

CHAPTER 15

A Horse Called "White Eye"

Drackie thought that all Westerners rode horseback, and she was determined to do just that. She scouted around in Dixon and found a man who would rent his two horses for riding. Taking Dorothy Barnes, one of the Presbyterian Mission School teachers, with her, our fearless nurse set out. Suddenly she realized that her feet were in the sand. The horse had laid down on his belly. Drackie had had some riding lessons, and she knew that you must let the horse know who is boss. She dismounted, made the horse get up, and remounted. After a few steps, the horse was down again, and this time he was wheezing and having great difficulty in breathing. Drackie was almost beside herself, thinking he was going to die and wondering how many months' salary it would take to pay for the dead horse. After much tugging and cajoling, she got him on his feet and led him home. When she recounted her experience, the owner laughed and said, "He's all right. He just doesn't like to be ridden." Drackie was still wide-eyed as she recounted the experience to me. She did no more riding until after we had moved into the new hospital.

We discovered that Bill Voight, who had a ranch on the Rio Grande not far from the new hospital, had several horses. He was glad to have them ridden and charged fifty cents per ride. That was for the trouble of saddling up. He

didn't care how long a ride we took. Drackie and I had a short ride one day. I did not have riding breeches, and the inner part of my knees got badly chafed. The next time we planned to ride, I took care of that by padding my knees with cotton and wrapping them in gauze cotton bandages. The hospital handyman, Mr. Bettis, fetched the horses for us and tethered them behind our new staff home. I looked out at them and announced that I did not want to ride the one with the white eye. He looked wild to me!

Drackie said, "Don't worry, I'll ride that one." So we set out, planning to ford the Rio Grande and ride on the west mesa.

Drackie's horse went right across the river. Mine put one foot in and backed out. I tried again and again, but I could not get that horse to cross the river.

Drackie said, "I'll come back and lead him."

He would not be led, so we changed horses which put me on the one with the white eye.

Drackie said, "Wait at the foot of the trail and we'll trade horses again."

White Eye crossed the river with no hesitation and immediately started up the trail to the top of the mesa. I could not get him to stop, nor could I hold him back once we reached the mesa. I guess he was running. The ride was smooth, fast, and exhilarating. The legs of my slacks slipped

up, my bandages came undone, and streamers of gauze were flying out behind me. Drackie was so convulsed with laughter that she could do no more than hang on to her saddle.

Eventually, the horse slowed down, and I was able to get him to stop. Drackie and I conferred and decided to ride north on the mesa. We thought we could find another place to ford the river. At a likely spot we dismounted, and I held the horses while she explored a trail. She called back that if I could get the horses past a certain point, we could get down to the river. I could not get either horse to take one step down that trail. She came back up and we remounted. I had barely gotten one toe in the stirrup when White Eye took off again at a mad gallop. The loose stirrup kept banging him, and he went faster and faster. I finally got my other foot in the stirrup, but I could not control the horse.

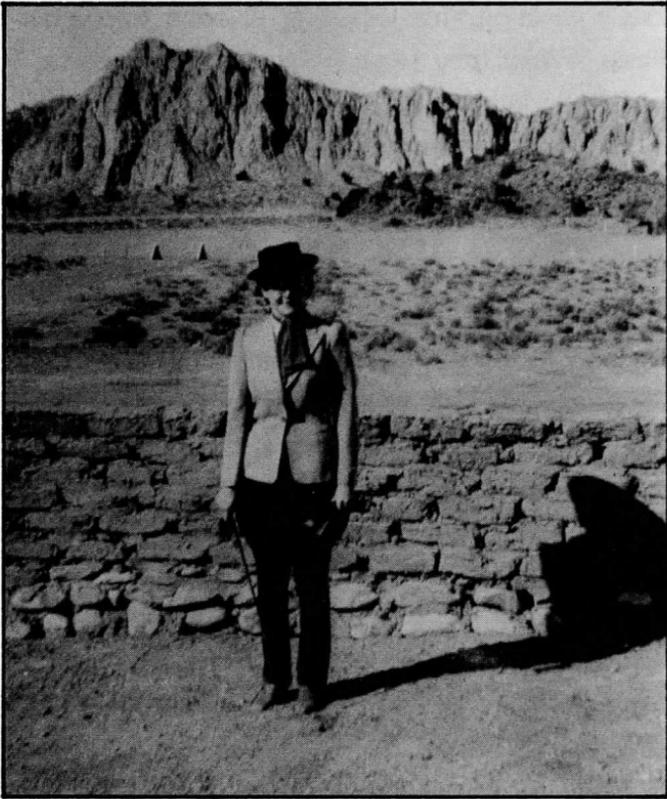
It was getting dark, and we didn't know how to find the trail we had ascended. We decided to let the horses have their heads. We really didn't have much choice. Before long, they found a trail down to the river and White Eye insisted on having a drink. He also stepped over one of the reins. I called to Drackie that I had lost a rein. She shouted back that she'd get it. We were still in the water when she put it in my hand. Once across, White Eye took off hell-bound-for-leather. I managed to stay on but I could not slow him. We were going on a trail through the woods.

Suddenly, I saw a tree in our path with a low branch. It was high enough for the horse to clear, but not high enough

for me on top of the horse. In desperation, I leaned way back in the saddle, still tightly holding the reins and hoping I could get low enough to clear the branch. Wonder of wonders! White Eye stopped, backed up, and went around the tree. Then we were off again. Drackie yelled for me to wait at the cattle guard and she would open the gate. White Eye and I paused a moment at the cattle guard, then suddenly we were on the other side, clattering up to the stable. A white-faced Mr. Voight helped me out of the saddle. Drackie soon arrived, and Mr. Voight took us home in his truck. He and his hired hand had been getting ready to start out to look for us but had no idea where we had gone. My bottom was sore and the color of an eggplant for a long time.

Later we learned that Mr. Voight was in the business of catching wild horses on the mesa, breaking them, and selling them to the U.S. Calvary. The Calvary was still an active branch of the Armed Forces at that time. When World War II began a few years later, the Cavalry was discontinued and its function was changed to the mechanized division of the Army. I had been riding his horse. White Eye was trained to take off when a toe touched the stirrup and to ride hard and fast. Mr. Voight was quite upset that I had been given White Eye to ride. He had a gentle bay mare which was very easy to handle, had an easy gait, and responded to voice commands as well as to signal from the reins. I had many delightful rides on Babe.

Drackie explored the Rio Grande behind the Castle Cliffs formation and found a wide place in which the current was



Equestrienne, Dr. Voorhies

not very strong and there was a sandy bottom. We adopted it as our swimming hole and went there fairly often during the summer.

Drackie's father had been very much opposed to her coming to New Mexico. He thought it was unsafe and worried about her becoming an Indian captive or being murdered and scalped. When she went home to Pennsylvania to visit and wanted to bring her sister back with her to New Mexico, it took a great deal of persuasion. The two sisters came back to New Mexico a few days before

Drackie's vacation time was over in order to see the Santa Fe fiesta. While they were having breakfast in La Fonda, someone handed them a newspaper. Drackie almost fainted when she saw the headlines—"Indian Uprising. 400 Citizens Slain." Then she noted the date—1680—and that it was forbidden to take the paper out of Santa Fe.

After the fiesta, Drackie and her sister, Ruth, came on up to Embudo. In their honor, we decided to have a steak fry on the banks of the Rio Grande not far from our swimming hole. A group of us, including the two Dracks and me and a few others went over to the site early to start the fire and get things set up. We were sitting there chatting when Drackie screamed and threw herself onto my lap in sheer panic. "Indians!" she finally managed to gasp, and pointed upstream. Sure enough! There were three of them, each one wrapped in an Indian blanket and wearing a single feather headdress. We sat quietly, and the Indians approached quietly and steadily. They turned out to be Dr. Bowen and two of the nurses. We all had a good laugh, but Drackie was still shaken and did not think it was at all funny.