



KAITLYN HENNESSY

B.A. POLITICAL SCIENCE '12

Kaitlyn Hennessy grew up riding horses and taking dressage lessons. By age 11 she was a serious contender, training daily and competing at high levels.

Dressage involves navigating hurdles, which helped prepare her for the challenge of leaving her friends and horses behind at age 14 and relocating to Hong Kong for her father's job.

Her parents planned to lease a horse upon arrival, but their only option was to purchase a recently retired racehorse with behavioral issues.

"The situation didn't look promising," said Hennessy. "No one could deal with him and no one wanted him. I knew he was destined for hard labor or euthanization, so I wanted to give him a chance."

She worked diligently to build rapport with the horse, whom she named "Smiley", then trained him to win blue ribbons in regional dressage competitions. When she moved back to the U.S. in 2004 she brought him with her, and the two remained close until his passing last month.

Hennessy selected CSUCI primarily because it was near her trainer in Westlake Village, but she enjoyed the University so much that she didn't want to graduate. She eventually graduated with honors – magna cum laude.

"I couldn't get enough of my upper division classes and I loved the small campus environment," she said. "One of the most important things my professors taught me was to challenge my perspectives. That's been so valuable."

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Today, she owns her own equestrian business, Kaitlyn Hennessy Dressage, in nearby Somis. She teaches riding, trains horses for competition, facilitates long-term boarding and collaborates with veterinarians to address each animal's unique needs. All of the horses reside in her care.

"It's a demanding job, but I'm my own boss and have the freedom to plan my life accordingly," said Hennessy. "The most fulfilling part is working with a horse that has a shortcoming or struggle and helping the owner understand. Once there's that understanding, I can make adjustments that help horses and riders use their bodies better."

In terms of her own riding career, Hennessy now competes at the professional level. Her horse Venturo, whom she raised from the age of 3, achieved top certification last year.

What's next for the duo?

"I hope to represent my country in the Olympics someday," she said. "It's every serious dressage rider's dream."

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