July 2021 Bianca Chevalier (by Elayne Barclay)

We are in the middle of the “Dog Days of Summer”, a phrase used for the most oppressive period of sweltering summer heat of the year. The phrase refers to the fact that the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius (the “Dog Star”), appears to rise alongside the sun during this period (July 3 to August 11th ) and it was thought the heat of the two stars combined to make temperatures more intense than at any other time. The heat wave we are enduring is enough to make anyone grimace, but the current Member Focus might be a refreshing distraction. Certainly if you ever run into Bianca at an endurance event she radiates a bright smile that lights up the trail and you can't help but beam in return.

Bianca Chevalier (literally “horseman” in French) has been enthralled by horses ever since she was little. She was fortunate to live in the Connecticut countryside and recalls, “I would ride my bike by pastures on back roads just to look at horses grazing. If I was really lucky my dad would take me to watch a local horse show, I was so envious of the people who actually got to ride real horses!” She credits a childhood stint of rheumatic fever that landed her in the hospital with finally being able to convince her parents to enroll her in riding lessons since they thought it would be a healthy outdoor activity that would help Bianca become stronger after her illness. Bianca was thrilled, “I was so happy just riding a placid old horse round and round in slow circles”.

When asked about her first horse, Bianca said, “I saved up $175 to buy a mare from a local “horse trader” when I was 12. Little did I know that the reason Marengo was so cheap was because she was only three and barely broke. I found that out on my first ride when she unceremoniously dumped me in a field and ran off. Everyday I would ride her on the trails and she would invariably spin/bolt/buck. That was the start of my lifetime of non-elective dismounts and probably why endurance riding never phased me!”

Bianca is a well-round horsewoman. She grew up riding English hunt-seat, but after college she attended the Meredith Manor International Equestrian Centre where she studied western riding. She remembers that “their grueling two hour daily group lessons in the West Virginia summer heat desensitized me to the rigors of endurance riding.”

Bianca's first endurance experience was in Colorado in the 1980’s. “I rode my lively appendix quarter horse. I knew absolutely nothing, but I got hooked on endurance at that first ride. I rode the entire 25 miles by myself and loved the freedom and adventure of new trails.”

Unfortunately, due to full time work/career goals, it was 15 years before she rode endurance again. Now living in northern California she spent hours riding the American River trails with distance riders she met there. She bought her first Arabian and signed up for the American River Ride. Bianca ruefully recalls, “after signing up for the ride, I asked a guy I rode with if I needed to go to the ride meeting mentioned on the flyer. He said “if you know the trails, you don’t need to go”.... so for two years I ignorantly never went to a ride or awards meeting! I lived so close to most rides that I would just trailer there in the morning and go home afterwards. I wondered where people got T-Shirts with the ride name on them, but really never gave it much thought, I was just so happy to be out riding the trails. I would find out months later how we placed in the ride by reading Endurance News.”

When asked about her endurance riding history Bianca states,“I am not a big-time or competitive rider, my deepest satisfaction comes from training and conditioning my horses to be able to do their personal best and I ride them accordingly. I guess from riding so many lesson horses, I enjoy riding many different endurance horses and am thankful for the many opportunities others have given me to ride their horses. Every horse is unique and has something to teach their rider. The biggest lesson I have learned about endurance is that you must always act in the horse’s best interest and know when endurance may not be the appropriate career path for that particular horse. That is why I always strive to have my horses cross-trained in other disciplines so they will have value in their lives.”

Bianca considers herself extremely fortunate to have lived and ridden in several different AERC regions (West, Southeast, and Northwest). “Endurance riders are the most friendly, considerate and helpful group of horse people! It doesn't matter what breed or what price you paid for your horse. So different an environment from the English horse shows I attended as a teen where no one spoke to me or my little unknown-breed horse.”

Bianca moved to southern Oregon in 2003 and joined PNER (the same year she was featured on the cover of Endurance News). She is currently the Rider Representative for Oregon, and stated, “it is a position which gives me the opportunity to support and listen to the suggestions, questions and concerns of fellow riders. I eagerly look forward to seeing many of you back on the trails again following my six months being grounded due to shoulder surgery (again caused by one of those non-elective dismounts!)”

Look for that sunbeam smile!