

From the President's Paddock:

A funny thing happened at convention this year...well, running for office wasn't exactly in my plans for the weekend, but here I am! I guess I can attribute my willingness to succumb to the power of "suggestion" to a few things, not the least of which was that I didn't really have an answer to everyone's question: "So what are you and Peek-A-Boo going to do this year?" Since Peek's going to be 19, and he's been accommodating my every whim with courage and stamina for the last 12 years, I think it's time I let HIM decide. So, without a clear focus on my ride schedule, or what exactly I'll be training for, I thought it might be a good time to give something back to this organization that opened up a whole new world to me and has given me so many wonderful friends. So, although I'm feeling a little like I've been catapulted off the end of a ship into open water, I guess it's time to Sink or Swim!! Good thing I've got my mask & snorkel, and my wonderful friend, Sandy by my side. If the sharks come I'll have a 50/50 chance.

It's been a whirlwind week of presidency. Lets see, in the first seven days we've appointed and herded up all the new recruits and leaned on the old for valuable info, started planning next year's convention, established a new format and schedule for the newsletter, and we've already started setting up new systems for making these transitions much easier in the future. Phew! None of it would have been possible without the tremendous support we've had from the Board of Directors (both old and new). I'm SO impressed with how people have jumped in to help out getting us up to speed. Karla Watson, our new Editor for the newsletter (see her intro elsewhere in this issue) has been just fabulous in taking on a really tough job, and scrambling to design, format and send to print this first newsletter in less than 10 days! We gave her a tough deadline schedule and she's really come through. If we ever let her go to a ride this year, make sure to track her down and thank her.

We have lots of goals and ideas for this year, and with the kind of support I've seen so far, I know we can make it happen. First, we're committed to getting you a monthly newsletter, on time, and full of the information you want. It will be mailed to every member. In addition, we'll be posting the prior month's newsletter on the PNER website. Second, we'll be reviewing the Bylaws to make sure they still serve the needs of the organization. If a change seems warranted, the general membership would be the ones to decide. You might want to sit down with your handbook and take a read. I've been doing a lot of that lately. Amazing how important those Bylaws have suddenly become. Third, we recognize how valuable new members are to this organization. We want to make sure they feel welcome and get the help and guidance they need to have the best experience from their very first ride. We have some ideas, but we want yours also. Along those lines, we want to know what you, the current members, want from PNER. We're devising ways to get your voice heard, and we want your opinion. Be on the lookout for a member survey, in this newsletter, in the coming months. We'll also be starting a feedback forum of sorts, at rides this year. Something fun. We want to know what's important to you, and why you got yourself into this crazy sport. Why do you keep doing it?

For me, it's a lot of things. I've been hooked on this sport since 1992, after buying a 7 year old Arab stallion from a PNER member named Chheng Biv, practically on a whim. I guess you could say I was Cheng-Hai'd. It was a deal I couldn't refuse, but there was a catch. I had to try endurance riding. A 50 miler. And there was one coming up in 6 weeks! It was the Wacky Woolly ride, which by the way, happened to be managed by none other than our Vice President, Sandy Cheek. We didn't know at the time that our lives would become so connected. I had a horse, a \$75 English saddle, an army blanket & safety pins, rubber english riding boots, a tent and that's about it. No truck, no trailer, no cool gadgets or special tack. I had a blast. Since then, Peek-A-Boo and I have ridden 50's, 75's and 100's, mostly settling on 50's because the conditioning is easier to manage with a busy work schedule. Plus, it's so nice to get back in time to socialize and have enough energy left for it. But I really enjoy every distance for it's own reasons. There's nothing quite like the feeling of finishing your first 100, especially if you managed to get lost in the pitch dark, attacked by the "cow monster" and wondered if you'd ever come out of the woods. Some of the other highlights have been a "dream come true" day at Tevis in 2000, and being part of the 2003 Pacific North Pan Am Team at Mt. Adams. But what really keeps me loving this sport is having a great horse that's been my companion for 12 years on the trail and at home; and such a wonderful community of people. Whether or not my day goes as planned, there's always a story to tell around the campfire and good friends to share it with. So, I'm looking forward to doing what I can to help make this organization even better than it already is. And maybe, if I do my job, there'll still be someone at my campfire at the end of the year...SANDY?????Julie Barnfather