

KYRA K the place she calls home



Though a heavy rains pours down on the rooftops of this quintessential English farm, in the indoor arena there is an outpouring of activity. Here, premier horses are nurtured, and apprentices trained to the music of raindrops echoing off the roof. Kyra walks around with a cigarette hanging out in the corner of her mouth. She's carrying on about the weather, clutching a cup of coffee in one hand, juggling a manure picker with the other. One of her eyes is on her pupils, the other watches Richard riding a beautiful ebony youngster. An indoor arena is a good place to be in this stereotypical English weather. On a day like this the indoor arena at Snowhill is the best place to catch up with Kyra Kyrklund. Snowhill Farm is the charming cottage-style spread where Kyra and Richard have lived now for four and a half years. This is also happens to be the place where some of Finland's elite riders are moving, just to be in close proximity to the air of inspiration and wisdom. Sharing the same spring showers as one of the world's best riders and trainers of the season. Close to Kyra and the place she calls home.



"Kyra, is it always this rainy here?" I ask, peeking out through the riding hall doors to where the outdoor arena once was. Now a clean twenty by sixty swimming pool lays in its place, and suggests the sun does shine in these parts sometimes...

"You are so unlucky coming now," she replies. "This is the only rainy day we have had amidst weeks of sunshine and heat." "And," she continues, "now everyone that has that misconception of England always being rainy will get their proof." "Validating this errant notion even more so, they will hear that we Englishmen always talk about the weather, as if it were the most interesting thing to discuss," she says and laughs. She has this way of laughing where you sense the dry humor that lays underneath, she's sharp and she knows it.

"You have been living here for four years now, or four and a half to be exact, is this 'home' for you?"

She takes a sip of coffee, "Well, even though we have been living here on this farm for four and a half years, we have been living in England for more than a decade. So, we have been home here for quite a long time." She reflects and continues, "Snowhill Farm is special though. When we still lived at our other place we usually gazed up here every time we drove by, and thought 'Isn't that one of the prettiest places on earth.' 'Imagine getting to live there,' we often said. And now we do."

You can hear the warmth in her voice when talking about the farm. Snowhill Farm is the first place she has owned, and she and Richard take care of it like you would a newborn baby. It's more a home than a farm. A farm, true to size, with a generous fifteen hectares of land to it, but with the nuances of a home; flowers blooming in every corner, and statues presenting themselves amongst the green leafiness. I wonder out loud how she likes the English climate compared to the differences of Finland. Kyra replies at

once, "I love it! Climate-wise I feel it is as big a leap from Finland to Sweden as it is from Sweden to England. Roughly translated, we are almost tropical here compared to Finland. You can easily ride outdoor all year along if you want to. Even though it's hard to believe at this very moment, we hardly use our indoor arena." As she is saying this the heavy rain falls even harder on the roof. I have a hard time believing her right now, but leave it to thought, and ask her about the great respect she has gained all over the world as a rider and trainer.

"So many people have great deal of respect for you. Though, I think half of them are scared by your personality and the strength you embody. Why do you think that is?" "Well, I am honest, there's your first clue. People nowadays are scared of honesty. They would rather you wrap your words up in nice pink paper napkins so hopefully no one will notice the real truth. I try to get it out loud and clear. To me there is no 'almost clean change', or an 'almost good piaffe'. It is simply either clean or unclear. Good or bad. As clear that.

"So, people respect you for your honesty, what do you respect in other people?" "I like honesty, and humor too," she says. "And people with a healthy self perspective. People need to loosen up a little, and not take things to seriously."

A young man enters the hall, he also has a Finish accent, as he introduces himself, I come to understand he is one of the up and coming Finish stars in the dressage sky. He too, has moved all the way from Finland to a farm close by, just to be in the vicinity of Kyra and the knowledge she provides. He defines Kyra with just a few words; essential accuracy, basal, and lucid. He candidly remarks "She is the very best trainer in the world," and points out, "No one can bring the truth to light like she can." I understand him completely. Kyra is one hell of a woman. His display makes me wonder if she herself has any mentors from whom she derives inspiration and knowledge.

"I try not to put people on a pedestal," she says and then continues, "Putting people up on a pedestal means you admire all their qualities, but at some point even the perfect picture will reveal a crack, and you will start seeing mistakes and fallacies. And then, it's a long way to fall, and it's quite unnecessary. It's better to see people's good sides, and let them be human." She finishes the coffee and puts it down, while the young man Henri, mounts a five year old gelding after Don Shufro. "Do you mean to create a Finish team?" I ask, and nod towards the Henri and the horse. "Quite possibly," she says, "Actually that is a dream that would be really nice to see come true. There are quite a few good Finish dressage riders that have the right qualities."

"Would you suggest you are the one creating Finish dressage culture at the moment?" I ask. She replies quite confidently, "Yes, without the risk of bragging I would say that I most definitely am."

As she answers, Richard changes horses and sits himself upon a beautiful four year old mare. Richard is relaxed and aligned sitting upon the young mare with a posture that many would envy.

"What are these qualities of a good rider and a horse that you are looking for?"

She answers without hesitating, "The very first priority of a horse is always the energy. I love horses with a lot of energy, but without being too spooky," she says and explains that all her horses have had a lot of energy and quite a few of them have had an oversensitivity for sounds, everyone except Master in fact. Kyra looks at the riders passing her and reflects on what she sees. "The most important qualities of a rider," she says, "is to know the basics; the seat, balance and the impact of your aids."

She gazes across the riding hall, where



“I also subscribe to the Swedish saying ‘Lika barn leka bäst’ she mentions with a smile”

Richard is riding. “He is really good at these things,” she says. I suddenly get a feel for the togetherness they feel and the amazing relationship the two of them have. Richard and Kyra have been together for more than eighteen years. They got married last fall, and spend almost all their time together. How is it possible to keep a relationship still passionate and refreshing after that long? Kyra laughs and says, “Well, it’s not exactly like we spend all our time together 24/7, we do things apart quite a lot too. He is a trainer in Germany, and I in Sweden, Finland and Portugal, so we have some time apart. But basically I think it’s important to give each other space. I also subscribe to the Swedish saying ‘Lika barn leka bäst,’” she mentions with a smile.

“But, how is it to live with your trainer, do you constantly talk horses, I persist.”

“I do believe that horse people are quite special, and that your partner really needs either to be a horse person himself, or be so understanding that he is ok with all the odd time schedules, the riding or training discussions over the dinner table and the many hours spent in the stable.” Kyra says with warmth in her voice, “Richard is fantastic. He is much more my trainer now than he has ever been before. Now we have teamed up together and we always ride together, almost always. He is the one giving me second opinions, new solutions and new ideas. In return, I’m giving him the competition experience and the feelings a competitor encounters when being on the hot spot in front of everyone’s eyes.”

This subject in particular she knows well what she is talking about. Kyra has been in the hot spot ever since she was very young and met Matador, who brought her to the top of the world’s elite quite fast. Though it makes you wonder, after being known as one of the world’s top riders, does she still see the same challenge when competing as she did before? For Kyra this seems to be a subject she is used to talking about,

“Any rider shouldn’t compete against the others out there, only against them self. I am only concerned how my horse is performing, not the placement or the ranking compared to others,” she says and states, “Therefore I will probably always compete. I have it in my blood, I need the challenge.” A horse is lead in by one of the grooms, it is one of the few horses that Kyra has for training. It’s a mare after Master, that has just been there a couple of weeks. It has been standing on the waiting list for almost two years. Now it’s here. Kyra mentions, “There are people who think I only accept horses that I like for training. This is not true. Of course I want to like them, but it is more important that the rider and the horse have the same goals and have equal the ability to achieve them. For me there’s really no prestige in making them all into Grand Prix horses, I like them too much to press a horse without enough of the right qualities and abilities to go Grand Prix, which will lead it to become a mediocre GP horse, instead of keeping it as a super talented Prix St. George horse.”

Kyra is very clear and sure in her opinions, I wonder if she is as clear and structured as a trainer.

“I am quite structured in some ways as a person, but honestly, you can put up any god damn structure you want when training horses, and in the long run its always the horse deciding the training anyway. Training a horse to me is like stepping up on a ladder. You move up or down on this ladder depending on what you want to improve, sometimes you need to go down many steps to be able to fix a step that is maybe several rungs up.”





When she says this, I get a feeling that any horse is an easy game for Kyra, everything is so obvious. "Is it as easy working on your own qualities as on the horses", I wonder. Kyra hesitates and says, "Well, working on your own personal qualities is always hard. I am very stubborn and sometimes I think it is hard for me to tactfully tell people something that they might find negative. I don't want to create tensions that might make them interpret me wrong, sometimes I even find myself biting my tongue and walking away, instead of telling what I feel or think of".

I ask her what qualities would be the worst enemies for a rider, and she says without hesitation, "The worst enemy of any rider is anger. Anger is often an expression of fear or panic, and that never brings out something good." Speaking of good things, I feel I need to at least ask her if she considers herself a trendsetter or a fashionista, regarding to the Kyra K clothing and the saddles she co-designs. She says with a certainty, that she just never thought of the business at all, she simply wanted to create some nice clothes to ride in or a nice saddle to ride on. "I believe in what I do, and other people tend to believe in what I do as well. I think that other people see me as trustworthy. If would put a bag on my head and tell everyone that it's really the best way learning the flying changes, everyone would soon ride with a paperbag on their heads, but no sooner would do this they would realize it's a damn paperbag combined with a lie, and I'd loose their respect. Therefore I'm really careful about putting out any paperbags without really having tried it out properly myself first..."

Kyra depicts the explicit characteristics of a true and honest person. It is no surprise that so many people respect her to the degree they do. While the horses leave the riding hall with the daily training done, Richard and Kyra point their steps towards their house, awaiting an hour of lunch and horsetalk. It is in these moment that the inherently efficient side of Kyra shines, and while walking past a beautiful bed of flowers and herbs she can't resist the inclination to pull the new weeds

that have appeared. Efficiency, determination and fundamental work ethics, it is clear that it's by no coincidence that she is where she is today. She is indeed a true talent, but her most prevailing attribute, is that of a hard working woman that loves what she does and does what she loves. I ask her if there's one basic truth she can reveal, that would applicable for any aspiring rider. She stops for a second, looks up into her mind and recalls what her father once told her; an adage that she lives by still today, and admits has helped her to the place where she is today.

"There are three things you have to learn in this life. First, is to know what things you can change, and in these you've got to put all your heart into. Second, there are things you can't change. With these there is no need to put any energy into them. And finally, you need to learn how to differ between the two." She takes a pause, and applies this to her own riding, "I know all I can do is to change how I am riding, and do better or as best as I can. And I recognize that what I cannot do is change how other people are riding, and so there is no point in expending energy down this avenue. So my goal is always just to ride as well as I can. See, that's the only honest thing I can do for myself, and I can then truly put my all energy towards the task at hand. And That energy seems to pour forth from Kyra Kyrklund as effortlessly and unending as the English rain.



"Kyra, is it always this rainy here?" I ask, peeking out through the riding hall doors to where the outdoor arena once was. Now a clean twenty by forty swimming pool lays in its place, and suggests the sun does shine in these parts sometimes...



"now everyone that has that misconception of England always being rainy will get their proof"