

My name is Linda and I was invited to come and see the program by my friend, Marilyn McGhan. At that time, she was the Head Riding Instructor and was working with a few others mentoring them to become instructors as well. On Thursdays there were 6 classes – with 6 riders – 45 minutes each. They also had 4 - 45-minute classes on Sunday afternoons. I was hooked the moment I got there and started volunteering on Thursday evenings in Fall 1987.

Marilyn was wanting to start a Therapeutic program on her farm near Calmar and wanted to step back from “Little Bits Riding Club for the Disabled”. She had talked me into taking my Equestrian Canada Western Coaching Certification with a group of her friends. At the same time in the spring of 1988 Lida McGowan (author of Aspects and Answers) was coming to Edmonton to do some certifications for the Cheff Centre in the United States. We studied with Esther MacDonald (PT) and long-time supporter Director and Instructor with LBRC. By the spring of 1988 I had successfully completed my Western Coaching Certification and received my certificate in Therapeutic Riding from the Cheff Centre in Augusta, Georgia.

I had taken over at Little Bits from Marilyn and was teaching on Thursday evenings along with Brian Finlayson and Lynne Greenslade. Marilyn had also become involved with the Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association (CanTRA) and by the end of 1988 I had completed my certification as a Canadian Certified Riding Instructor.

From this point I took over the running/organizing of the Thursday riding sessions. Little Bits became more progressive over the next few years employing a volunteer coordinator, and Jo-Anne (with her Cheff Centre Certificate) took over the Sunday teaching/organizing duties. We started communicating in order to bring some cohesion to the entire program.

I remained teaching on Thursdays for the next several years and during that time in discussion with the Board of Directors we decreased the number of riders in each class to 5, and increased classes to one hour as well as increased the number of classes on Sunday.

Over the years at WELCA it was often a struggle to maintain good working relations with each set of directors and/or management teams who were in charge.

At some point – maybe in the early 2000's I was granted my CanTRA Coach status and shortly after that became an Examiner for the Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association. I am still an Examiner and a member of the Certification Committee for CanTRA.

By 2000 it was evident that I needed a new hip and I toughed it out until Nov. 2002 when I finally did get a total hip replacement. I continued to do some teaching but took on more managerial duties and once Meredith left, I took over them all and stepped back to let new, younger certified instructors take on the teaching.

My heart is always in the arena and to this day I still assist with mounting and dismounting and that way I keep in touch with the riders, the parents and the volunteers. I am always available to sub when we cannot cover for an instructor and it gives me great joy to see the accomplishments of every rider in the class.

During my 32 years at Little Bits I have had the honor and pleasure of working with a great team of people including Jo-Anne and Ros for all those years. The Board of Directors has always been supportive of the staff and are always looking at ways of expanding the program while making sure we are financially secure to do so.

I am always eager to get to Little Bits and of course there are things I am not thrilled about doing but I can assure you one smile or high five from a rider makes every negative thought go away. I am such a better person for all the lessons that our riders have taught me – the teacher! And thankfully they keep on teaching me to be thankful, humble, positive and to never give up!

Linda

