

# Rider and horse have developed competitive bond



**Jon Spencer,** [jspencer@gannett.com](mailto:jspencer@gannett.com)

11:40 a.m. EDT July 2, 2015



(Photo: Submitted photo)

ONTARIO — If what she has is a "disease," Emily Wright doesn't want to get well.

An almost life-long love for horses has helped the 24-year-old Ontario High School graduate reach the major leagues of the dressage world with her horse Florestano.

Wright's immediate goal is to qualify for the Young Adult "Brentina Cup" Dressage National Championships in Illinois in August. It's her final year of eligibility for the competition and would be another step forward toward her dream of someday competing in the Olympics.

"Most of the riders who get to the Olympics are in their 30s and 40s because it takes that long to get to that level," Wright said. "I'm in the process of looking for a young horse to train for that level. (Florestano, now 17) deserves to slowly back off — not retire, but work a little less."



**Emily Wright with her father Keith and soul mate Florestano.** Wright, who has advanced to the Grand Prix level in dressage with her horse, hopes to eventually compete in the Olympics. (Photo: Submitted photo)

They made the leap to Grand Prix, the highest level in dressage, after winning many championships in their showing career. They made an appearance at the U.S. Dressage Finals in 2013.

"The girls that stick with it, it's ingrained in them," said Keith Wright, Emily's father. "A lot of young kids, especially girls, think horses are so cool, but by the time they're 14 or 15 they're done with it. Boys come along or they're more interested in shopping.

"Even our baby sitter's daughter, who Emily really caught the bug from, she rode pretty consistently until 16, but doesn't ride much (now). Emily just never got away from it."

Keith Wright laughed.

"The ones who stick with it, I think it's a disease," he said, jokingly. "That's the only thing I can think of. It's an expensive disease."

Dressage, occasionally referred to as "horse ballet," has its ancient roots in Europe. The sport is defined by the International Equestrian Federation as "the highest expression of horse training," where horse and rider perform from memory a series of predetermined movements.

The Wrights found Florestano in Germany 10 years ago — "it was kind of like going to look at a puppy," Keith Wright said — and while it might have been love at first sight for Emily, the horse made her work for his affection.

Qualifying for the North American Junior Young Rider Championships in Colorado in 2008 proved a huge challenge after she was thrown from Florestano and broke her foot, sidelining her for two months.

"We were new; it was more just getting used to him because I haven't come off him since," she said. "Knock on wood, I haven't had any issues with him going lame. He's considered older (than most competitors), but he's got a few more good years of competition in him. There's no jumping, so it's not hard

on the joints."

Turns out both horse and partner have tough hides.

"The very first horse we bought Emily was 13," Keith Wright said. "We thought 'He's old enough; he should be calm.' We didn't know anything about horses at the time. But he had some sort of flashback, I think, because he'd take off with her. She was 9 at the time and probably weighed 60 pounds. He'd take off running — she couldn't stop him — and then he'd slam on the brakes, and she'd fall off. She'd always get back on."

Her second horse was equally dangerous, throwing her off and into the hospital, but the Wrights had more luck the third time around with a grumpy 21-year-old.

"He wouldn't do anything unless you asked him exactly right," Keith Wright said. "But he wouldn't take off. That was the greatest thing ever because Emily got her confidence back after being in the hospital. He was a God-send."

Or what they thought was a God-send until Florestano came into their lives.

"We started at the First Level, learning together, and last August we did our first Grand Prix together," Emily said. "It took 10 years to get there and that's fairly typical. It takes a long time."

A lot of which she spent on the road with her father. They had living quarters in their trailer, which allowed for plenty of father-daughter bonding. They traveled together to every show until she graduated from Ohio State with a degree in animal science.

Keith and Mary Beth Wright also have two sons. Ben, an avid weight lifter, played football and baseball for Ontario. Youngest sibling Chad was a 13-time All-Ohioan for Ontario in swimming, parlaying his success in the pool into a college scholarship to Cleveland State beginning this fall.

The family travels as much as possible to Emily's competitions. She spends her summers in Massachusetts and her winters in Florida, managing the barns and helping with the training of the horses at a couple of equestrian farms. She eventually hopes to be in charge of her own facility

"There's not many things like that a young girl wants to do with dad, and nobody else could drive the trailer, so she was stuck with me," Keith Wright joked. "No, I love it. I enjoyed it as much as she did."

"All three of our kids, when they chose what they wanted to do, they were very dedicated."

[jspencer@nncogannett.com](mailto:jspencer@nncogannett.com)

419-521-7239

Twitter: @jspencermnj

### **Dressage movements**

- Piaffe: A calm, composed elevated trot in place. Minimal movement forward is allowed. If the horse moves backwards, it is considered a serious fault.
- Passage: A very collected trot, in which the horse has great elevation of stride and seems to pause between putting down its feet. Described as a horse "trotting under water."
- Pirouette: A 360 degree turn in place, usually performed at the canter (between a trot and gallop).
- Half-pass: A movement where the horse goes on a diagonal, moving sideways and forward at the same time, while bent slightly in the direction of the movement.

Read or Share this story: <http://ohne.ws/1LVJh7j>

MORE STORIES



[\(/story/sports/outdoors/2015/07/05/tips-get-rid-pesky-groundhogs/29734841/\)](#)

**[Tips to get rid of those pesky groundhogs \(/story/sports/outdoors/2015/07/05/tips-get-rid-pesky-groundhogs/29734841/\)](#)**

July 5, 2015, 12:03 p.m.



[\(/story/sports/mlb/2015/07/04/nelson-wins-rd-straight-start-brewers-beat-reds/29726789/\)](#)

**[Nelson wins 3rd straight start, Brewers beat Reds 7-3 \(/story/sports/mlb/2015/07/04/nelson-wins-rd-straight-start-brewers-beat-reds/29726789/\)](#)**

July 5, 2015, 6:52 a.m.



[\(/story/sports/mlb/2015/07/04/locke-pirates-edge-indians-behind-jeff-locke/29726773/\)](#)

**[Locke down: Pirates edge Indians 1-0 behind Jeff Locke \(/story/sports/mlb/2015/07/04/locke-pirates-edge-indians-behind-jeff-locke/29726773/\)](#)**

July 4, 2015, 11:31 p.m.