October 2022 Bobbi Walker (by Elayne Barclay)

The 2022 endurance season is winding to a close in the Pacific Northwest. Hopefully you have achieved some of the goals you set out to accomplish, overcome some unexpected challenge, or gained some knowledge/experience that will help you succeed in the future. Someone that is no stranger to achieving her goals, overcoming challenges, and seeking knowledge and experience to foster future success is PNER member Bobbi Walker.

Bobbi was born and raised in Montana, but she wasn't born with the name “Bobbi”, that name was inadvertently bestowed upon her by her older (by 18 months) sister who when trying to say the word “baby” came out with “bobbi” instead and the nickname stuck. Regarding her nickname, Bobbi stated, “To this day, the only people that call me Janet [her actual name] are people that don’t know me and my mother, when she was mad at me.” When she was five years old Bobbi came up with a new and improved last name for herself which sadly didn't stick, “I asked my mom if I could change my last name to “Horse”. She wisely said, 'sure!'. I never asked again, but in my mind, my last name was Horse for quite a few years.” Her newly requested last name might have been inspired by receiving her first horse on her 5th birthday, she recalled, “His name was Tony and he was a buckskin Clydesdale [can you imagine a 5 year old riding a Clydesdale!]. That horse and I spent hours riding and swimming, yes Tony loved to swim, in the summers.”

After graduating from high school, Bobbi's life changed dramatically, she stated, “I left the big sky country and horses to go to college and I ended up getting my Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from UC Irvine in California. I worked for Hughes Aircraft company in Fullerton California. I was one of the engineers Hughes selected to work on the Canadian Air Traffic Control System (CAATS), and they transferred me to Vancouver, British Columbia. This is where I met my wonderful husband Mark.

In the early 1990's Bobbi took early retirement from Hughes to be able to return to Montana to care for her mother, who was battling aggressive cancer. She passed in 1995. During this time Bobbi reconnected with horses, she elaborated, “We bought two weanlings, an Arabian and a half Arabian. I started out in CTR and transitioned into endurance. Even while in Montana, most of the rides I attended were in the AERC NW Region, with my two favorite rides being Klickitat Trek and Mt Adams.”

Several years after her mother's death, Bobbi had to deal with another life-changing issue, she explained, “Overnight, in the late 1990s, I awoke with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA). I went from being able to beat Mark in an arm wrestle to not being able to pull the covers over myself at night. I went from strong and confident to weak and hesitant. It took forever to diagnose my illness and arrive at medication that worked for me. Finally, my condition was diagnosed and medication was found that worked pretty well for me.

We all want to be known for our abilities, not our inabilities. It is at this stage in my life (when RA attacked my system and I was struggling to accept the 'new me') when horses and endurance became my personal statement to myself that I was still strong and could accomplish things that required endurance and strength.”

In December 2012, Bobbi decided to put her strength and endurance to the test, she was going to do the Tevis in 2013! She made plans to take her horse, Willie, and their camper down to Southern California, where she lived and conditioned for about 3 months. In addition, Bobbi said, “I then attended the Tevis Educational Ride, where I developed lifetime friends and mentors, and the concept of the 'cooperative competitive environment' started banging around in my head. A month later, I successfully completed the Tevis on my first try. It was my first successful 100 mile ride. I came in 50th, taking 21 hours, 6 minutes, and 1 second. I could not have done it without the many mentors I met along the way, including Pat Chappell (who I started the Tevis with) and Nicole (Chappell) Wertz, my mentor at the Tevis Ed Ride. The Tevis completion was so much more than that to me. To this day, if I am hurting or discouraged, I straighten myself up and say, “You are a Tevis competitor, you can do this!”

Bobbi and Mark moved to northwest Washington in 2015, which is when she got involved in PNER. Bobbi is effusive in her enthusiasm for what PNER means to her, “PNER members are knowledgeable, supportive and caring, with an incredible volunteer spirit! Everyone holding a PNER office or position is a volunteer, from the President to the Newsletter, Handbook [which Bobbi took over being editor of in 2022], and convention planning (used tack, raffle, speakers, vendors, etc.). When you attend a PNER ride, most have a lot of people helping. They are all volunteers and rides could not happen without these great volunteers. The volunteer spirit in the PNER is incredible.”

Speaking of PNER rides, Bobbi has been the ride manager for the unique Midnight Rider endurance ride and its associated Night Riding Clinics since 2017. Recall Bobbi's “cooperative competitive environment” concept? She explains how it gave birth to the Midnight Rider endurance ride, “I shared my Tevis journey with my friend and PNER member Eileen Reilich. Eileen was a teacher of teachers, and had a deep understanding of meta learning. I shared my Tevis Ed Ride experience and how everyone there felt like a team, all reaching for the same goal: a Tevis completion. I explained to Eileen how so many of the Tevis Ed riders completed and how we felt stronger and more connected for having attended the Ed Ride together. I also told Eileen that it would be a dream come true to do something similar for night riding, because night riding was the one unknown that wasn’t addressed at the Tevis Ed Ride the year I went. Eileen said, if you would like to do this, I will help you'! This is how the Midnight Rider and the Night Riding Clinic came to be. Eileen explained that the feeling I was trying to recreate for the riders could be described as a 'cooperative competitive environment'. This is a bonding competitive environment where a positive outcome for all members of the group enhances the experience for the individual. Even though everyone is competing, they are also helping others to complete.

The support of the PNER organization and PNER riders for the Midnight Rider endurance ride has allowed me to share my dream. The PNER is open to ideas like the Midnight Rider, and that is one of the things that makes it a great, dynamic organization.”