



"Shix iwachá wáshat k'úsinan ánach'axi!"

'It was good to ride a horse again.'

by Evie Bredeson, Development Director

Every day at EquiFriends "really cool stuff" happens, be it a rider's accomplishment, a project completed, an in-kind or funding donation or a special visitor! Well, a few weeks ago, we had a very unique visitor, who came to ride a horse and who became an inspiration to us all!

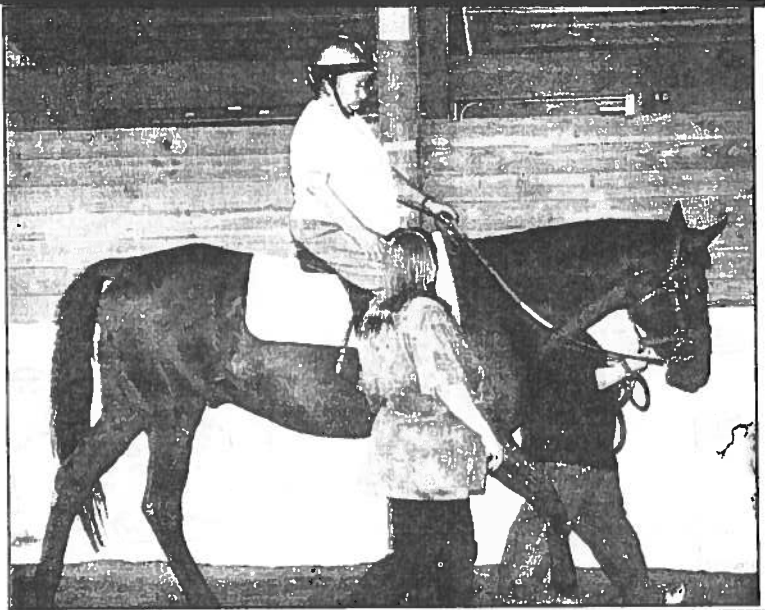
Her name is Virginia Beavert, born in 1921, a Native American of the Yakima Indian Tribe. Virginia is a nationally known resident of Toppenish, WA, where she, at age 83, is a Scholar in Residence at Heritage University. She specializes in teaching the Sahaptin language (Yakima dialect). Virginia explained, "Many of our students take my class to fulfill their language requirement for college and it qualifies, because it is both a written and a spoken language." She added, however, that only a few people speak it now and thus, it has become her passion to preserve the language and the culture it represents.

For years, she has been involved in tribal government and in promoting the preservation of native languages. In 2000, she received her Masters degree in education at the U of AZ. But her life experiences go far beyond teaching. As a very young girl in the Toppenish/Yakima area, she attended 'a mission school' and she grew up riding horses. In those days, most of the transportation was by wagon or saddle horse. Virginia recalls her Native American family's expeditions from Zillah to the berry-picking fields west of Mt. Adams, where they would start out on wagons and then have to go the rest of the way by saddle-horse when it got too rough for the wagons. Her involvement with horses broadened into an early racing career when her mother and step-father owned and trained TB race horses. She was in her teens and twenties, when she exercised, groomed and became their jockey. She raced in 'Bush Races' (small races at fairs, etc.) and she believes she may have been the very first certified woman jockey in Canada and in WA State. She raced and trained at Long Acres until she joined the service during WWII.

So, how did Virginia find her way to EquiFriends?

Virginia was in the Seattle area to receive an honor for her linguistic contributions at the 6th annual meeting of the Indigenous Language Institute, held at the U of W this year. She was staying with friends, Sharon Hargus, a linguist, and Sharon's husband, Dave Nelson, who knew of Virginia's love for horses.

Dave shared, "One of the things we like to do with Virginia is travel around to the different areas that she knew as a child. And always, if we passed a pasture of horses, Virginia would comment and reflect about her days when she rode horses. Then she would always add... 'I will probably never ride again' ". It had been years since she had ridden, so Dave decided to call EquiFriends to



Virginia Beavert, 83, rides therapy horse, Spencer.

arrange a 'surprise ride' for Virginia. He knew that at Virginia's age, she would need a very controlled experience.

On this 'one time ride', a rare occasion at EF, Head Instructor, Michelle, chose Spencer, a well-trained TB to be Virginia's mount. He used to be a racehorse under the name of 'Hog' and after his racing days, Spencer became a 4th level dressage horse before he came to EquiFriends.

He was perfect for her and flanked by three instructors. Virginia donned her helmet, mounted and picked up the reins. Watching her posture and poise on the horse while she strode around the arena, it was quite evident that she had done this before. She said the memories really started to flow back to her riding days. After the ride, she grinned, "I'll bet it would take about 5 rides and I'd be jogging again." The EF staff all appreciated her great spirit and inspiring enthusiasm.



Yes, she was a bit sore and she admitted, "I need this therapy!" And in Sahaptin she exclaimed. "Shix iwachá!" "It was good!" Anach'axiish wáshat'ata k'úsinan" "I want to ride a horse again!"

At 83, Virginia is now looking into a therapeutic riding program in the Yakima area.

Shix iwachá!

"It was good!"



"A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle"

- unknown