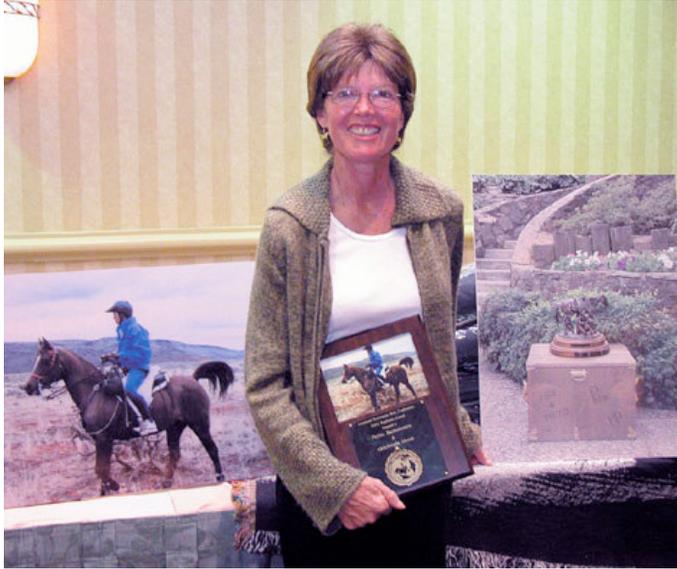


AERC Pard'ners Award 2002

PHYLLIS BARTHOLOMEW AND AHLSCHEWEDE MERAB

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For endurance riders, life is about their horses and about persevering to reach each finish line with a happy and healthy horse. The relationship between horse and rider becomes a true partnership of mutual trust and respect.

Because of their strong bond, and because of the respect other riders have for them, Phyllis Bartholomew and her Arabian mare Mera (registered as Ahlschwede Merab) were

given the high honor of being selected for the Pard'ners Award for the year 2002.

Fifty-one-year-old Phyllis, who resides in Arizona with her husband Otis, started endurance riding in 1983, because, she said, "I loved to ride and wanted to do more than just trail ride."

Since then, she has accumulated over 14,000 career miles, with 8,375 of those miles on Mera. "Mera is a very nice mare to be around," says Phyllis. "She is bold and very trusting, and she will do anything I ask of her. Other than her desire to go faster at the start than I want, she is a real pleasure to ride on the trail."

According to friends Dana Landale and Mari Ural, Phyllis is also a real pleasure to ride with.

"I first met Phyllis in the late 1980s," said Dana, who lives in Utah and met Phyllis at a multiday ride. "She is not a shy person, once you get to know her. She has a great sense of humor; we've shared many laughs.

"I have ridden quite a few miles with her on the Outlaw Trail, XP rides, the Big Horn 100, and others," continued Dana. "She has a special connection with her horse Mera. She enjoys riding other horses, but Mera is her true partner."

Mari Ural said, "I've known Phyllis since 1984. We've ridden thousands of miles together. I consider her one of my very best friends. She's a wonderful person and wonderful horsewoman. She is all about everybody else. For her, it is about the horses,

and it is about her friends. She is honest and straightforward. There's always a lot of laughter on the trail with her. That is why it is so much fun riding with her. ”

Mari recalled Phyllis's concern for her horse during a multiday ride: “Mera wasn't quite right one of the days. Phyllis couldn't pinpoint the problem, so we got off and walked, leading the horses, the last 25 miles. There were a couple times that we remounted on the flat areas to check on how Mera was going. Phyllis couldn't figure it out, and so she ended up hauling the mare to a specialist in California. She never did find out what the problem was, but Mera got over it and was fine.

“When I first met Phyllis, she was riding a big Appaloosa mare, ” recalled Mari. “When she retired the Appaloosa, she found a nice home for the mare as a pleasure horse. Then she found Mera. It was the horse she always dreamed of— and Phyllis made Mera a great horse.

“Mera is fabulous,” continued Mari. “She is all business. She does her job and does it well.”

“Mera is exceptional,” agreed Phyllis. “She has done everything that has been asked of her and never missed a beat.”

Was she the dream horse from day one? “Oh, no,” replied Phyllis. “I was very scared of her at first. You never know what you've got when you start a new horse. My husband Otis was more optimistic than I was. But she just fit in, and she liked to do multiday rides, and that is what I really like to do.”

Along with Otis and three horses, Phyllis headed off to the 2001 XP, a 2,000-mile ride from St. Joseph, Missouri to Carson City, Nevada.

“Ever since I can remember, I wondered what it would feel like to ride continuously, day after day. I'd done a lot of five-day rides, but to ride day after day after day seemed like a great adventure.

“It felt great!” she exclaimed when asked what it was like. “Riding is something I like to do, and being able to do it continuously, seeing the country like the pioneers, was fabulous. ”

Phyllis completed 1,950 of the 2,000 miles, with 1,050 of those miles on Mera. The only reason she didn't complete one day was because Gunny, one of her horses, didn't feel well. Concerned that she had not electrolyted properly, she and Otis hauled the horse to the Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital to be thoroughly examined. Turned out that Gunny had a high fever.

“We left her there for the weekend to be treated. She went on to do 600 XP miles after that,” Phyllis explained.

Before the 2001 XP ride, Phyllis told her friend Mari Ural, “If this is the last thing that I get to do, it will be enough. It will be the ultimate endurance ride.”

Mari said recently, “It was eerie, looking back and remembering this.”

Because in December 2001, Phyllis was diagnosed with bone cancer.

“I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma,” Phyllis acknowledged. “It started to progress quite rapidly and did not respond to the initial chemotherapy. I’m now receiving another type of chemo plus some other medication which seems to be working. ”

The IGA cancer marker is normally 400 to 600. “The last time I was checked, it was 970. The highest it got was 10,000. So the treatment is working,” says Phyllis.

“I’m riding a couple of times a week now. I still don’t have my strength, but I am riding more and more. I’ve been riding by myself, but I had a friend come this weekend and ride with me. I don’t do any hard riding. I just go out to have fun, ” she said.

“Endurance has given me the strength to fight back against the cancer, she declared. “I’ve been so weak and down. I’ve had to pull myself up and say ‘Okay, I have to work at this just like I do getting through an endurance ride’.”

Phyllis and Mera have shared 8,375 miles to date. Phyllis has ridden the five-day 265-mile Outlaw Trail Ride 11 times, six times on Mera, who was best condition overall two times. She’s also ridden the New Mexico Renegade Ride, the original XP Trail, and Mt. Carmel, Shellbourne, and Grand Canyon XP rides.

“I like the multiday rides as they are a true test of endurance and horsemanship,” she said. “And because they are more relaxed, you have a chance to get to know the other riders and their horses. Since most multiday rides now have one base camp to ride out of every day, it is like taking a vacation where you can just ride and ride some more. ”

When asked, “Why endurance?” she replied, “It is a sport that you can set your own goals. You don’t have to win the ride to be a winner. There are so many possibilities, like mileage, keeping your horse sound, etc. What a great way to see country that one would not see otherwise!”

Attitude has so much to do with how well one does on the endurance trail. No doubt, Phyllis’s attitude will make the road to recovery easier. And, with a little help from her pard’ner Mera, the pair will be back on the endurance trail before long.