

## BITS of BALANCE – biomechanics from the foot up

By: Jennifer Cooper

Jacqueline Boonekamp De Wit has a great eye. She can spot what you need to fix the moment your behind hits the saddle on Joker, her simulator horse. Jacqueline was kind enough to bring Joker to Lake Erie College for the NODA/LEC D4K event in October 2021. After watching her work with a rider there, and learning about what she does with biomechanics, I decided to book a lesson for my daughter and myself.

Josie and I had an excellent time riding Joker with [Jacqueline Boonekamp-de Wit](#) and learning more about proper body alignment. Jacqueline's business is called Bits of Balance, based out of Rocky River Stables. She really makes you think about you and not your horse and the simulator, Joker, doesn't compensate for your balance issues!

We decided to bring our own saddle to make sure we sit right in what we have at home, but Jacqueline has a great saddle for all to use as well. We signed our waivers, donned our riding gear, and I climbed aboard Joker. There is no girth, so you need to balance and not hang on the same nor can you step into the stirrups as you usually mount!

Jacqueline started by placing the foot. When you build, you start with the foundation, and the foot is just that. She stated that you should be standing straight up as you ride. If the horse was pulled out from under you, standing! The stitching should be straight across the front of the stirrup and keep heels out to help keep your foot and toes forward, this made me feel like I was pushing in with the knee, and I know we are to keep our thigh and calf on. Jacqueline said this too at the beginning, but, this rotation allowed to help with alignment. I loved Jacqueline's use of her term "your meats" meaning your thigh and or bum. We need to adjust our "meats" when we get on to get the right part of our legs and buttocks on the horse and relaxed in the right place. Also with relaxation, Jacqueline brought up the thought that as we contract one side of our leg muscles, the other side lengthens and relaxes. She had me push out with my ankles and feel the outside of my leg tense and then think about how my inside felt – looser and more able to apply when needed to the horse's side. The muscles can also go back to a "neutral" position better after stressing the other way.

We then discussed the seat. Jacqueline said that it should hold water and not spill any, I had heard wine from my trainer, so about the same...for my normally over curved/arched back, I had to draw my core back and "bring my sternum to my pelvis" which lifted my ribcage up and brought my shoulders forward so much so that I kind of felt like I was in 2-pt. position. However, gazing over to the mirror, I was perfectly aligned shoulder over hip over heel. Wow, it felt weird! Josie just needed to roll her pelvis. Her feet were a little in front and when she just brought her shoulders a little forward – perfect alignment!

We dealt with the hands a little too. Using a resistance band under my legs and around the saddle and back to my other hand, Jacqueline had me pull up and away from me, as I have a tendency to drop my hands. We used this in the walk, sitting trot, and posting trot. As I was pulling up and forward on the bands, I was instructed to think about dropping my elbows for better position too. Josie's hands needed to push forward more and not take on the reins. She reminded Josie to feel her core with the bands by contracting her core away from her hands. After the lesson, I felt like I wasn't as messed up with my body as I

thought! There is hope and a foundation to work from with a few new tools for my riding toolbox and thoughts to consider for a more harmonious ride. Thank you Jacqueline! \*\*\*





