

1) Can you briefly tell me about yourself (married, kids, pets, work, hobbies)?

My name is Liz. I live in a small condo in the western suburbs with the four-legged love of my life- a rescued black lab mix named Mason. I am employed full-time as a Transportation Analyst for a global container line. I have been in and out of the international transportation industry for over a decade and enjoy the diverse challenges it presents on a daily basis. However this job doesn't define me, I'd like to think it's the things I do in my free time that do. In addition to being a regular horse care volunteer at Ellis Equestrian Center, I have a part-time job working for a pet-sitting company. I really enjoy meeting and taking care of all types and sizes of dogs, it definitely keeps me on my toes. In the little free time that I have left, I enjoy hanging out with friends and family, participating in 5K's, taking the scenic route, camping, fishing, hiking, and spending as much time as I possibly can outdoors with my pooch. My love and compassion for animals of all kinds started very young and runs deep.

2) How long have you volunteered at Ellis?

I started as a horse care volunteer shortly before its grand opening in July of 2009.

3) What drew you to Ellis, (did you think about volunteering at any of the other equestrian centers in the area)?

Curiosity and word of mouth led me to Ellis on a beautiful summer day with my mother in tow. The center was under construction and not yet open to the public. Regardless, I instantly fell in love with the beautiful country setting and striking architecture of the house and grounds. Who wouldn't? A staff member met us on our way out and chatted with us a bit about the facility. I went with the intent to continue my riding lessons in a more rural setting but jumped all over the opportunity to volunteer once I learned that was an option. Regrettably, I had to take an indefinite leave of absence from my position as a animal care volunteer at Willowbrook Wildlife Center where I cared for a variety of native wildlife. Fortunately for me they were understanding of my desire to get my "horse fix." Although I still haven't gotten enough of horses and all they have to offer us and probably never will.

4) Have you had horses in the past? Or, have you spent time around someone else's horses?

I was never lucky enough to have horses of my own. However, I grew up having exposure to them thanks to an Aunt that owned several on her property in Lockport. I jumped at every chance I got to get on them or be around horses in general. On every vacation, I'd scope out the nearest stable for a trail ride. My interest in horses and riding grew the older I got and I finally started to take formal riding lessons in 2006. It's a lot easier to learn when you're young than to pick up this hobby when you're older...that fearless mentality has vanished and you just don't bounce back as quickly. Perfecting my balanced seat riding has become a personal challenge, one that will continually be a work in progress.

5) Do you have a favorite horse at Ellis?

I really try not to have a "favorite" horse. They really are all unique and special in their own way and all hold a soft spot in my heart. Yet there is one in particular that I'm rather fond of and have bonded with over the years- Princess, a 10 year old grade mare known for her laid-back charm and boss mare attitude.

Not long after starting as a volunteer, I was given the opportunity to participate in the Charter Horse program at Ellis. The emphasis was to care for, exercise, and work with one of the Ellis horses over the slow winter months. This gave me the opportunity to bond with a particular horse without have to pay boarding fees and Princess got the exercise, training, and individual attention she required. You may still catch me whispering to her and giving her kisses when I think no one is looking.

6) If you had your own horse/horses what would you have?

That's a tough question. Right about now I'd be happy with just about any horse to call my own! If I was in the position to be picky, my ideal mount would be a tall, lean, dark bay gelding, preferably a quarter horse/draft cross. In my dreams I own a large Friesian and keep several BLM rescued Mustangs on acres of land out in Colorado.

7) Have you taken lessons at Ellis?

Yes, I have taken several sessions and have gained a lot of ground...literally and figuratively.

8) Do you take advantage of the free lesson after 88 hours of volunteer service?

I do, any chance I can get and anytime our instructor isn't busy giving lessons to the public. Sometimes I will just ride alongside a lesson or tag along on a trail ride. I don't think I have ever turned down the chance to get into the saddle.

9) What do you enjoy the most at Ellis (parties, Friday fun nights, chores)?

EVERYTHING. Just being there. I love the fun stuff, like the birthday parties, Friday Fun Nights, and special events but I actually enjoy the physical work too. I don't shy away from the not so desirable barn chores. Sometimes this is the only exercise I get each week and I know the help is appreciated by the horses and staff. I won't lie though, having the fortunate opportunity to immerse myself in the horse world and ride on a regular basis is definitely a big perk.

Ellis has become an oasis from the hectic, fast-paced suburban life I otherwise lead. The amazing four-legged creatures and people at Ellis have taught me so many valuable things including patience, trust, and acceptance. I really enjoy educating the general public about these gentle giants and seeing the smile spread across a child's face when they saddle up for the first time. Now if only I could find a way to be there all the time...