

### ***Student riders are the stars at Will Simpson clinic benefiting The Compton Jr. Posse.***

*by Winter Hoffman & Christy Hobart*

There was a clue that something big was going to be happening at the Will Simpson riding clinic on April 14 in the hills above Malibu. A cameraman was pulling equipment out of the van and a woman introduced herself as a producer from CNN. The surprise, though, was that they weren't there to film the 2008 Olympic gold medalist. They were there to report on Shola Oyefeso, a high-school senior and a rider from the Compton Jr. Posse.



The Compton Jr. Posse, where Shola has been riding for six years, was founded in 1988 by Mayisha Akbar with the goal of providing inner-city kids with year-round, after-school alternatives to the lure of gangs and drugs. By having children work with horses, the group helps them develop discipline and self-esteem and learn to set and achieve goals academic and career goals. The Posse's motto is "Keeping kids on horses and off the streets."

It's that slogan that hooked the jumping rider almost 10 years ago. "It's fantastic," he says of the group's mission. "I grew up on the south side of Chicago and was given chances myself. If I can give back and help in that direction, I'll do it." Since becoming involved, Will hasn't stopped

giving. He's offered countless lessons to the kids in Compton, put his barbecuing skills up for auction at fundraisers (always a big hit), led clinics to benefit the organization and encouraged friends to become involved. He currently sits on the Compton Jr. Posse board.

Shola has trained with Will before, but as she's currently transitioning from hunters to jumpers, she found this clinic particularly useful. "Will helped me a lot with eye control," she says, "getting a feel for and figuring out a horse I'd never ridden before and seat position." Before she leaves home to pursue studies for a career as a veterinarian or a dentist, she'll dedicate her time to more competition and to "helping the kids at CJP with their riding."

And while Shola's personal story is certainly interesting (look for it on CNN!), it was her commitment—and the commitment of so many others—to the Compton Jr. Posse that stood out that day. Will was in the ring from morning until late afternoon, donating his time and expertise to the organization, working on equitation and jumping skills with 11 Los Angeles-area riders. Ranging from elementary school students to adults, each rider left the ring with personal, game-changing take-aways. Will happily donated all the clinic fees to the Compton Jr. Posse.

"The horses inspire the kids," Will says. "They get to know what it feels like to be responsible for another being and they get the sense of being needed." Plus, he adds, the sense of accomplishment they gain when they progress from getting on a horse for the first time to jumping rails carries over to other parts of their lives. "They learn they can do something they once thought was impossible."

A clinic like this doesn't just happen. Victoria Faerber, the Compton Jr. Posse's trainer and a volunteer for over a decade, organized the event at Malibu Valley Farms, where—in addition to the stable in Compton—she trains her riders. With her own jumps down for repair, Victoria turned to Chad Mahaffey, owner of the neighboring Chad Mahaffey Stables, who generously offered his ring for the day. It takes a village. Indeed, Faerber noted, "Winter Hoffman, who's been very involved with the Posse, donated two of her really amazing, experienced horses—Ollie and Transmission—for two of the kids to ride."

That generosity was appreciated. Nathan Williams-Bonner, a Compton Jr. Posse star, came a little closer to achieving his goal of competing at the Grand Prix level by participating in the clinic, thanks to Will's instruction and Winter's horses. "Both of the horses I rode jumped fantastically. Over a few jumps I felt I needed some saddle grip because they jumped so well." He's still getting to know Ollie, but both he and Hoffman are hoping for a future for them

together. While he concentrated on his riding in the ring, Nathan also took note of how well other riders did. “When the clinician can make sure everyone learns something, you have a happy turnout.” Such camaraderie and good will is part of the Posse ethos.

“It’s an amazing thing,” Will says. “It’s refreshing and inspiring. These kids don’t care if their boots are too big, or if the saddle isn’t just right. They just get on and go. They’re so appreciative of being able to get on a horse and ride.” Being with the organization so long, he’s seen how their dedication to riding helps them succeed outside of the ring. He notes one student who, with courage acquired from the program, took on a job in a restaurant. Years later, “he arrives at the barn dressed as a chef, before changing into his riding clothes. You feel happy for the guy. And you think you’ve made a contribution.”

It’s this sense of community that permeated the day and made it feel so special. It was the easy conversation between new acquaintances and Will’s relaxed manner with the riders. It was the communal lunch order, with folks pitching in approximately what they owed for their sandwich or salad. It was in the moments when one kid helped or teased or chased after another. It was the way a young participant from the Posse looked up to an older one. There was community on display and it was growing—right there, in the moment.

And this, it turns out, was the story of the day.

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For more on the Compton Jr. Posse, visit [www.comptonjrposse.org](http://www.comptonjrposse.org).

*About the Authors: Christy Hobart is a journalist based in Santa Monica whose work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, InStyle, Saveur, House & Garden and many other publications. Following her daughter, Maisie Shapiro, around from horse show to horse show, she’s added the equestrian beat to her lineup. With a background in filmmaking, fashion and contemporary art, Winter brings a unique perspective to the equestrian world. A lifelong horsewoman, she helped her daughter, Zazou Hoffman (currently a trainer at Meadow Grove Farms), navigate her way to a successful junior career, including a 2009 ASPCA Maclay Equitation Championship at the National Horse Show.*

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