jackson Gillespie in Colorado. Westpoint is by the stallion Windfall, who Charlotte trained up to Grand Prix level. She succeeded in also training Westpoint to Grand Prix and showed him through Intermediaire I, but she didn’t feel that it was in his best interest to compete him at Grand Prix. “He is 18-plus hands and I felt it was going to be too hard on his body to be working at Grand Prix level on a regular basis. I love him dearly and never wanted to sell him.”

In 2015, when Charlotte was at the North American Junior/Young Rider Championships in Lexington, Kentucky, she met Jackson. “He was there to help out his team members even though he had not made the team,” she explained. “That in itself impressed me and I took note. Later on he contacted me several times to see if I knew of a horse big enough, with enough training and within his budget to do the Juniors. At that point I had never thought of leasing out Westpoint, but something told me

it could be a good match. My riders at home were like flies on his back due to his enormous size. Jackson is very tall and strong, but yet super kind with a very good feel. That was just what I wanted for Westpoint.”

As for her own journey in dressage, Charlotte continues to ride, but isn’t currently focused on competitive goals. “I still love riding every day, but don’t care so much about showing,” she said. “I have two wonderful horses I ride every day and they are both schooling Grand Prix.” One is Chanel, the 9-year-old Danish Warmblood mare that made an appearance at the 2015 Reem Acra World Cup Dressage Final in Las Vegas in a *pas de deux* exhibition that Charlotte performed with Jan Ebeling. The pair’s routine to a “Grease-”themed medley thrilled the crowd in the Thomas & Mack arena. “Jan and I had a blast and that is the kind of thing I would like to do in the future. I like to perform dressage in a way that makes it fun and appealing to the general public. I have competed more than 30 different horses over the past 30 years, so I don’t need that anymore,” she said.

Recently, Charlotte performed the

you are, the harder you have to work at it, but as long as you have fun doing it, it is not hard at all."

Charlotte first became interested in dancing when she moved to the U.S. "'Saturday Night Fever' was the rage and I loved the music," she said. "I started taking lessons at a local Arthur Murray studio and all I wanted was to do the Hustle. It is still my favorite music and dance. Dancing lessons are expensive, so it was limited how much I could go, but I stuck with it."

Charlotte pays to dance with an instructor once a week, but said her focus is on having fun and enjoying herself. "I love to dance and it is very good exercise, but I am not that good. It is like a form of therapy. The partnership you have with your dance partner is very much the same as what you have with your horse. When I dance with someone who is really good, I feel I can follow very well and it makes me want to be that kind of leader for my horse." Her practice of Pilates, however, is less about having fun in the process and more about the results. "I can't say I love it, but it is incredibly important for core strength and posture."

As with dancing, Charlotte first started playing tennis after moving to the U.S. "I was about 19 when I moved to an apartment complex with tennis courts. I got obsessed with it and started playing almost every evening on the lit courts." Her husband has also played tennis most of his life and they have played together for the entire 22 years they have been together. They have a court on their ranch with lights, which allows them to play doubles with friends four to five nights per week. "It is great exercise, but also a ton of fun," she said. "We play with some very fun players. I love the strategy involved with doubles. I also play at our local tennis club every Friday morning. Of course I travel a lot, so this schedule only works when I am in town."

Time for Travel

When she's away from home, Charlotte's travels take her to nearly all ends of the earth. She loves visiting Denmark in the summer to spend time with her family, but also enjoys a winter trip to Wellington because of the abundance of opportunities for dressage riders. But as much as she travels, Charlotte admits that she's ironically not very good at taking vacations. Sometimes she will work half days during her trips to Florida, teaching in the mornings or attending shows, and in the afternoons, catching up with friends.

She has taught clinics in Barbados and judged in Sydney, Australia. "As an international dressage judge you do have the opportunity to see the world. I have also traveled to many other places with Joel for either polo or business. On those occasions I have really enjoyed going to St. Petersburg in Russia and on safaris in Kenya. Because of the horses we have both had the chance to travel the world and still do."

As assistant youth coach, she travels domestically quite often for clinics. However, she also recently returned from a week in Aachen, where she chaperoned four Young Riders on the International Dream Tour, sponsored by The Dressage Foundation. "At Aachen, the standard of riding is the highest in the world and the facilities are unmatched. One of my jobs on this trip was to set up meetings with some of the top riders, trainers and judges in the world. It is so amazing to me how generous they all are with their time and knowledge. We were also lucky to spend a lot of time with the entire U.S. team—not only the riders, but also team vet Rick Mitchell, team physiotherapist Andy Thomas, team coach Robert Dover, head of international dressage Hallye Griffin, team supporter Betsy Juliano and Debbie McDonald, who was coaching Laura Graves and Kasey Perry-Glass. It was great for the Young Riders to see

how it truly takes a village. This trip was invaluable and will prepare them for competing in Europe."

What Comes Next

"I feel incredibly lucky to enjoy everything I do and I would do it even if I won the lottery," she said. The woman with seemingly inexhaustible levels of energy laughs at the concept of retirement. "The idea of ever retiring is a ridiculous thought. I will keep doing what I am doing as long as I can."

She's got one more big dream on her bucket list, though. She wants to have a center dedicated to youth dressage, complete with a covered arena and housing for riders. "My goal is not to have it be a place for riders to train year round, but a place they could come for a week or two or perhaps a month at a time. If they live too far away to bring their own horses, I would have some very nice schoolmasters to teach them on." A while back, Charlotte started Dressage Retreats, an opportunity for non local riders to stay and ride on her ranch. "It went well, but I worried too much about the weather, especially when people were flying from far away. If I had a covered arena, I could offer this year round." Her plan would be to allow riders to stay on the ranch in hopes of fostering an atmosphere of camaraderie and encouraging long-lasting friendships. "Eventually I would want experts to come and do different presentations. I live in a beautiful area, and parents, if so inclined, could have a great time staying in hotels nearby, going wine-tasting and touring the town of Solvang. The coast is also nearby as well as beautiful Santa Barbara. The idea of being able to help youth from across the country would be something I could see myself doing for the rest of my life or for as long as I could. In a way I feel like everything I have experienced so far was in preparation for this chance to share all I have learned." 

