

THE HORSE OR THE PILLS?

The Kimberly, Julian, and Cameron Harrison Interview

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HORSE TIMES IS DELIGHTED TO BE ABLE TO SHARE THIS NEXT STORY ABOUT HOW HORSEBACK RIDING TRANSFORMED A FAMILY. AFTER JULIAN AND CAMERON HARRISON WERE DIAGNOSED WITH ADHD, ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTMITY DISORDER, AND PRESCRIBED DAILY MEDICATION INDEFINITELY, KIMBERLY HARRISON WAS FACED WITH A CHOICE; TO LET ADHD AND THE PILLS CONTROL HER FAMILY'S DAY-TO-DAY LIFE OR SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES TO TAKE THEIR LIVES BACK INTO THEIR OWN HANDS. IN JUST A COUPLE OF YEARS, JULIAN AND CAMERON HAVE MADE A FULL TURN AROUND AND SAY THAT THEY OWE A LOT OF THEIR CHANGE TO THE VALUES PASSED DOWN THROUGH THE EQUESTRIAN SPORT. JULIAN AND CAMERON NOW HAVE DREAMS OF BEING THE FIRST BLACK BROTHERS TO REPRESENT THE UNITED STATES IN SHOWJUMPING AT THE OLYMPICS ONE DAY, A TRULY INSPIRING STORY. WE GOT TO ASK THE HARRISON FAMILY SOME QUESTIONS TO GET TO KNOW THEM BETTER, LET'S HAVE A LOOK;

Can you tell us a little bit about your life before COVID?

Before COVID, there was a lot of hustle and bustle with Kim in regards to work and the kids going to school. Our life, to a certain extent, revolved around the **ADHD** medication because everything was about timing. From getting up in the morning, to lunch time and then finally going to bed at night, we had to make sure that Julian and Cameron's medication was timed out. If things didn't go as planned, Kim would receive complaints from the boys' teachers about their behavior, or that they weren't eating at lunch time.

From the boy's perspective, they always enjoyed basketball, soccer and track. They would hang out with friends in the park after school. There were a lot of play dates and comradery between team sports and school, only for them to eventually be in horseback riding, which ended up being a very individual sport.

What were some symptoms of ADHD that you experienced which led to diagnosis and medication?

Some of the symptoms from the boys included a lack of focus which was affecting their school work. It was something that the school had brought up a few times and had been weighing on me for a number of years until I finally gave in *[and got them on the medication]*. I never wanted my ego to be a factor in denying the kids the kind of help that they needed. From the kid's perspective, they'd say as much as; they tried to focus during class and they just weren't able to do it. It would often lead to getting bad reports from their teachers.

What made you want to take Julian and Cameron off of their ADHD medication?

Right after the schools went into lockdown [due to the Covid-19 pandemic], Cameron came to me and had done some of the math; he explained to me the number of pills he would have to take by the time he turned 18 and said that he thought "this can't be healthy". It made me rethink the whole process of using medication as a fix for their symptoms. If we were going to take them off their medication, the time had to be now while the schools were shut down.

Take us through the process that led to discovering horseback riding for Julian and Cameron?

Early on into COVID, with the boys unable to do any sports, they turned to each other to play with. I noticed that one of the games they were playing over and over again was “horseback riding” where they would take turns being the horse and the other the rider. Come to find out, horseback riding was one of the only things that remained in operation during the pandemic. Previously, the sports they had been playing were only being offered over ZOOM [virtual meeting platform]. That wasn’t something I was going to let happen in my kitchen, so we started looking at horseback riding as an option.

What advice would you give to other families who might experience ADHD with their children?

The advice that I would give would just be to listen to your child and in doing that, their needs will be revealed in whatever capacity is right for them. I think oftentimes we write off kids’ perspectives, especially when it comes to something medical. But honestly, who knows what they’re going through better than they do?

What changes have you noticed in Julian and Cameron’s character or behavior since they have started horseback riding?

After horseback riding, I’ve noticed that the boys have become extremely disciplined and focused. They have a routine that they follow every day and that keeps them on track with their school work. There’s also a new sense of pride that they’ve taken on in all aspects of riding – from cleaning, to competing or simply grazing. I’ve also seen their self-esteem improve by leaps and bounds.

“Let’s chat a little with the boys;”

What are your favorite subjects in school?

Julian: My favorite subject in school is math.
Cameron: My favorite is English and Grammar.

What other hobbies or activities do you enjoy?

Julian/Cameron: Before the end of COVID we discovered Latin Ballroom Dancing, which we both love. We train 3-4 times a week to show at competitions with our partners. When we’re not dancing, we’re definitely playing Fortnite on our Nintendo Switches.

What are your favorite foods?

Julian/Cameron: Pizza!

J & C: What music do you like?

Cameron: I like all kinds of music but right now, I’m really into Taylor Swift.
Julian: Anything we can dance to, from Taylor Swift to Drake.



How regularly do you ride and what level do you compete at?

Julian: I compete at 2.6 Hunter and Jumper. (*Two feet six inches = 76.2cm)

Cameron: And I compete at 2.6 Hunter. We ride at least four times a week. (*Two feet six inches = 76.2cm)

What are some things you are working on in your training right now?

Cameron: We’re working on counting strides. It’s something our trainer is constantly drilling into our heads.

Julian: I’m also working on both Jumper and Hunter – Hunter being a new experience for me.

What is a typical day like for you?

Julian/Cameron: We wake up at 5AM every morning and do 60 minutes on the treadmill. Then after that, we eat a big breakfast before doing our morning duties and heading out to the barn for training. After training we have a tutoring session, followed by a dance lesson in the evening. Our nights usually end with a big Fortnite gaming session! And THAT’S when things get competitive.

Who do you look up to?

Julian/Cameron: We really look up to people like our trainers or barn mates. inspires us to do better.

What is it like to compete against one another?

Julian: Bizarrely enough, we don’t think about it like that. *We’re each other’s biggest fans.*

Cameron: Yeah, like if Julian gets a blue ribbon, it’s like I got it too and same goes for him.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Julian: I’m interested in being an equine chiropractor!

Cameron: And I’d like to be an equine veterinarian!

How has horseback riding affected your life?

Julian: Horseback riding has given me the confidence to keep pushing for what I believe in and not be afraid to take on new challenges. Showing in Jumpers for the first time was something really special, but took a lot of me having to convince my mom.

Cameron: For me I know that if I work hard at something, I can be really good at it. It’s taken a lot of practice for me to get where I am today. Taking pride in the smallest things really makes a difference.

What has horseback riding taught you that anyone can apply to their lives?

KIM: I would have never thought about horseback riding for me and my kids. Not because I was scared, but because I didn’t know anything about it. But the fear of not knowing should never prevent you from exploring something that ultimately ends up being the best thing for you. Also, sometimes the best medication doesn’t come in the form of a pill, but a rather large animal!