

Rodeo News

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The Flow Riders

Mary McCashin

Special Feature • The Flow Riders

THE FLOW RIDERS

Paying it Forward

[Three boys who.....]

Story by Mary McCashin

On August 1, 2013 Wendy Skiver sat in a stale, cold doctor's office trying to remain her normal positive self, but the bomb had been dropped. Ovarian cancer. Wendy immediately faced both surgery and aggressive chemotherapy to try and save her life. Within three weeks Wendy's surgery was behind her and aggressive rounds of chemotherapy lay ahead.

In September 2013 as she lay recovering from surgery Wendy heard about the "Mane! Mane!" team led by RC Landright, a PRCA barrel racer. To Wendy's amazement RC and his team had organized a charity event to raise money for cancer research. Wendy immediately decided to shave their heads in support of Wendy's battle with both cancer and chemotherapy. "I remember they came into the house and I saw what they'd done and just started crying. I asked them what would happen if my hair didn't fall out but a couple days later it started too," says Wendy. To further their support RC and his fellow barrel riders decided to begin the slow process of growing their hair out for Locks of Love, a non-profit organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children and anyone under the age of 21.

As their hair began to flow a streaker began to form. RC began calling the trio The Flow Riders, a joke likely based on how their hair would fly when the horses bucked. But quickly The Flow Riders name began to grow; fans and event attendees began referring to the curly streakers. "I don't think we really ever expected it to become what it has. We were just doing it to be supportive and now we're more recognizable because of it," states Phoenix, Alberta's Clint Laye. J.R. Vesina says it's a bit different, "I kind of thought we were going to grow a mane it would



Below left: RC Landright (left) and RC Vesina (right) with Wendy Skiver.



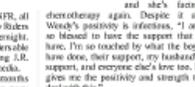
Below: Clint Laye and J.R. Vesina, members of The Flow Riders.

catch on. Tons of amazing guys have names for their growing groups but we had a purpose behind ours." For Clint and J.R. it was never something they had to think about doing. Being crowned in a race and encountering the United States had formed a bond between the three cowboys. Their families are family and their struggles are each other's struggles. "Wendy is like my second mom. I'd do anything for her," claims J.R. Vesina. Clint Laye, the youngest of the group, claims to "These guys have helped me out from the moment I started riding, they asked me to help in with them and I thought that was cool. They made me part of their gang. It just was a no brainer to jump onboard and support RC's mom, we just did it." RC's mom was beyond touched by their gesture. "They're become like my sons. We call and text, they keep me posted on things and we check in on one another. I'm so grateful RC has their support too." However, that support took awhile to spread throughout the rodeo community. Initially when the boys began to grow their hair the feedback was less than supportive. "In a sport that is so well known for being clean cut, I don't think the judges and fans knew what we were doing. We'd get told to go get a haircut or something," stated RC. As fans, judges, and fellow competitors began learning the reason for the locks, support began to grow and the stress and comments quickly went away. For Clint Laye it

was a different reaction. "I didn't catch on much until the other guys. Being crowned my hair has always been a little longer and I somehow got more with it more." Clint says that when it is time for him to cut and donate his hair he is planning on growing it out again. J.R. feels the same way. "I've never really cared what people think so I have no doubts I'll keep growing it out." Wendy is quick to chime in. "It was hard to sit in the NFR and hear people making comments about their hair and how the boys needed a haircut. But once people found out the purpose behind it their fans took to donate either cash or in a community where cowboys, lady and possibly support causes such as breast cancer research, the fans have asked another Round-Up there was a huge fanbase in Wendy's honor. Heck at their home, the feedback included a roving event



2: Wendy during RC's hair 2: RC and his mother (above) at the rodeo.



A lot of saw you knew." They're more determined than ever to see it through, especially now that Wendy's cancer has returned and she's facing chemotherapy again. Despite it all Wendy's positivity is infectious. "I am so blessed to have the support that I have. I'm so touched by what the boys have done, their support, my husband's support, and everyone else's love too. It gives me the positivity and strength to deal with this."

Phyllis (Buck) Conway's Russ Rowan is a personal supporter of The Flow Riders. "Professional sports athletes are extremely in the business of promoting themselves and their sponsors. In this particular case, these athletes are promoting a cause that renders them no financial gain or personal benefit. This gesture is a testament to their true character." It appears they've brought the rodeo family even closer together, helping each other to "pay it forward" with a nice gesture for someone else. "That's just the kind of people we are, it's awesome," says Wendy of the rodeo family.

So what does the future hold for The Flow Riders? A life extra shampoo and conditioner, less and lots of hair, as well as the possibility of a quick lesson in braiding and the art of the perfect ponytail. For Wendy it's more chemotherapy with more support than she could have ever dreamed possible. Will The Flow Riders continue being their locks grow wild and free? For Clint Laye and J.R. Vesina it's an immediate yes, while RC is more focused on their current involvement with Locks of Love and his mom's health.

One thing is for sure however, the rodeo community should never forget these fine, young men for the selfless. There are no gimmicks, ulterior motives, or selfishness. They are whole heartedly committed to not only supporting Wendy Skiver but also fighting cancer, but centered to giving it forward with their donation to Locks of Love. It's an attitude and an action that deserves recognition and commendation. The rodeo community could not ask for a better group than The Flow Riders to be ambassadors for the sport of rodeo and for what real character is all about. ■

On August 1, 2013 Wendy Skiver sat in a stale, cold doctor's office trying to remain her normal positive self, but the bomb had been dropped. Ovarian cancer. Wendy immediately faced both surgery and aggressive chemotherapy to try and save her life. Within three weeks Wendy's surgery was behind her and aggressive rounds of chemotherapy lay ahead.

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In September 2013 as she lay recovering from surgery Wendy heard shouts of, "Mom! Mom!" from her son RC Landingham, a PRCA bareback rider. To Wendy's amazement RC and his travel companions, Clint Laye and J.R. Vezain had unanimously decided to shave their heads to support Wendy's battle with both cancer and chemotherapy. "I remember they came into the house and I'd saw what they'd done and just started crying. I asked them what would happen if my hair didn't fall out but a couple days later it started too", says Wendy. To further their support RC and his fellow bareback riders decided to begin the slow process of growing their hair out for Locks of Love, a non-profit organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children and anyone under the age of 21.

As their hair began to flow a moniker began to form. RC began calling the trio The Flow Riders, a joke initially based on how their hair would fly when the broncs bucked. But quickly The Flow Rider name began to grow; fans and even announcers began referencing the catchy nickname. "I don't think we really ever expected it to become what it has. We were just doing it to be supportive and now we're more recognizable because of it", states Provost, Alberta's Clint Laye. J.R. Vezain saw it a bit differently, "I kind of thought we when gave our group a name it would catch

on. Tons of roughstock guys have names for their traveling groups but we had a purpose behind ours.”

For Clint and J.R. it was never something they had think about doing. Being crammed in a van and crisscrossing the United States had formed a brotherhood between the three cowboys. Their families are family and their struggles are each other’s struggles, “Wendy is like my second mom, I’d do anything for her”, claims J.R Vezain. Clint Laye, the youngest of the group, chimes in, “These guys have helped me out from the moment I started riding, they asked me to hop in with them and I thought that was cool. They made me part of their group. It just was a no brainer to jump onboard and support RC’s mom, we just did it.” RC’s mom was beyond touched by their gesture, “They’ve become like my sons. We call and text, they keep me posted on things and we check it on one another. I’m so grateful RC has their support too.” However that support took awhile to spread throughout the rodeo community.

Initially when the boys began to grow their hair the feedback was less than supportive, “In a sport that is so well known for being clean cut, I don’t think the judges and fans knew what we were doing. We’d get told to go get a haircut or something,” stated RC. As fans, judges, and fellow competitors began learning the reason

for the locks, support began to grow and the sneers and comments quickly went silent. For Clint Laye it was a bit of a different reaction, "I didn't catch as much grief as the other guys. Being Canadian my hair has always been a little longer and I somehow get aware with it more." Clint says that when it is time for him to cut and donate his hair he is planning on growing it out again. J.R. feels the same way, "I've never really cared what people think so I have no doubts I'll keep growing it out." Wendy is quick to chime in, "It was hard to sit at the NFR and hear people making comments about their hair and how they boys needed a haircut. But once people found out the purpose behind it their tune tends to change rather quickly." In a community where cowboys loudly and proudly support causes such as breast cancer research, the trio have added another dynamic to the mix allowing rodeo fans to see and participate in another great cause.

In fact, during the 2013 Pendleton Round-Up there was a huge fundraiser in Wendy's honor. Held at their home, the fundraiser included a roping event and cookout. During that event several other cowboys also shaved their head for Wendy, "There were several bald heads at Pendleton that year!" she proclaims. J.R. says that The Flow Riders just wanted to help Wendy feel at ease and show their support however they could.

Today however The Flow Riders have increased support from both fans and the peers; their Facebook fan page seems to grow daily and other rodeo competitors are considering joining the cause and growing their hair out as well. "It's good that we have a fan support with us. I don't think we really expected it but it's great to have people support you. We never expected it to become what it has, we were just doing it for Mom and now it's taken off," RC explains. Following their appearance at the 2014 WNFR, all three cowboys qualified, The Flow Riders popularity seemed to skyrocket overnight. No longer were the roughstock riders able to blend into a crowd, something J.R. Vezain also contributes to social media.

Having grown their hair for 16 months now the boys are still 5-6 inches away from being able to donate to Locks of Love, but they're not giving up. The boys are quick to joke that their shampoo and conditioner bills have risen over the past few months, "Just a little bit, it takes a lot of care you know." They're more determined than ever to see it through, especially now that Wendy's cancer has returned and she's facing chemotherapy again. Despite it all Wendy's positivity is infectious, "I am so blessed to have the support that I have. I'm so touched by what the boys have done, their support, my husband's support, and

everyone else's love too. It gives me the positivity and strength to deal with this."

Flying U Rodeo Company's Reno Rosser is a proud supporter of The Flow Riders, "Professional sports athletes are ordinarily in the business of promoting themselves and their sponsors. In this particular case, these athletes are promoting a cause that renders them no financial gain or personal benefit. This gesture is a testament to their true character." It anything they've brought the rodeo family even closer together, helping teach people to "pay it forward" with a nice gesture for someone else. "That's just the kind of people we are, it's awesome", says Wendy of the rodeo family.

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