

Ken Pethick, a TREC rider for more than 12 years, had the ride of his life in Cave Creek, Arizona in February, 2006. Once my husband and I confirmed our travel plans, my main goal was to take Ken horseback riding. I thought he'd love it. Horses have been a big deal in Ken's life since he was a young boy helping to feed our neighbor's horses. So, it never even crossed my mind that it could be dangerous for him.



But once I saw him in the saddle of "Newt", the largest horse I've ever seen, my stomach began to churn and doubt crept into my mind. What was I thinking? At TREC, Kim Gardner and the side walkers were there for his protection. How could Ken ever get by on his own for 1-1/2 hours in desert terrain? Luckily, my concern didn't carry over to him; Ken was thrilled from the moment he saddled up.

Ken eased my fear as he looked perfectly in control of the situation. Cool, calm and collected, I tried to imitate him as I followed behind. Into the trip, we all even trotted and cantered a few times. Ken chatted nonstop and loved riding Newt. On a hillside path on our downhill descent, our ride suddenly changed. Spooked by a jogger from behind, our horses took off without warning. My horse ran up the path, while Ken's took off down a 45 degree slope, past cactus and desert brush. Ken was on his own and I knew it. A million thoughts raced through my mind. I couldn't see what was happening to Ken, but I could hear it all in slow motion. Ken's horse had raced past the guide, but he was able to stop Newt himself further down the hillside. When the guide called out to see how everyone was, Ken firmly responded, "good." I couldn't believe it since I was visibly shaken from my own sudden jolt! After that, I no longer worried about his ability to ride. It was easy to see that Ken was in control. He was amazing!

Riding horses with my brother in the desert was magical. This was without a doubt one of the happiest occasions of Ken's life. I know he'll never forget it. His enthusiasm was contagious, and it was a thrill to share in his enjoyment. Thanks to TREC, for that hour and a half that he rode Newt, Ken's mental disabilities didn't hold him back in life. He was just like everyone else!

Laurie Brugger  
Ken's sister