September 2021 Andrea Hurn (by Elayne Barclay)

Sometimes it feels like you just can't keep moving forward, even when doing the things you once loved doing. Add in the pandemic and the loss of a loved one and it could crush a lot of us, but some, with the help of others, are able to carry on and even flourish. Andrea Hurn is one of those individuals.

Andrea started riding horses at the age of 5 and grew up riding cutting horses, which she describes as “a 2.5 minute adrenaline rush”. She started distance riding more than 19 years ago and faced the challenge of riding an American Quarter Horse in a sport dominated by Arabians. Shadow is 23 years old and is still competing so she must be doing something right. Andrea said, “ I've learned that if managed correctly any horse can do our sport. My first top 10 happened with Shadow on the LD at Renegade [a notoriously difficult ride]. He was strong all day and out-pulsed a couple of Arabs for the 10th place finish. He is a metabolic wonder!” Andrea is currently riding another non traditional endurance breed, Jazz, a Tennessee Walker. Unlike Shadow, she has found that Jazz requires electrolyte dosing well before an endurance event.

If you have been at a ride with Andrea, you might have noticed that her riding helmet has American Sign Language symbols on it. Andrea admits, “many people have asked me why, well two reasons: #1, I am an ASL Interpreter and #2, I'm hard of hearing myself. My close friends will tell you that if I'm nodding and smiling, I have no idea what you said!” Andrea's husband, Pat, was instrumental in her change of career choice from music teacher to being an interpreter for the Deaf. Pat was also an amazing support for Andrea at endurance rides. Andrea recalls, “he crewed, he cooked, and he helped take care of the horses and dogs that we had in camp.” Pat was even taking riding lessons to become a better rider with the goal of riding an LD with Andrea at the Mary and Anna ride, but tragically he passed away in February 2020. In addition, Andrea had to deal with the advent of the pandemic, further isolating her and preventing her from sharing her grief with others. Andrea was grateful for her PNER family. “When I lost Pat I found so many people who genuinely cared about my well being. Some were unexpected...some I already knew were amazing. PNER helped me to carry forward when I didn't think it would be possible. I was encouraged to ride not only for myself but for Pat, because he would want that...he would want me to carry on.”

A couple of the PNER family members Andrea already knew were amazing were Jala Neufeld and Nicole Miller. They have been friends for about 10 years now, but weirdly Nicole and Andrea were both involved in FFA during High School at the district level and should have met one another back then, but it took Jala saying, "I have this friend and you should come ride with us" before they all three started riding together. Andrea emphatically states that, “the rest is history and I wouldn't change it for the world!”

One of Andrea's fondest endurance memories involves these two friends, “I have attended many rides this season. I'm always gung-ho about going, then about a week before I'm ready to leave...my grief takes over as Pat was always at the rides with me. I went to Grizzly with Jala...next up was Don't Fence Me In. I was going alone, but Jala agreed to be at the out vet check by the time I got there (she couldn't get away earlier). When I got to the vet check both Jala Neufeld and Nicole Miller were there, I was so surprised and overwhelmed at the same time! Each ride this season has brought on an emotional roller coaster and these two help talk me down from my ledge and keep me going forward.”

If the story of her relationship with Jala and Nicole wasn't inspiring enough, amazingly, out of the grief over loosing Pat, Andrea found the will to start losing weight. In the last 1.5 years she has lost 100 lbs! She states, “I have another 40-50 lbs to go and I'll get there. I feel so much better...and I'm riding a lot more because I don't hurt so bad.”

Andrea has also given back to PNER over the last 19 years. She has been the newsletter editor and she managed the Capital Climb ride and now helps with the Creek to Capital Peak ride and the new ride coming up this fall, the Fort Lewis Challenge.

Rest assured, your PNER endurance family is there for you if you need them.