

Cheyenne Moon—My Rock

I began my adventures into the horse world late in life—57. I always wanted a horse when I was a kid, used to pretend that I was a horse...that my bike was a horse. My family didn't have the money. I grew up in San Lorenzo, which was not horse country.

At the age of 57, I decided that it was time to do something with horses. My husband drove me down Crow Canyon in Castro Valley, and I began taking some lessons. Within 6 months I decided that I wanted to ride every day—not just in lessons.

My trainer at the time was an Arabian fan and told me that she had a wonderful recommendation for me—a Varian Arabian, whose father was Desperado. I nodded but frankly I was so new to the horse world, that I didn't know Varian from Shmarian and I thought Desperado was a Linda Ronstadt song. I felt stupid, so I kept my mouth shut.

Later I went out to try Cheyenne Moon. He was gorgeous and had 6 years of show training. He had been ridden only by professionals so because I didn't ride like a professional, he was puzzled by my cues.

I bought him when he was 8 coming on 9. I was then 59 and knew very little. He had rested his head on my shoulder and blown into my neck and ear. Debbie Compilli, his trainer at that time, said that he was “choosing me” that he was respectful to everyone—extremely well trained and kind—but that he was not an “in your pocket” horse. Thus our journey began.



In May, Cheyenne will turn 24 and I am now 74. He has been my rock through so many challenges—my fight with



cancer and my husband's death. I have now had Cheyenne 15 years. He went from being a winning show horse to being both my baby and my strength.

I probably ride him 4 or 5 times a week but go to the barn every day and do something with him. As I approach his stall, I sing out to him, "It's time for P.E.!!!" He is a joy to ride; we have become very bonded and close. I have had at least two trainers tell me that Cheyenne rides better for me than for them. He is respectful and behaves and responds correctly for anyone who knows what they are doing and sends him the correct signals, but the trainers have said (and I agree) that he wants to "please me" and goes the extra mile to figure out exactly what I want him to do—just to get a "good boy" from his mama.

In 2012 I was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer and given 6 months to live. In August of that year—at the 6-month mark, when I was supposed to die—I took Chey to an all-breed show at Woodside and won a buckle instead. I always have made a point to show in all-breed shows instead of Arabian shows to show the rest of the horse world how magnificent the Arabian is.

When I was first diagnosed and told how sick the chemo would make me, I was prepared to lie on the couch, receive visits from friends, cards, flowers, etc. I think I did that for 15 minutes and then told my husband that this was not who I am, and that I wanted to go to the barn and see my horse. I've done that every day since my diagnosis and usually leave the chemo room and go directly to the barn .

Chey is calm and less reactive than most of the other horses...pays attention to what I'm asking him to do. It was at that Woodside show when a woman standing by the rail asked me if Cheyenne was a Varian Arabian. I was surprised. I could understand her asking if he was an Arabian...but a Varian Arabian? Really? At an all-breed show when most of the horses were quarter horses? I recently looked at some of Sheila's Youtubes and was stunned at how the horse she was riding, Jubilation, did indeed look just like my boy.



I later took my Woodside buckle to Kaiser to show my oncologist, Dr. Shek, who was both pleased and incredulous.

Cheyenne has been my rock—always there for me whether I want to play and ride or whether I want to just put my hand under his mane and stroke him. Six years

later, I am still alive--still in treatment...but still embracing my world and passionate about life. I carefully read Sheila's blogs about her cancer journey, and I so identified with her and what she was going through.

Varian has given me a precious gift You are a part of my family. From the bottom of my heart I thank you.

