

Dear OHJA board members,

Since I started showing on the A circuit, my Dad has always been there for me. At my first Children's Medal Finals, I made it to the second round, and I couldn't have been more excited. Galloping toward the little white picket fence, my noble steed wasn't acting so noble and decided to stop. As my eyes filled with tears, I saw my dad taking pictures of the jump Teddy refused. The second we got home, he was off to Home Depot to buy wood. Within a few days, an exact replica of that evil jump was set up at the barn and ready for Teddy and me to master. Not only did he make that white fence, but he has made boxes, walls, open water and other scary jumps for all of Jen's students to practice. He has spent countless hours, late nights and weekends not only making jumps but cleaning tack, grooming horses, fixing tack trunks and even building an observation room.

When I qualified for the Maclay national finals, sending me to New York was going to be a big stretch financially. Cutting down expenses in other areas was the only way it could happen and unfortunately that meant my dad wasn't able to go with us. But anyone that knows my Dad knows he finds a way to do everything. He got up at 3:30 a.m. to watch the live camera feed of every single rider showing in the Maclay finals. Second to last to go, he watched me ride just like my mom was able to. The second I got off Teddy I had a text message saying 'Great ride Kelsi, you and Teddy were awesome.' Even though he wasn't able to watch me ride in New York, he has been on the sidelines of almost every other show. A couple of times he has even woken up extra early to watch me ride before he goes to work.

My dad also hauls my horse to every local horse show. Sometimes he even hauls without me. A couple of years ago this wouldn't have been possible because every time my Dad tried to load Teddy, he would move in any direction except forward into the trailer. After many hours of patiently urging Teddy forward, he has finally mastered the task. While preparing for the USET finals, Teddy spent a lot of time at Cornerstone practicing the open water jump. While I was at home studying for a big AP government exam, my dad made the 3 hour round trip with Teddy several times all by himself.

My competitive riding would not have been possible without the time and financial commitment my dad has given to my horse and I. This is why I nominate my dad, Gary Schatz, to be the 2010 OHJA Father of the Year. He has helped my riding dreams come true and is the best barn dad anyone could ever ask for.

Kelsi Schatz