

Memories of

Dr. Nasr Marei



■ by **Judith Wich-Wenning**

When my last talk to Dr. Nasr Marei ended, I had a very heavy heart. I felt the dark clouds coming, but there was nothing I could do. Nasr had called me to speak about his latest surgery in Munich and of course, as always, about horses and coming shows. He made plans about returning to Germany, this time hopefully without medical obligations. We intended to meet again soon; Nasr was so much looking forward to seeing my little baby Dana. It was not meant to be. Not even two days after this last conversation, Dr. Marei was in a coma and finally passed away in the morning of October 17th, 2017. A good friend went. For the world of Arabian horses an era had come to an end.

When I started to become interested in Arabian horses as a pupil, I wrote a letter to Dr. Marei to ask some details about his famous Al Badeia Stud in Egypt. He answered promptly and graciously sent me a copy of the Al Badeia Stud Book as a gift. I was impressed – not only by this kind gesture so typical for Nasr, but first and foremost by the beauty, quality and special type of the Al Badeia horses. Then in the year 2000, I finally met Dr. Marei in person. Judith Forbis introduced us. In the coming years I immensely enjoyed meeting Nasr and talking to him. He was a very special man, always at peace with himself, composed and thoughtful. One of my fondest memories of Nasr is the show in Paris in 2003 when beloved Gelgelah Al Badeia became World Champion Mare. His joy, pride and excitement were immeasurable – and so well deserved. Nasr was a passionate breeder with a vast knowledge about Arabian horses and an excellent and highly popular judge. He was a rare, true gentleman, always well dressed with perfect manners and a smile in his face. Besides of his passion for Arabian horses, he loved to travel, took excellent photos and had a soft spot for dogs, especially German Shepherds.

Still I can hardly believe that I will never hear his sonorous, comforting voice again. Farewell, dear Nasr. May Allah bless you! You will be greatly missed.





Dr. Nasr Marei with Simeon Sbarav (Asfour x Simeon Shuala)

Mohannad Albadeia (Magd Albadeia x Simeon Safir) - Photo: Dr. Nasr Marei



Mohannad Albadeia (Magd Albadeia x Simeon Safir) - Photo: Dr. Nasr Marei

It was always a great pleasure for me to write regularly about the legendary Al Badeia stud farm. Not long ago, Dr. Nasr Marei gave me this last interview. It shows his deep passion and now reads like a legacy, full of important hints and advice.



An Interview with Dr. Nasr Marei

■ by *Judith Wich-Wenning*

Dr. Nasr Marei is one of the few true connoisseurs of Arabian horse breeding in our time. His stud farm Albadeia in Egypt was founded by his grandfather Mr. Ahmed Marei more than 80 years ago. Dr. Nasr Marei has led the breeding program to new heights. He is not only a highly acclaimed breeder but also a well-respected judge and an imaginative photographer. In 2015 Dr. Marei received the prestigious Milestone Award by The Pyramid Society. He was also the recipient of the Life Time Achievement Award from Arabian Horse Alliance, USA in 2013. Being in Dr. Marei's company is always a great pleasure: Warmth, kindness, honesty and reliability are just a few characteristics, which come to mind when talking to Dr. Nasr Marei. His dedication for Arabians as well as his vast knowledge about these horses is impressive. In this interview Dr. Marei shares with us his personal views and gives us an insight into the latest developments at his stud farm.

Judith Wich-Wenning: *Dr. Marei, please describe for us your first memories related to Arabian horses.*

Dr. Nasr Marei: *My relationship with horses dates back to my childhood. My father was already breeding Arabian horses when I was born. My earliest recollection was that I used to love to go to the stables in our farm situated about 50 km away from our today's stud farm. I was fascinated by this creature and would spend part of the day with them. I have pictures when I was three years old on the back of one of our foundation mares that my grandfather had bought from The Royal Agriculture Society (The EAO today).*

My love for the horse grew up with me. I learned riding when I was 10 years old in the Equestrian Club in Cairo but rode mostly mixed breed and warm blood horses for my training. I continued riding and became a competitive rider in show jumping and dressage, winning many upper level-jumping competitions. To encourage me, my father bought me two warm blood mares to ride.

Meanwhile, my father continued breeding Arabians in our new farm, Albadeia in Giza near the great pyramids. Of course, I would ride our Arabians in the desert at the pyramids for hours. Until this point in time I just loved our Arabian horses but was not involved in breeding decisions or the management of the stud farm. That came later in the sixties after



I returned from the USA to pursue my graduate academic work for the M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of California in Davis.

Upon my return to Egypt in 1971, I became more involved in the breeding program and joined my father in managing the farm. He held several top governmental posts and was quite busy and therefore depended on me to care for the stud farm. My breeding education, skills and experience had just begun to be serious then.

Having made this brief introduction, my answer to your question is that the love of the horse was always in me since I started walking. The passion grew all the time and my fascination with the Arabians never ceased but in fact became stronger by the day. Now that I am I retired from active business and living in the farm since my father passed away in 1993, my bond with the horses has become stronger.

Judith Wich-Wenning: What do you enjoy most about Arabians?

Dr. Nasr Marei: *The Arabian horse to me is not simply the love of the horse itself but also I am fascinated by its traditions and heritage. I love their history and the legacy that goes with it.*

I admire their beauty, harmony, intelligence and disposition. They are companions and family. I am extremely happy to get a new foal and terribly sad when I lose a horse. I worry immensely when one gets sick.

I check on my horses every morning and before ending my day. They are my lifestyle.

Judith Wich-Wenning: Some years ago, you have exchanged several horses with Simeon Stud, Australia. Please explain how this has influenced your breeding program.

Dr. Nasr Marei: *My father entrusted me with a treasure and left me with a great foundation herd. I started reviewing the qualities of my horses and breeding program. With my greater international exposure to the world of Arabian horses, I realized that I needed to get rid of some undesirable characteristics and enrich my gene pool with more desirable ones. To do so, I had to reach out and infuse some distant bloodlines. In pursuing this I had to import some horses from abroad.*

One day, the accomplished breeder, Marion Richmond of Simeon Stud, Australia was visiting Albadeia. She wanted to acquire the king of the farm, Farid Albadeia. I was not able to part from him being such an amazing stallion and a great sire. Marion settled to take one of his fillies, Wed Albadeia (Farid Albadeia x Momtazet Albadeia). She also fell in love with one of the best mares, Ibtehad Albadeia (Badran Albadeia x Halawat Albadeia). We came to an agreement by which I would exchange them for two horses of hers sired by Asfour whom I loved very much. The superb mare Simeon Safir (Asfour x Simeon Safanad) and the yearling colt, Simeon Sharaw (Asfour x Simeon Shuala) were my choice.

A classic beauty: Daboom Albadeia (Farid Albadeia x Simeon Safir). Photo: Dr. Nasr Marei



Asfourat Albadeia (Farid Albadeia x Simeon Safir)

*World Champion Mare
Gelgelab Albadeia
(Imperial Madori x Anbar Albadeia),
bred by Dr. Nasr Marei
and owned by Shirley Watts of
Halsdon Arabians, Great Britain.
Photo: Dr. Nasr Marei*



*The extraordinary mare
Ibtebag Albadeia
(Badran Albadeia x Halawat Albadeia),
four times Egyptian Champion mare.
Photo: Dr. Nasr Marei*



*Haytham Albadeia
(Simeon Sbarav x Galagel Albadeia)
Photo: Vesty*



Simeon Safir is a flea-bitten, gorgeous mare. She is 22 years old and still breeding some of the greatest foals. She never disappointed me. She gave me finesse and good movement. When she came, she was in foal to Anaza Bey Shab. The resulting filly was the amazing Hekayet Albadeia. Both won the Egyptian National and International shows in Egypt several times. Their progeny is still proving that I had made the right choice. Unfortunately, I lost Hekayet few months ago.

Meanwhile, Simeon Sharav produced some great foals. The strongest influence he consistently passed on to his get was the great shoulder, upright long necks, beautiful heads and lovely body. Sharav was leased to Ariela Arabians in Israel, which is a remarkable breeding program, for over two years and has done very well with them and for other breeders. Sharav himself has to his credit a good record in the show ring in Egypt and in Europe. He was sold to Iran five years ago. I still have four stallions sired by Sharav and many mares. Again I proved to myself that outcrossing with some selected bloodlines would improve my herd.

The success of this exchange incited me to do more. So I leased several stallions from other breeding programs. I leased Majd Al Rayyan (Safir x Ansata Nawara), Labeeb (Imperial Imdal x AK Latifa) and Al Maraam (Imperial Imdal x The Vision HG). They have impacted my herd in a substantially positive way.

I am continuing the same path now. I leased the stunning young stallion Bariq Al Shaqab (Al Adeed Al Shaqab x Wahayeb Al Shaqab). I bred him this season to several mares and waiting patiently to see his foal on the ground.

Judith Wich-Wenning: Please tell us about the latest developments at Albadeia!

Dr. Nasr Marei: *The process of learning breeding is a continuous process. There are many new things one learns everyday. I believe that a breeder should always work on the refinement of his/her herd.*

So my objective in improving the quality of my horses is still and will always be, underway.

As mentioned above, reaching out and infusing new selected qualities is a must for my endeavour. I also became more selective in making breeding decisions. My experience was enriched over the years by judging major international shows around the world and visiting and studying what other breeders are applying. I always keep in mind to maintain my "Albadeia" looks and types.

Thanks to the priceless foundation horses I inherited from my father, I was able to take this further into the future. I am gratified to hear my fellow breeders around the world saying that I took Albadeia to a new and higher level.

As we all know, breeding horses is a long-term process. One will never know if he/she has chosen the right horses and made the right breeding



decision except at least 8 years or two generations down the road. Having already infused new bloodline and outcrossed my horses to distant relatives, I am witnessing at present my achievements that took place over the last 20 years.

My plan for the future is stop adding new bloodlines and use my current amended gene pool so that I would not loose my identity.

Judith Wich-Wenning: Which young horses are especially promising for the future?

Dr. Nasr Marei: The list is long. Basically all horses that qualify as of good breeding potential can be significant in designing and implementing a breeding program. All young horses (four years and above) that resulted from the use of the leased stallions have become the new foundation for the future. I have the daughters and sons of Labeeb as well as his grand sons and daughters. I also have Al Maaram's sons and daughters and expect their get soon. From Majd Al Rayyan, I have at least 4 generations. Same goes for many other stallions bought or bred to my mares, like Simeon Sharav, Imperial Madori, Bar Sama Halim, Rashdan and Adl. I have more than six generations for each. Besides of course the get of my original horses that are purely Albadeia and EAO.

All are important and useful for breeding. They constitute the genetic tools that I can select from to better and improve the qualities of my horses.

Judith Wich-Wenning: What is the key to success for Albadeia Stud?

Dr. Nasr Marei: Love, dedication, financial sacrifice, acquiring broader experience, studying and analysing with open mind and learning, being objective and truthful and critical to myself and finally more love to the horse and to the breed.

Judith Wich-Wenning: Where do you think the Arabian horse is heading? What would you want to change, if possible?

Dr. Nasr Marei: The Arabian horse "TYPE" has changed significantly with time. The best horses of the 60's and 70's are not the same horses that are being bred today. The World Champions of yesteryears cannot even qualify today for major shows.

Breeders have selected to evolve in many ways. In the past, one could distinguish between a Spanish and a Polish horse. Or between Egyptian and Russian types, etc. Now, the differences in their distinct types have become less and the result of the current breeding approaches is what I call the "UNIVERSAL ARABIAN TYPE" resulting from mixing all Arabian types together including Egyptian, Russian, Polish, Spanish, American, etc., bloodlines. The distinct differences between these types are diminishing and all breed more or less the same horse.

Spectacular Gelgelah Albadeia. Photo: Dr. Nasr Marei



*The very typey Haytham Albadeia (Simeon Sharav x Galagel Albadeia).
This Egyptian Event Europe Champion was leased by the Polish State Stud Janow Podlaski.
Photo: Stuart Vesty*

Dr. Nasr Marei with Farid Albadeia. Photo: Boiselle



A photo from the past - during a presentation at Al Shaqab in 2001. From left to right: Dr. Nasr Marei, Judith Forbis, Anna Bishop and Don Forbis. Photo: Judith Wich-Wenning





This was facilitated by the easier communication and exchange between the breeders globally. Artificial insemination, export/import of frozen semen, embryo transfer etc. have become easier and with high rate of success.

The show ring, whether we like it or not has affected the TYPE of the breed. Many breeders just follow the vogue, trend or the winning type and breed the horse that represents the type that wins in the show ring.

Variation in type is needed and expanding the gene pool should be an objective. Trends or fashion come and go. Russian Arabians dominated the show ring at one point. The Golden Cross horses followed that. A new vogue followed: the Polish Arabians, which was followed by the Egyptians. Now, the Universal horse is dominating the ring. Each of these fashions would last few years. A breeder will have to change his strategy accordingly and will never have his/her own identity. All of these breeders will be breeding the same horse.

I am not saying that the breeder should not evolve and stay static. What I really mean is, a breeder has to be dynamic and evolving after setting goals and venture within certain parameters that will provide him/her with the horse of his/her dream regardless of his show ring performance. Breeders need more genetic tools (a larger genetic pool) to be able to use in refining and breeding their ideal horse. The constant use of few selected bloodlines will result in diminishing the size of the genetic pool and hence cutting down the number of options that a breeder can use.

To summarize what was said before and to answer your question, I do have concern that the existing Arabian horse types and diversity, which are very important for future breeders, may disappear.

I would like breeders:

- 1. To preserve the threatened old bloodlines.*
- 2. Evolve and change in the herd but within certain limits and try to breed a type that reflects the breeder's choice and minimize the impact of show ring effect.*
- 3. The show winners are not necessarily the best breeding horses. Many breeders are not showing their horses. And in the same time, not all winners are good breeding horses.*
- 4. We should emphasize performance disciplines in shows. The Arabian is not only a pretty horse to look at but it is a serious performance horse as well. This in itself will help diversifying and enlarging the available gene pool.*

Judith Wich-Wenning: What are your plans for the future?

Dr. Nasr Marei: *I am now in my 70's and a major concern is how to carry on Albadeia and keep it true to its program. I am in the final stages of preparing a format for continuing the Albadeia program with the same goals and passion as has carried us through the past 80 years. It is the legacy I owe to my horses.*