March 2023 Darla Westlake (by Bianca Chevalier)

Spotlight on **Darla Westlake** • (PNER member #954)

**Family, Fun & Fame!**

Darla’s long successful endurance career has been an exhilarating journey based on the foundation of family participation, some truly GREAT horses and the ultimate achievement of Fame with one exceptional equine athlete.

Darla answered some questions for us about her life with horses, family and endurance. She shared several photos for this interview which truly bring her story to life. Her husband Terry Westlake, and their three children; Nathan, Alex Ann and Sierra have all been endurance riders. Endurance riding for the Westlakes was always a family affair. The family has owned several wonderful horses, but the true star of Darla’s life was her gelding RT Muffin (Muffy) who carried her to remarkable career highlights and went on to also be a trusty mount for all their kids.

**Darla:** “I was born in Eugene Oregon. Third generation Oregonian. (My mother's family has held a family reunion, in the same park for over 100 years.)”

“ I loved horses as long as I can remember. My older sister was the first to own a horse. She traded her western saddle for a pony for my twin sister and me when we were seven years old. We named the pony Amos. When we were 11 years old our older sister gave us her quarter horse Arab cross and her best friend gave us her palomino national show horse.”

“ I rode in 4-H and got lessons from the trainer down the road. Raised and trained my own horse in 4-h. Next I rode in equestrian team, jumping and drill team at Oregon State University.”

“Terry and I met because his brother's wife was my older sister's best friend. Terry's brother Dave, and sister-in-law Arthel started riding endurance in the 70's."

"I went to help out at some endurance rides with Terry, Dave and Arthel. That was in the mid to late 1970's. They lived in LaPine Oregon and put on some endurance rides into the 1980's including the Chief Paulina endurance ride, which is now the Lava Cast ride. I actually found Arthel's best endurance horse, because my friend was selling her Arab gelding Jasam. She rode him 4,000 + miles, and won one of the few 150 mile rides ever offered. Karen Bumgardner was also a finisher!”

“When Terry and I started endurancee riding we had the Hollander family (Lew, Hannah, Ellen and Lewis) as a roll model. The Hollander's rode and kept multiple horses conditioned, while making it look simple. It was just our life to do the same! Terry and I worked full-time and conditioned three or four horses”.

“My first endurance ride was in 1981. Then I bought Muffy
(RT Muffin) as a 3 1/2 year old, to be my Arabian English pleasure show horse! They told me that he had a month under saddle and that he had been ridden in a Western saddle; and to be sure you lunge him first! I only owned an English saddle. I lunged him the first day and then said ‘he doesn't need this’, and off we went!! He was so brave and forward I loved every minute! “

“As a 4-year-old, we thought why not take Muffy on some 25 miles, he did five, that year. He knew it was a race and wanted to finish first, our commitment, to him, was to not let him win a 25 miler. I remember I was riding at Prineville, I had my English saddle and a snaffle bit. At the last vet check I was supposed to check my girth and tighten it, I forgot. He saw the horses in front of him and wanted to catch them, he went cantering fast down a steep hill; the saddle was loose and it went up on his withers, I had my heels behind his elbows, we got to the bottom of the hill and I went no, no, you are going to trot into the finish, I got off tightened the girth, he got fifth place (that was the last time I rode him in a snaffle bit!)"

“I also rode Muffy, english and jumping and lessons in the winter and the off season . I wanted to be the best rider I could be, for him. He was meant to be an endurance horse, it's what he loved to do, there was no question. Our goal for Muffy was to keep him in the best shape possible, so that he could do what he did best! WIN. His attitude was, where do we go, when do we start, and how fast.”

“I rode rides a couple months after each of the kids were born. Nursed each for six months, one year and two years. Terry pit crewed, friend's sometimes helped. Sierra was pit crewing with Terry from the time she was a toddler. Heidi Smith DVM, told me after I finished a ride one time, that Sierra was saying “Muffy Muffy”, not “mommy mommy” when I took off out of a vet check. I love, that she has my love of horses.”

“Here are some highlights of Muffy’s career: Muffy was PNER Champion in 1983 as a five year old.Then he was PNER Champion 1985 & 1988. Third place at the Race of Champions in Colorado.
(I nursed three month old, Alex Ann, at the vet checks.)”

“1990 PNER veteran horse. In 1991 he completed Tevis top ten, 1991 won North American championship. AERC BC award in 1988. RT Muffin was inducted into the AERC Endurance Horse Hall of Fame in 1991. Muffy was endurance ridden until 2000, his last ride by Nathan Westlake”

“Muffy then retired at home, continued uspc pony club, did show jump rally with Sierra, when she was 6 years old! Many kids rode rallies, and passed ratings on Muffy."

A kid was riding him in a lesson, the lesson was over she was cantering around, stopped came over to me and said how much can I canter him? I said as much as you want. He didn't sweat, he was still in great shape, he just did whatever they wanted.”

“After Muffy, I rode our wonderful gelding MC Rams Z starting in 1995. He was Terry’s horse first. Rams Z was the AERC BC horse in 1996. In 1997 we were 2nd individual and and silver team medal in the Pan American championship in Manitoba Canada. In 1998 we finished 19th at the World Championship in Dubai, 3rd team finisher for the silver medal. In 2000 we were selected for the world championship in France. Unfortunately Ram Z slipped on a root, during a training ride before the race, fell flat on his side, his hoof kicked my helmet when he stood up, I snapped my collarbone and had a concussion, was not able to ride the ride. Rams Z’s record is 6285 AERC miles (105 starts with 103 completions) ”

“A favorite ride memory: Sunriver ride, the 50, I was on RamsZ, Nathan 12 years old on Muffy, Alex Ann 8 years old on Karmie. We were at the last water trough, not far from the finish, Alex Ann was getting tired and a little whiny, I was getting all the horses water on the necks, making sure they drank, and I saw another horse coming and said in a loud voice somebody's catching us, we're out of here. Muffy heard my voice and took off with Nathan, Alex Ann and I went after them! Alex Ann said do we have to go this fast? I said we aren't going fast we're just keeping up with Muffy. We were going very fast!! We had to finish within a minute of Nathan because he was a junior, I could see him through the trees, mostly... we finished the race it was an exciting one! The Sunriver times interviewed Nathan, the winner on the 50 mile ride.”

“I’ve been a PNER member snce 1981. I love PNER. For me it stands for family. My kids grew up with endurance riding and their PNER family. Ride managers always think of the junior riders. The adults encourage them, riders volunteer to sponsor them. Nathan would tell his sponsors all about Spiderman, Alex Ann would watch out for herself and her sponsor, Sierra would sponsor their Mom, Pat Super, was Sierra's favorite. I could go on forever”

“Presently, I'm very involved with horses. We (Sierra, myself and four grandkids) have six horses, two retired endurance horses. They are MJ Figaro 23 years, my retired endurance horse, BRR Carmen Storm 22 years who is Sierra's retired endurance horse, CS Timbrel 26 who was Alex Ann and Sierra's endurance, high school equestrian, eventing, dressage and cow horse.

The current endurance wanna be's are Ali, my Arab rescue gelding, who has done a few LD's and a few 50's and Tuffy, Sierra's young mare, related to Muffy, a great prospect. Last but not least is Broccoli, our 14 year old pony that jumps, drives, trail obstacle, the bravest equine on the property."

“What advice would I offer to someone who is new to the endurance world?

Find the horse that wants to be an endurance horse, train them honestly, consistently, religiously, listen, watch, ask questions, trust yourself when evaluating your horse, you know your horse better than any veterinarian, trainer...”

Darla Westlake • AERC #964 • 13,435 AERC miles

RT Muffin more than 9865 AERC miles (144 starts - 142 completions) \*
108 first place finishes, 75 BC’s

*\* Note: the AERC online data base before 1985 is incomplete,*

*(we kept handwritten records of all Muffy’s endurance rides
before computers)*