



KCS EQUINE LLC

Let me preface by saying that I have never written a blog before, nor am I particularly talented in the writing department at all. I do however believe that as a professional in the equestrian community for the last six years and as a lifelong equestrian I do have lots to say. It is my hope that some of my experiences and opinions will be relatable to others in this industry. Whether you are on a path similar to mine or trying to find your own way, I hope that this blog is helpful to someone. It is my hope that we can begin a dialogue that can help others navigate this wonderful, albeit challenging environment with some sense of positivity and encouragement in an otherwise, let's be honest, cutthroat industry. I believe that there is a way forward that does not need to be a negative, defeating path; although I am not so ignorant that there won't be endless challenges along the way. Not everyone will agree with me, not everyone will think that I should have a voice, not everyone will follow along with my journey for the right reasons and I have accepted this. With that being said, let me introduce myself...

My name is Katee Snyder, I am currently 32 years old and grew up on the east coast of the United States in Chester County, Pennsylvania. I have had horses my entire life, inheriting my first unruly pony named Amos at the age of five. I was fortunate enough to grow up on a farm, keeping my horses at home, however I did not come with a strong financial backing that often comes with owning horses. Because of this I was able to gain tons of hands-on experience with management, horsemanship, out of the box riding opportunities and some interesting horses to ride. I was not a typical "lesson kid" who boarded or leased a horse in an organized professional program. There are times now in my career that I am grateful and frustrated by this. In one way I feel as though I have a much deeper understanding of different types of horses, how they think, their needs and feelings. I feel like I am much better with horse management from the perspective of the horse. I feel as though it has made me a better 'trainer' and rider of the inexperienced horse. However, it has also inhibited me to grow in the industry that is largely built around showmanship. I am not an established show rider, I have not perfected the 'effortless show round' and I struggle with my nerves to perform as most amateur riders do. I've found it is difficult to get your name out there, especially as a rider, if you're not actively showing and winning on the circuit. This is a topic I will bring and elaborate later on.

As my riding began to develop into my teenage years I had a very special horse land in my lap, Party Boy aka Charlie. He was (is) a 15.2hh American bred thoroughbred who actually raced in France and ultimately retired from racing to be trained under Laura Kraut as a show horse. He was probably the most well trained, broke horse I have ever had the pleasure to ride. He was exactly what you want for your junior rider show horse, all kick and perfect jump every time with easy changes. He probably deserved a kid with bigger goals

and a bigger budget, but I was so grateful for the opportunities and the doors he opened for me. Charlie ultimately moved on to teach the next kid, having a very successful career, and is now happily retired and impeccably cared for by his current owners in South Carolina. After Charlie I began riding a young thoroughbred named Gopher, aptly named for his need for rolling in mud puddles. He was five years old when I first got this plain, short-backed, fire-y chestnut gelding. We did not get along in the beginning, I struggled to figure out what made him happy while also struggling to ride his incredibly bouncy trot. But he had this picture perfect, powerful jump and hack winning gaits, and my stubborn teenage self was determined to figure him out. After about a year and a half we came to an understanding, and we were finally jumping around consistent courses and were unbeatable on the flat. Just in time for me to take a break from riding and focus on my education. I spent the following four years as a college student riding in the IHSA collegiate riding program through my school while also majoring in Pre-Professional Biology. Trying to convince myself that I was not going to have a career involving horses, that I was in fact going to become a doctor of alternative medicine. Once graduating from college it was obvious to me that I was not going to pursue further studies with biology. Feeling a bit lost I fell back on the only other skill I did possess and I gained a job assisting managing a 50 stall hunter show barn. Although I felt comfortable in this position, I also felt stagnant, I felt as though I had more to learn and needed more room to grow. As grateful as I am to the opportunities I had at the time and the people that provided me those opportunities, it was obvious that I was always going to be the one behind the scenes (as I should be in someone else's program), but that was not what I ultimately wanted for myself. It was time to branch out, to leave my comfort zone and to try something totally new. This is when I got a job as a working student in an FEI Eventing/sales barn. I kept this job for about a year, working 80 hours a week and learning a lot about how things operate at the top level. This was the first time I learned about working alongside sponsors, utilizing social media for business, and the networking involved at the top of the sport. Unfortunately, I also saw the not so glamorous side of the industry. I learned that there was more than one path to the top and not all of them allowed you to keep your soul. This is a topic I will NOT share details, because I do not think it is my place to share opinions and speculations of specific people. I will only ever talk in generalizations about my own personal experiences. After leaving this job I again found myself a bit lost, not really sure what to do or where to turn; so I did what most young adults do in this position, I moved back home. I took a few months to regroup and began teaching lessons very casually at the farm I grew up at. Within my first year of coming back home I had started to grow the program to the point where it didn't feel right to continue as a side hustle. I hesitantly gave up my amateur status and checked the box to become a professional. I started taking on some project horses and my lesson program expanded into coaching an IEA team. After a while it became obvious that I was overstaying my welcome and could no longer invade my mother's barn (thanks mom for the kickstart). I rented my very first barn in 2019 with the aspirations of starting a boarding/training business. The facility was a cute 8 stall renovated bank barn with great trails and turnout, but no riding ring. I would wrangle up my kids and we would hack/pony horses 10 minutes down the road to the riding ring to get all the horses ridden. I gained my first group of boarders and slowly began to build the business I so desperately tried to run away from

years prior, finally accepting my fate as a professional in the horse world. After a year and a half a barn close by with not only a riding ring, but also an indoor became available to rent. I hesitantly went to tour the facility, knowing that the likelihood of renting to a young trainer with a program only big enough for half the stalls and barely a deposit likely wouldn't earn me the privilege of renting said facility. As luck would have it I was given the contract and moved in only a few months later. I learned the easy way and the hard way to establish an LLC, fill a barn full of stalls within 30 days so that your checks don't bounce. Learning about establishing lesson subscriptions, learning a new billing system for boarders, scheduling for twice the amount of clients, contacting new vendors, all of the growing pains of a young equine business. After about six months I started to be able to sleep through the night and was beginning to feel more confident in how to run the sort of business I was imagining for myself. It is one thing to manage this kind of business for someone else, but I was not prepared to be the one responsible for the decisions that would either make or break me in this industry. It was the first time I realized how truly lonely it is to be a professional running a business in this industry that we should otherwise feel blessed to be in. It hit me like a ton of bricks that it does not matter how much you love horses, how much you care, there will be more opportunities for you to fail than there are for you to succeed in this business. This is where I am hoping my story can begin to make the biggest impact, maybe there is a way forward for young professionals to have more success in the future. The scariest lesson to learn in the beginning is that clients will come and clients will go, but you will still have bills to pay at the end of the day. It's difficult for people to conceive that their treasured hobby isn't a hobby to you, it is your way of life, it is how you pay your bills. The reality that these creatures you care so deeply for, the reason you started this journey in the first place, they are now a commodity. We as professionals walk the line every minute of every day of making the money to live while also trying to do what's best for the animal that allows us to live this life. Often times there is sacrifice on one side or the other, the care for the horse you love or putting food on your own table. Moving forward I realized that I had gotten to this point by 'winging it' and certainly a little bit of luck, it was time to have a little more strategy to my plans moving forward. I set a goal for myself that within five years I no longer wanted to be renting a facility, I wanted to take the mass amount of money that I spent on rent every month and put it toward something I could possibly own someday. It took me about three years, a boatload of faith, unconditional love and a ton of help for me to accomplish this goal. In Fall of 2022 we bought our current farm. As much as I love our new home it was a lot of work to get it to where we are now. We renovated the entire barn top to bottom, replaced more fencing than I can count, learned more about arena footing than I ever thought I would need to know, added on parking, changed gates, changed plans, learned about electrical, emergency water heaters, the list goes on. To say that farm ownership has been one hell of a learning curve is an understatement, but it is OURS and that somehow lessens the blow. Ironically I thought owning a farm was somehow going to save me a ton of money, that it was going to allow my business to flourish, and in some ways it has but there has been a lot more twists and turns than I expected. I no longer have an extensive lesson program and no longer coach IEA. I have about the same number of boarders I always did, some stay, some go, some new faces. I do ride a lot more than I used to, I've taken on some more

training boarders which is ultimately what I love to do, but these are often temporary clients. I have taken on some project/sales horses and that has taught me that the sales portion of this industry, although has high potential, is extremely difficult to break into and has more heartbreak than seems reasonable. This brings us to present day where I plan to go into more detail about moving and growing my business, opportunities for young professionals to learn, issues I faced and noticed in the industry, building a barn from the ground up, the future of our industry from my perspective, showing opportunities or lack thereof, and so much more. I hope that this introduction to my blog isn't too boring and that some of you will stick with me through these next pieces. Here's to seeing where this journey takes us next!

- Katee Snyder KCS Equine LLC