

## JANET WHITMER The Perpetual Motion Being



*For those of you who think the simple life is boring, spend a day with Janet Whitmer. Or more correctly, spend a day in her dust – the woman is on the go from sun up to sundown. This 68-year-old grandmother of motion is busier than a one-legged man in a butt-kicking contest. And if its riding, roping, barrel racing, running, shooting hoops, milking cows or shoveling, you know what, she'll kick your butt at that too.*

*She lives in a home/log cabin on 1 ½ acres of heaven over on Dale Rd. with her horse Ogey (Ogemaw), her dog Sadie and no one knows how many chickens. In 1996 Janet brought an original Amish log cabin from Ohio and rebuilt it along side her house with a connecting “dogtrot.”*

*The walk up the driveway is a trip back in time as each step brings back memories of yesteryear. The barn, the blacksmith shop, the tool shed, the washhouse are all reminders of a village long gone.*

*But don't be fooled by the surroundings. This woman is a modern day dynamo who has a place to relax after burning daylight in the fast paced world of today.*

*The oldest of nine children (seven girls & two boys) in Beaverton, Janet lived in town until age 14. "My dad worked quite a few different jobs," she said. "If there was a promotion or new job my parents celebrated and usually nine months later I had another brother or sister."*

*The majority of her time as a child was spent at her grandfather's farm getting dirty and riding the horses. She was so addicted to horseflesh when she finally got her own horse as a teenager she asked all her relatives (most of them farmers) to give her nothing but hay and oats for Christmas.*

*As an adult Janet worked as a Customer Service Rep (CSR) in the insurance business, first with the Schumacher Agency in Beaverton then at Ferris & Maxwell in Midland. A CSR is a nice title that basically means you do the paper work but don't sign your name at the bottom...or get the commissions.*

*At age 38 she tried her hand at being a jockey, which didn't last long. The first race in Harrison she lost a stirrup and had a runaway horse. The second race was in the rain at Standish. Upon returning to the barn totally covered in mud, a new adventure seemed appropriate. There would be no third race.*

*Her connections in the horse world eventually led to a job with T-Bill Stables owned by Walter and Carolyn Bay where she works "just about as many hours as I want to." Her friendship with Carolyn eventually led to getting back into the barrel racing circuit- Senior and Open classes – she's that good!*

*She's been the Race Secretary for harness racing at the Gladwin County Fair for over 25 years and on the Fair Board for 31 years; plays basketball for the Twin Oak Farms women's team in the Beaverton recreational league; runs 5ks, 10ks, ½ marathons and occasionally competes in the Old Kent (now 5/3<sup>rd</sup>) Bank 15 mile race.*

*Did I mention she was busy?*

**ROR: When did your fascination with horses begin?**

**Janet:** My grandfather would let me ride the draft horses while he cultivated the fields and I would ride up there all day. It just killed me the day he bought a tractor and decided to sell Joe & Goldie (Belgians). I made my dad write on a piece of paper 'Sis, I will get you a horse' – I've still got that paper. When I was 13 my dad finally gave in and

bought me a mare. I kept her in my neighbor's chicken coop until we moved out to the farm the next year.

**ROR: You've been involved with the Gladwin County Fair for a long time. How did that association begin?**

**Janet:** I used to ride my horse eight miles to the fairgrounds to horse shows. I was at the last fair when they closed in 1954 and was there when they started up again in 1976 and have been involved ever since.

**ROR: How old is your Amish log cabin and what exactly is a "dogtrot" anyway?**

**Janet:** We think the cabin was built between 1820 and 1850. No one really knows for sure. A dogtrot is a log cabin term for a breezeway – most are open spaces but I've enclosed mine. It was disassembled in Ohio and trucked up here. We had a "frolic" with my Amish friends and neighbors who helped rebuild it. Thank God someone noticed the logs were actually number stamped because our chalk numbers came off in the rain and we might never have gotten it put back together.

**ROR: You have a unique, close relationship with many of the Amish. How did that start?**

**Janet:** Enos Swartzentruber bought the Kerswell Farm in 1979 and needed insurance. He was the first Amish contact. Amos Gingerich and his family were the second to move up here and I got to know them very well. He was pretty impressed that I could milk a cow (laughing). I've been a delivery service/driver for many of the Swartzentruber Order – medical emergencies are about the only time they can ride in a motorized vehicle.

**ROR: You are also a barrel-racing grandmother. Tell me about that.**

**Janet:** I raced barrels at the fairs and in 4-H when I was a kid. Then when I started working for T-Bill Stables, they provided me with good horses to ride so I got back into the sport. I've qualified for the Nationals, which I'm kinda proud of for my age (laughing). But now my granddaughter and son-in-law are racing and it's become a family event.

**ROR: I've heard a little about your "sister trips." How did that get started?**

**Janet:** In 1992 my mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She wanted to take one last nice trip and have all of us girls go with her. So we packed up and headed for Gettysburg, PA. When she passed away

we decided to continue taking trips in her honor. We've since lost another sister but we've kept going somewhere almost every year – New York, Door County, back to Gettysburg. I'll admit most of the trips revolve around antique shopping. We rotate who picks the destination but keep it a secret and send each other clues.

**ROR: Speaking of antiques, your place is full of them, especially old tools. What are some of the unique ones you have?**

**Janet:** I've got so many I can't remember what they were used for. I usually have to ask one of my Amish friends to remind me. There's a lady over in the Thumb who's got a wooden sprayer she says her husband's grandfather used in the fields. I've never seen or even heard of such a thing. But one of these days I'm gonna go over there and look.

**ROR: This is your 50<sup>th</sup> High School Reunion year – Class of '57. How big was your class and do you see your classmates much?**

**Janet:** Yes, it's a great group – 52 graduates in our class. We don't wait for reunion years. Since our 40<sup>th</sup> reunion, we get together every 3 months, usually at someone's house. Most of them live within a day's travel distance and many still live right here in the area. At least 25, sometimes as many as 40 or 45 come to a gathering. We're lucky – we've only lost four classmates so far.

**ROR: And speaking of gatherings, I saw quite a few chickens running around your place on Michigan Log Cabin Day (June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007). Do you raise chickens to eat or for the eggs?**

**Janet:** You probably noticed they were pretty small chickens. I raise Banty miniature chickens. I don't sell them but I need to get rid of a few roosters if anyone's interested. There's not much meat on them but they are good eating if you cook enough and it would probably take a dozen eggs to make a decent omelet (laughing).

**ROR: I know you're a history buff – tell me about your involvement with the Daughters of the American Revolution.**

**Janet:** That took me two years of research. I knew we had relatives in the Revolutionary War but proving it was quite a task. My maiden name is Calhoun but originally it was Calquin from Scotland. We are descendants of Andrew Calhoun of Massachusetts who fought two different times in the war – on the American side – must have gone home to tend to the crops in between I guess.

**ROR: You also have a passion for holidays, especially Halloween...**

**Janet:** Well, I've been having Halloween parties at my house since my nieces and nephews were little and some of them are in their late 30's now. One year I was a voodoo witch doctor; I've been Mother Goose and also the headless horseman. Another year I had a casket made for me and I was Dracula. I set it in the driveway and when I spotted my brother-in-law coming I rose up real slow outta that casket – I've never seen a grown man run so fast (laughing).

**ROR: So what don't people know about Janet Whitmer?**

**Janet:** They probably don't realize I'm really a shy, quiet person (again laughing).

**ROR: They probably won't believe it. Thanks Janet.**

