January 2021 Jessica Huber (by Elayne Barclay)

It is the beginning of a new year and the beginning of a new endurance season, hopefully with a full slate of rides in the Pacific Northwest region. Sadly we won't get a chance to socialize with each other at the annual PNER convention this year, but we can still interact over the internet. To that end, it's time to focus on another PNER member. This person is a powerhouse of energy packed into a small amount of mass, kind of like a human Tardis, bigger on the inside than on the outside.

Jessica Huber was born and raised in Gooding, Idaho where she still lives and states she “enjoys the small-town vibe and the unique beauty of the area.” She grew up riding quarter horses and said, “my mom taught me the basics and waited for me to get through my teenage years to come back to ride with her.” When Jessica was an adult and ready to get back into horses again her mother, Merri Bodenhofer, introduced her to endurance. Jessica recalled her mother “had done a few rides and talked about how much she enjoyed them. I knew I wasn't cut out for the show ring so I thought I'd give endurance a try. About 5 miles into my first LD I was hooked!”

Jessica has been doing endurance for five seasons now but admits, “I really still feel like a beginner! Every single ride I learn so much.” Her long term goal is to complete a 100 mile ride, “A lot of pieces have to come together to successfully compete at that distance but I feel like I'm moving in the right direction. We're still a few years off so shorter-term goals include some Pioneer completions and a continued focus on equine nutrition, which I find fascinating!”

Simply learning to be a better endurance rider and working toward completing a 100 mile ride wasn't enough for Jessica so in 2018 she decided to manage an endurance ride herself. Having the boundless energy of Jessica she decided her first time managing a brand new ride in a brand new location would not simply be a one day ride, but a multi-day and not simply a multi-day but a Pioneer ride, the Autumn Sun Pioneer. I asked her what prompted her to attempt such an intimidating undertaking, “I knew I wanted to have a ride someday but it was down the road, or so I thought! Since the opportunity and time slot in the calendar was there I figured I'd just go for it. (Special shout-out to anyone who came the first year and still comes back -- look how far we've come since then!!) A Pioneer made sense logistically for both myself and riders. Tucked in toward the end of the season, three days provides a great opportunity to add miles/points for those point chasers and I wanted my ride to have a warm, end of season celebration feel to it. The two goals I have always really focused on are having well-marked trails and making everyone feel welcome in camp.” Having competed in the first year of this ride and returning every year since, I can say Jessica has definitely accomplished her goals!

When looking back at the last three years of being a ride manager Jessica says, “I'm just as proud of my growth as a ride manager as I am anything I've done on horseback. I truly love putting on a ride and making it better and better. For both riding and managing when I look back to where I started I'm amazed at everything I've learned so far. I also have deep gratitude for the horses and people who have inspired me and helped me grow along the way. I'm so looking forward to riding, managing and growing more every year!”

When asked for her favorite endurance related memory she recalls it was “riding at Top of the World with my father, mother, and son. It was such a neat experience to have three generations of us out there together. We bickered and argued the whole darn day and I loved every minute of it.”

In addition to being a ride manager Jessica is also giving back to PNER by taking on the position of Awards Coordinator about which she stated, “I enjoy this role as I get to make sure everyone is celebrated for the achievements they've earned. I admire those who have done so much and it gives me goals to shoot for!”

When asked about her thoughts regarding PNER, Jessica said , “PNER is a group of people fiercely protective of their horses and their sport. PNER is a family and the last year has really shown how, when faced with great adversity, we can all come together for the greater good. In a time when very little was going on in the world, many of us still saddled up, supported each other, made it to rides and felt just a sliver of normalcy. That is a huge gift in this difficult world.”

I think you will agree that Jessica's energetic spirit flows into all she does.

“When we are enthusiastic we are intoxicated with passion rooted in our true selves and it flows into all we do.” - Linda Saccoccio