east visiting New York, New Orleans, Miami and other eye-popping sights to natives of the rural West. By the time they had reached Pueblo, Colorado, their travelling money had dried up and Ben found himself calling home for help. Not being one to accept things as they are, he saved up enough money for another trip, this time to the sunny shores of California.

For the next few years, Johnson migrated back and forth between Southern California and the family farm, helping his parents with the crops during the summer months and returning to the warmer climate during winter. Typical of his generation, he did what he could to turn a dollar — washing dishes, spraying grapes and at one point wrangling horses for the Urban Military Academy on Hollywood Boulevard. In the fall of 1939, however, a tragic accident brought Johnson back to Colorado, this time for good.

"My older brother Raymond was working as an assistant park ranger at Estes Park and one day, no one really knows what happened, his car ran off the road on a return trip from park headquarters and he was killed." As soon as the news reached Johnson, he packed his belongings and left for home. "Raymond had rodeoed some and was a pretty good hand. He had a calf roping mare and a spotted two-year-old filly that he had come by in a rather round-about way.

"Raymond and my Uncle Otto had kind of hit it off, and during the spring of 1937 while caretaking Uncle Otto's place near Gilcrest, Colorado, he had taken one of my uncle's Thoroughbred mares to a leopard stallion named Sundance that he had seen in Greeley. Raymond paid the breeding fee but never told my uncle about it. Soon after he returned the mare to Gilcrest, she ran off with my nephew who was about ten at the time and broke his arm. My uncle understandably decided to get rid of her, but Raymond insisted she was too good a mare to sell and convinced him to keep her. Before long, it became apparent to everyone why he was so insistant; a leopard filly was born.

"For the next two years, there was a real battle between the two. Raymond wanted to buy her but my uncle didn't want to sell, at least, not until a man from Wyoming offered $125 for her, which was an outlandish price at the time when you consider that you could have bought the best broke saddle horse in the country for $25. My brother matched the offer and finally got possession of the filly although he never had the chance to do anything with her."

After the accident, it was decided that Johnson would get the filly which he named Leopard Lady. He still remembers making the trip to Gilcrest where he picked her up. Little did he realize, however, the profound influence the little mare would have on his future. "Appaloosas at that time were considered rank underdogs by most people, but right from the beginning I realized that she was a pretty good horse. I saddled her up and rode her off and although she didn't know anything, she had a better disposition than 90 percent of the horses I had been around. All you had to do was show her what you wanted her to do and she would do it. She was kind of small but well muscled and I like her. Yet, because of her spots, she wasn't considered much by a lot of people," Johnson said ruefully.

In 1940, Johnson was working in Grand Junction and staying in a boarding house when he and a friend decided to go to a dance to celebrate Johnson's twenty-fourth birthday. Having an eye for pretty girls as well as pretty horses, Johnson spotted Dorothy Eastman, a student nurse at the time, and asked her to dance. A few months later, Dorothy and Johnson became partners of another kind and settled down on a rented piece of property where they raised beans, corn, alfalfa and a few hogs. He kept his job in town working at a tire store recapping tires, a critical occupation during World War II when rubber was tightly rationed.

Two years of hard work paid off and, finally, a down payment was made on a place of their own. Here they had room for a few horses and Johnson outcrossed Leopard Lady three times, the first lesson in genetics was born a solid chestnut filly which they named Sherry. The second mating resulted in a solid colt which they promptly gelded and sold. The third time around, however, Leopard Lady foaled a chestnut filly with frosting over her hips and, as Johnson recalled, "That gave us the fever. We named her Miss Sundance." He then purchased an Appaloosa stallion.

About this time, Ben and Dorothy went to visit Uncle Otto, and while going through some of his things, came across a copy of *Bit And Spur* magazine containing an article about the newly formed Appaloosa Horse Club. Piqued by curiosity, Johnson wrote a letter to then Club President Claude Thompson asking for more information. He soon received Club membership number 76. Leopard Lady, the first horse registered by the Johnsons, received foundation number 167.

In 1948, Appaloosas were becoming more and more of a business for the Johnsons. When news of the first National Show circulated among Appaloosa enthusiasts, he decided to attend and traveled to Lewiston, Idaho, for the event, farther than anyone else. As Ben recalled, "There were about a hundred people there including Dr. Francis Haines, Claude Thompson, George Hatley, and Mabel Strickland Woodward, who was later inducted into the Cowboy Hall of Fame, among others."

The atmosphere at that show was exhilarating, as is often the case when isolated people with similar interests get together for the first time. "By looking at the horses there, I realized that there were some very good Appaloosas around and that the breed wasn't getting the recognition that it deserved. I think we felt a need to change people's attitudes toward Appaloosas. There was kind of a sense of mission that we shared."

Toward the end of the show, there was a membership meeting in which Johnson was nominated and elected to the first Board of Directors. "I think it was because of the notoriety I had received for driving the farthest to the show," Johnson remarked. Regardless of the reason,