

*A Testimonial from clinic participant Dofti Nickerson*

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Camp Crane: An experience that will change my life forever.

Camp Crane - what the heck is that, you might ask? Well, it is the nickname for Kevin Crane's farm in Albion, Maine, Also the home of Zip Me Anytime, the quarter horse stud that happens to be the sire of my filly, Dotti's Little Zipper.

But, let us get back to Camp Crane, and exactly what goes on there. To begin this story, let me bring you back to February 19th, 2000, the Millennium. On this night 2 years ago, a filly was born to Classy Glow Note, the mare belonging to AI Dube, of AI Dube Quarter horses in Biddeford, Maine. They nicknamed her Milli, because she was born during the Millennium, and they thought it fit. I obviously do as well, because I have kept that as her nickname. Milli was a beautiful little chestnut with a pencil neck, fine features and legs, a beautiful little head, and a disposition of an angel.

She was a month old when I came to the barn to see her - it was love at first sight. At least for me, anyway. There was no way I would walk away from that angelic face without the knowledge that she was "mine". I bought her, and started the process of bringing up baby... Me, who had not ridden in 20 years, and who had never brought up a baby before. Oh well, she and I have learned many things together, and are, I am afraid, joined at the hip for life. But, back to Camp Crane.

Kevin Crane not only owns the stud that fathered Milli, but he is a well known clinician and teacher of horses (mostly "problem children") and people like me that want to ride and compete with their horses, or who just want to understand their horses better, and be a better partner for their horse that they consider a trusted friend and family member.

I decided the first time I saw Kevin work with an animal that he would train Milli. Not only is he one of the most knowledgeable trainers in the area, but one of the kindest and most gentlemen I have ever encountered. I started going to Kevin's clinics a long time before Milli was ready to have a saddle put on her back. I went and worked with Kevin's horses, young and "unfinished" as well as older and "well broke" like his stud "Lucky" (Zip Me Anytime). You would never know that Lucky is a stud. He is well mannered and quiet, in even the most confusing and noisy circumstances. He and Kevin have worked as a team for many years, and it is very evident that they adore each other. Kevin has trained with some of the most well known names in the world of natural horsemanship.

Names you will all recognize: Ray Hunt, Buck Brannaman and Tom Dorrance. Kevin, I feel, has taken the best of all of his mentors, and pulled it all together into a package that he can explain to all participants, at all skill levels. If at first you don't understand, just ask - Kevin will find a way to help you understand what he wants you to learn and to take away with you when you leave his clinic. So, you get home, and you try what you think you have learned with Kevin, and it doesn't seem to work? Just give a call - he will talk you through it again, and again, if necessary, until you fully understand the concept and can use it on your horse, so they understand it as well.

Come with your horse, or without. If you bring your horse, Kevin will work with both of you, separate and together, to help you "dance the dance". After all, groundwork and riding are a dance of sorts, Kevin says, and you don't want anyone getting their feet (or other body parts and feelings) stomped on.

I finished my weekend at Camp Crane today - 2 days of laughing, crying (yes, crying - for JOY, not because of frustration...) and listening, learning and doing. My mare, Milli, not only was saddled today, for the first time, but I rode her as well. The whole experience from putting the saddle pad on to putting the saddle on and getting "on board" took about 15 minutes. No yelling, fighting, hitting, bucking, just gently putting my leg in the stirrup on the left side, laying over the saddle, and moving the other stirrup around and bumping her side gently with it. Then, the same on the right side, and she stood calmly and patiently, as if to say "so Mom, what is the big deal, anyway?" Kevin then instructed me to calmly swing my leg over the saddle and sit down, which I did, with no fear or anxiety, knowing that the day before we had done all the ground work necessary to know that she understood what would happen, and all the cues involved.

I sobbed - with the biggest grin my fiancé, Rick, has ever seen (he says). I was finally where I had wanted to be for 2 years, and Milli was actually happy to have me there. We walked and trotted around the arena, under Kevin's watchful *eye* and presence, with only a training halter and lead rope, which I moved from one side of her neck to the other, over and over, in order to guide her in the direction I needed her or wanted her to go.

My dream, a reality, because of a man named Kevin Crane, of Camp crane, as all his students call his farm . "Get lucky at Camp Crane" - that should be a t-shirt. I got VERY lucky at Camp Crane. I arrived with my baby, my little sweetie whom I have spoiled and treated as one of my children, and left with my partner, my horse, the beginning of the next chapter in my book of life.

Was it worth the wait and all the money, time and effort? You bet! And the BEST money I have ever spent in relation to Milli, is the money I handed Kevin when I left his farm today, along with the respect and admiration for that man called Kevin.