

Melanie Pai and Canaan Ranch

By Ann S. Reilly, Ph.D.

On the surface, Melanie Pai comes off as a girl-next-door type; fun company and a cheerleader who loves everyone in equal measure. But the dressage trainer and owner of Canaan Ranch in Fulshier, Texas and Middleburg, Virginia has had a heavy influence in the sport of dressage during the last decade. From owning Steffen Peters' 2004 Olympic mount Floriano, to nurturing some of the best of the best young dressage stock in the country, Melanie's passion for the sport has left a lasting footprint on the industry.

Pai has been riding horses since she was four years old. Growing up she rode cutting and barrel racing horses, and learned to jump one summer as a kid, but it was experiencing a horse's exuberant extended trot that was the catalyst for her lifelong passion for dressage.

After taking a break from horses to raise her family, she began riding again after her husband gave her a dressage horse one Christmas. Her return to dressage led to the creation of Canaan Ranch, and a journey that she never could have predicted.

Not everyone has a horse of Olympic caliber, but Melanie did in Floriano. After his first rider left the Pais, Melanie was looking for a replacement. Steffen Peters had been to the ranch for a clinic, and the rest, as they say, is history. He was invited to Texas to ride Floriano and Gucci, her two Grand Prix horses. Steffen told her that Floriano had a good chance of making the 2004 Olympic Dressage Team, and Melanie and Lou gave him the go ahead to show Floriano in international competition. Steffen and Floriano



Melanie Pai and King Garcia winning at Devon. King is responsible for showing the horses in hand at dressage sport breed shows as well as in hunter breeding and presents them for breed inspections. "King has been with us for many years and is a vital part of our young horses development," Melanie says



"Dreams are what life is about," Melanie Pai says. "I have achieved many of my dreams and am working on achieving many more of them."

were selected as the first alternate for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, and were participants in the 2005 World Cup in Las Vegas, NV, winning the 2005 Invitational Championship there.

The Toughest Time

But Melanie's life has not always been a bed of roses. In 1994, her 6-year-old son Kyle began the fight of his life when he was diagnosed with Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia (ALL). ALL is the leading form of leukemia in children; representing approximately 85% of leukemia patients under the age of 19.

For the next three years, Melanie and her family were in and out of the hospital and faced many ups and downs throughout Kyle's treatment. "I had to become a vigilant person and try to balance my family's lives," remembers Melanie. At 9, Kyle was finally taken off chemo and went into remission. "It was such a long road... everyone I met along the way had a different story," Melanie adds. "Not every child that walked into that hospital with Kyle survived."

Five years later, Melanie decided she was ready to give back and fight the disease that turned her family's life upside down. She started by participating in her children's schools with The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Pennies for Patients program. In 2009, when she learned of the LLS's "Equestrian of the Year" campaign, "I was so excited and ready to go as a participant...it really brings my two worlds together." This fundraiser welcomes equestrians from all disciplines and levels to compete against each other to see who can raise the most amount of money for the LLS.

Melanie has also generously given to the sport of dressage in the US. She sponsors dressage shows, including the \$5,000 Canaan Ranch Pas de Deux held at the EEMI Dressage Show.