March 2020 Carlene Benson (by Elayne Barclay)

As the first rides of the year are fast approaching, many of us are accessing what our goals for the season will be. Maybe you will attempt your first endurance event ever, or maybe your goal is a longer distance, going for a specific award, or completing a ride that has the reputation of being particularly difficult. The likelihood of successfully accomplishing a new goal is greatly increased by doing research and asking for advice. Carlene Benson is a PNER member that has done just that over her 20 year endurance career. Even with a lifetime of horse experience to fall back on, when she decided to get into endurance riding she asked for advice and listened to that advice. Now she is in the position to offer help and advice to others and definitely has a “pay it forward” attitude.

Carlene started her lifetime with horses when she was only 5 years old. Miraculously, she did not have to beg and cagoule her parents, her mother just decided it would be a good idea for her to have riding lessons. When she was a teenager, despite living in town and having no previous experience with any kind of livestock, her parents surprised her on Christmas with her very own horse, a 3 year old Morgan mare. Carlene states, “that started my deep love affair with horses. I've been uncommonly blessed to have been able to keep a horse through thick and thin since then. My mare was a national English saddle seat Morgan champion and I showed coast to coast and in Florida in the winter. I had fabulous teen years.”

Carlene continued to show into adulthood but finally stopped when she was 6 months pregnant, so for a few years raising humans took priority, but she still had her mare's colt to raise as well. Apparently he did not like the show-horse lifestyle so she switched gears and learned to trail ride instead. After her kids were teenagers she made an observation: “I looked behind me in the mini-van and decided the dogs didn’t each need their own seat, so I bought a pickup, borrowed a trailer and started going farther afield.”

Carlene's “gateway” sport into the addictive world of endurance was Search and Rescue. “I got involved with our Sheriff’s Mounted Posse and SAR and loved it. I developed the first SAR academy for the county and it might have been the first one in the state for Posses.”

During a 3 day pack trip in the Mt Washington Wilderness her horse decided to head home on his own. Kate Beardsley spent an all night ordeal tracking the horse up and down the mountain and when he was finally caught, Carlene recalls, “Kate’s horse was worn out, but Rocky was completely unfazed and Kate told me I should take him on an endurance ride and let him see God.”

Carlene took Kate's advice and found she loved endurance but didn't love riding the “big muscled crazy Morgan” she was leasing. She told her husband Wally, “I need an Arab!” Luckily she listened to her trainer and wound up with Moe, despite him being the “wrong” color. “He was 5, small, dainty, and had never been out of a paddock or an arena. He was adorable. I bought him. And off we went and never looked back. Moe was my second once-in-a-lifetime horse. He was perfect. Truly perfect.”

Carlene joined PNER and sought out as much information as she could get from books and experienced endurance riders. She remembers that she “knew no one and didn’t know a thing about endurance, but I just talked to people and picked every brain I could. I had the benefit of great mentorships from Carol Giles & Ron Sproat, Tom Dean, Dennis & Sue Summers, and others who answered my questions and offered needed advice and I listened!” She spent a year conditioning Moe before she went to her first ride with him. She fondly recalls, “We went slow and had a great first year and we won the Rookie Horse & Rider award, which is why Wally and I continue to sponsor the award. Moe was a steady Eddie, so he got a lot of mileage awards. At one point David LeBlanc figured Moe had won the most consecutive Sandybaar awards of any other horse, 7 I think. I ride for Arabian Horse Association points and Moe received his Legion of Honor + and Legion of Supreme Honor /. I love awards because they help me set and reach goals. I also like getting cool stuff, which is why I love doing awards for convention.” Besides sponsoring the Rookie Horse & Rider award, Carlene also sponsors the AHA Region 4 awards.

Carlene has been the Rider Representative for Oregon since 2010 and states, “I really enjoy that involvement and try to support Oregon riders any way I can. I get the names of new Oregon members and reach out to them to see if they have any questions, need help finding others to ride with, share my beloved book list, and let them know there’s a friend out there. I try to let them know what’s going on with the Board and if there’s a big issue coming up I’ve done polls to see what Oregon members want.”

Besides being a Rider Rep, she also started a convention tradition: “Wally and I started the Green Bean table at the convention banquet. That way new members have a seat saved for them, they’re not left wandering around alone, stuck at a table in the corner, and they can get to know others near them – I try to group them according to where they live so they can make connections. We’ve gone from 1 table to 3 this year. Lifelong friendships have been made at the Green Bean table!”

When asked how she felt about PNER, Carlene replied, “I love PNER! I believe in PNER. The friends I’ve made, the mountains of information I’ve learned about my horse, myself and this sport is amazing. PNER works together in ways other regions don’t quite. We’re competitive and intense, but there isn’t anyone who won’t stop to help someone or won’t share their “secrets". Hanging around like-minded people and sharing our experiences with these wonderful horses feeds my soul.”

So don't hesitate to contact your state's PNER Rider Representative to get connected, who knows what goals you might achieve and who you might help achieve their goals in the future!