

# “TIME WILL TELL...”

MISTY VALLEY ARABIANS FARM IS BREEDING  
FINEST STRAIGHT EGYPTIANS IN GEORGIA, U.S.A.

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In the fall of 2017, I met Danny and Carol Heithold. The medical doctor and passionate Arabian horse breeder had arrived from Georgia, USA, together with his wife in order to see the studs of Italy. During the time they spent visiting, we debated enthusiastically. On the past and present of the Straight Egyptians, on the role they play in our lives, on the influence of the wealthy Middle East on breeding in Europe and in the US, and on modern genetic engineering, which is going to re-define the classic definition of a purebred Arabian horse for the future. We found that today's situation in Straight Egyptian breeding in the US is quite similar to the situation in Europe. In the last century, things were still different.





While during the 60's and 70's, lots of Straight Egyptians had been imported from Cairo to Germany and Hungary, with their offspring eventually reaching neighboring countries, SE breeding in the USA during the 80's and 90's was, undoubtedly, a role model for the breeders of Western Europe. Following the example of the Pyramid Society in the US, the Pyramid Society Europe was founded, and shows were organized for Straight Egyptian horses only, the so-called „Egyptian Events“.

Some of the US studs fairly boomed, with many of their horses leaving the US and becoming foundation horses for SE breeding in Germany or Italy. Whoever was able to raise the money would import from the US. Offspring of the US super stallions in particular, such as Ruminaja Ali, Ansata Ibn Halima, Imperial Imdal or The Minstril, was much in demand and obtained world-wide influence, first in Europe and later on in the Gulf States. Was it superior marketing or a superior approach in breeding that had made SE breeding in the USA so impressively prominent? The question would remain unanswered, as meanwhile, the enormous purchasing power of the newly established studs on the Arabian gulf had shifted the market in the Eastern direction. Now, it was the US breeders who would sell their quality horses to the booming studs of the Middle East, just as the Europeans had done so successfully for some time. Today, some 20 years later, we find that Europe and the USA alike need to re-focus on their own distinct standards of quality, markets, and goals. The modern West-to-East migrations of Arabian horses via Air Cargo have almost come to a standstill. Nowadays the Middle East is producing such quality horses that need for importation is diminished. Those who are interested in real business usually stop breeding. For the true horse lovers, this offers the opportunity to work towards their breeding goals along several horse generations, and to present the results of their breeding to the public on the occasion of beauty and ridden shows.

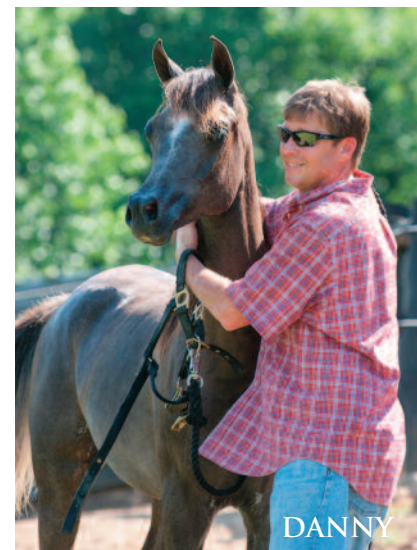
Among breeders, there is also growing interest in cooperation in a more Western sense, meaning on an equal footing. The digital world of communication makes developing friendships across continents much easier. Breeders with similar goals and horse bloodlines consider the other horses from their circle to be mutual kin. The friendship with the Heithold couple soon proved to be productive, particularly as far as shared strategies were concerned.

During the interview, I found that Danny is an extremely honest and self-critical person on the subject of the history of his SE breeding operation. For him, it was not about highlighting his successes and lending importance to his breeding, the way it's usually done in many studs' media presentations today. His approach was to address the problems and the defeats, and to tell of the problem-solving as a positive learning process. All of us have suffered tragic defeats in our breeding, as well as lucky strokes that serve to compensate for the grief. Danny talks about that when he says „With horses we are reminded that life is beautiful and tragic, both at the same time“.

Pyramid Society documentation also has it that he and his wife Carol are successful amateur handlers and that their horses were often placed among the top horses in various Egyptian Events. Despite all difficulties, Danny and Carol are set on going on with breeding their horses at home and with presenting them themselves. They believe in an upswing and positive development of SE breeding, in the US as well as in their own stud. They are eagerly awaiting their next foals. “It is what is so exciting about foaling season: to see what arrives after much speculation, planning and effort.” Luck, happiness and success in our barns, that's something all of us breeders wish for, every year hoping again that our wishes will come true.



CAROL



DANNY

## INTERVIEWING DANNY HEITHOLD

**Let's start with something that is probably much in your mind as a breeder: the three promising colts you bred in 2012/2013. Thee Dominion for example, what became of him?**

We had a period when we had seven out of eight foals that were colts. Most we sold locally for pleasure horses. Three colts were not gelded as they showed early promise to be show horses and possibly breeding horses. Well, things have developed since that time – we sold Mubarak, after showing him, to our farrier, Phoenix Rising MVA was sold to Saudi Arabia as a two-year-old, and we kept Thee Dominion. One of the sad things about selling a horse overseas was the fact we lost contact with the horses' status. This was one of our learning experiences with Phoenix Rising. I often wonder what became of him. I pray that he is healthy and loved.

As to Thee Dominion, keeping him was not our original intention, but I did not want such a promising young stallion to be sold cheaply with no guarantee for his well-being. We are a small farm and did not want to have the responsibility of a stallion at home. However, he did so well at his first show, winning Junior Stallion Championship laurels at Scottsdale and following them up with a Bronze Junior Championship at the Egyptian Event as a 2-year-old. He did not sell immediately then, so we elected to keep him intact.

He is at a local farm with stallion experience in management and semen collection. His first foal crop is expected in 2018. We plan to breed our beautiful mare MGM Grande MVA to him this season. We do not promote him on the website as our plan is to get some foals on the ground and allow him to mature and enjoy being a horse.

He will return to the show ring with GREAT expectations. We think he can be an important part of SE breeding history, but time will tell. Both his dam and sire are rare in that they produce amazing fillies





and colts. We will see how these babies do in the next couple of years. I would love to see him return as a mature Stallion to the halter arena anywhere.

**2016 was a very unusual foaling season for your farm – would you like to tell the tale?**

Yeah, that was a memorable year at Misty Valley Arabians. We were excited that we had five foals coming by five different Stallions from the 2015 breeding season. We had also been fortunate to have two fillies that year to end our series of colts. At the end of January 2016 there had been a sudden severe cold spell over several days. This changed our lives for the next six months

and confirmed that we could survive the tough times in breeding.

First, we had to take Wardah Karimah MVA, nine months in foal, to the hospital with colic, and the next morning, it was the same with A Samia, who was seven months pregnant. Wardah had surgery and survived, even with abscesses of the incision and required prolonged wound care. A Samia returned to us after surgery and a short uneventful stay in the hospital. Miraculously, both in utero foals survived along with the dams.

Later on, in February, we had the pleasure of seeing Thee Dominion become unanimous Junior SE Champion in his first show. While we



were away for the show, our foundation mare Thee Desert Rose had a filly by A Illuminatus, whom we named Jassourah MVA.

Soon afterward Wardah delivered, but she would not nurse. She was too weak after her long painful recovery from the surgery, and never bonded with the filly. So urgent hunting for nurse mares, goats, etc began to no avail. We learned about a bucket baby on the fly and never slept well again until the Fall. I must thank Carol for using her maternal instincts in getting the filly to transition to the bucket. We then had a filly, Tagreed MVA (Farhoud Al Shaqab X Wardah Karimah MVA) in March. After settling into a schedule for bucket feedings we had three foals in April: Isstourah MVA out of Thee Phoenix by Al Ayal AA, then Azan MVA (by Scapa) out of our prettiest mare MGM Grande, and finally, a surprise black filly out of two bay parents, the dam being A Samia, the second mare who had colicked in January. A Samia had a speedy delivery in the paddock, the foal was nursing, no problems. Her filly Hebah MVA (by The Singleton) was healthy and strong. The next day A Samia colicked again and did not survive. It was painful. No more amazing foals from this special mare, and a second bucket baby. Kindred Spirit SG came to the rescue for us. We





used her to wean the foals in her later years. She is a stunning 1990 daughter of The Minstril. She did not nurse but raised these two bucket babies like her own and was very protective of them both.

Looking back it may have been a blessing that we had not one, but two bucket babies. They got socialization, and mixing some more powdered milk is just more expensive, but not a great effort otherwise. That process confirmed that we could be and were 100% dedicated to horses' well being. I must thank Mitch Crawford and Carol for being part of a feeding schedule that was difficult with our schedules. We were



blessed with five SE fillies. Now we look at them in the pasture and smile. With horses we are reminded that life is beautiful and tragic, both at the same time.

**Will you describe to me your horses you have actually on your farm as important or promising breeding horses?**

Well, we already talked about Thee Dominion, of course. We will begin showing Nasheetta MVA (Thee Desert Rose x Al Fayed), one of our 2015 fillies, with Ted Carson in 2018. She is a half sister to Thee Dominion and we are excited to see if she can be successful in halter classes.







Then there is that filly out of Thee Desert Rose by A Illuminatus, Jassourah MVA. We regard her a very special and promising young horse.

Wardah Karimah MVA's filly by Farhoud al Shaqab, called Tagreed MVA, was the most refined horse you could imagine. I dreamed of her success in the show ring to further solidify Thee Desert Rose's legacy through Wardah Karimah MVA, as Tagreed had the finest coat and neck I had ever seen. I called her Tagreed because she was a very vocal horse. But we had to say goodbye to her in the summer of 2017. As I told earlier, we had to take Wardah Karimah to the hospital with colic when she was nine months in foal, and still being weak when she delivered, she would not nurse her foal. I assumed that Tagreed was so vocal from being a bucket baby with a unique behavior. Actually, she had laryngeal nerve abnormalities that could not be repaired when she got bigger and outgrew her air supply. She was fine, and then within two weeks' time she was struggling to breathe. I am not sure if was related to the in utero surgery and stress, or to genetics, or both, but it was so sad.

Then there are those three fillies of April 2017. If Isstourah MVA (out of Thee Phoenix) had been a colt, we could have sold her in utero. As things are, she is a dream come true and we will see what this Al Ayal AA daughter will develop into. The long awaited filly out of our prettiest mare MGM Grande MVA, Azan MVA, will be an outstanding show prospect. And that black filly out of A Samia, Hebah, is probably good for a surprise or two, as her beautiful dam A Samia was outcross blood that we bought from Athala Arabians.

We were blessed with five SE fillies in 2016 that can compete in the halter arena without a doubt. We look forward to showing them to the world. I am barn blind of course, but I believe that these fillies can compete at the highest level.



THEE DESERT ROSE

**About technology and horse reproduction: the USA are renowned for their advanced reproduction technology. In embryo transfer, we now have the discussion on epigenetics and the genetically manifest influence of the recipient mare on the embryo in her uterus. Therefore, we can basically talk of three parents now: sire, dam, and recipient mare. For SE breeders, keeping the breed pure has been always the big credo. What's the reaction of the SE horse industry in the US to these facts?**

The study of epigenetic looks at the interactions between genes and their expression into substance and behavior. These are genetic traits that can be modified by environment and other mechanisms. To what degree these changes affect our horses (and humans) will only be determined with time and more research. I have always found it interesting that the passage of recipient mare DNA to the foal does apparently take place. It will raise the question about the amount of DNA for instance in a Friesian, or a Thoroughbred, or any other horse than intended, being incorporated into the foal's genome. If this affects phenotypic traits that are not of the original breed is the question. The idea for maintaining "Purity" was a random event the day the horses were chosen. I have often wondered how "desert-bred" translated into one's breeding decisions years ago.

**Are you doing Embryo transfer with your mares?**

We use artificial insemination even with local Stallions. We have not used frozen semen or embryo transfer. I have no problem with the technology and have dreamed of many a breeding looking at photos of horses on the internet. However, I feel that frozen semen and embryo transfer have threatened the local / regional Stallions here and globally. I don't





CAROL AND THEE DESERT ROSE



like that it leads to people all running after “the stallion of the season” and shortening the time that stallions are used. I am a breeder first, so I look at a much longer horizon and only have to please myself with the result.

I believe that seeing the stallion in person is essential. There is a feeling I get seeing the horse I am interested in, that is important in decisions for mares. It is not a tangible thing. Just a feeling that leads to a thought and, sometimes years later, to a decision to breed. That process is the art of breeding aside from the pedigree, phenotype, a desired vision for the foal that makes it so exciting. There are so many biologic and environmental variables that cannot be controlled. It is what is so exciting about foaling



season to see what arrives after much speculation, planning and effort.

**What about the market? Does it make sense in the US to breed, to keep and train and present an on-farm stallion for breeding? Or are things more like they are in Europe, that the small farms use their own - mainly unknown – stallions, and the richer farms use the super stars from the Middle East, if they arrive in the country?**

I am not sure it makes sense to breed in the US with difficult market conditions of late. I feel we are positioning ourselves to have the highest quality SE Arabians we can produce. It is a business centered on a burning passion for this horse. We have not bred of late because we do not want more horses than we can manage. It is frustrating not to try some of the crosses I envision but that is what dreams are for.

We don’t have as many ME show horses concentrated at large training facilities here as there are in Europe. A small breeder still has hope to do well in a show here and have a chance to compete with larger breeders.

We are a small farm and do not want to have the responsibility of a stallion at home. We think Thee Dominion can be an important part of SE breeding history but time will tell.

**Do you see a gap between the breeders who are producing SE horses with qualities as riding horses, and those who produce only for the show ring? Are there (still) breeders who are trying to combine both?**

No. I think that Sport Horse classes are becoming more popular among Arabian horse owners, but that all horses should be sound for riding (especially SE). We have long needed to involve our horses ( especially geldings in under saddle training for show and pleasure).



**What about the show ring? Do people in the US still believe that it will be simply the best horse winning?**

As a breeder I only ask that we present our horses in the best manner possible with trainers that we trust to treat the horse with the respect they deserve. Results are what happens on one day with a few people, not what the horse means to me in my heart. That can never change and is why my life is better on most days, regardless of placement. I am excited to hear the Pyramid Society is adding classes so that amateur owners can showcase their horses without formal expense for trainers. I hope that breaks down some of the financial barriers to doing the EE and increases participation.

**Are you still presenting your horses by yourself in the shows?**

I love to show halter but time is limited, so no shows for me in the immediate future.

**Is there something like a good friendly network between the SE breeders in the US, or do you put more emphasis on the international network?**

We have been fortunate to have many fellow small breeders in the Southeast that started about the same time with their horses. It has been a blessing to share our successes and defeats in the show ring and in life. Our annual gathering at the Egyptian Event is something I really look forward to each year. I hope that the show can continue. With the ease of seeing a show online, cultural changes, and economic downturns, show participation is declining.

**Do you have, in the US, a tradition of organizing private Open House meetings of the kind we have in Europe and the ME, just to create visibility for your horses and to meet people and establish friendships?**

Yes. There are breeders that have open houses to invite others to see their farms, both large and small breeders alike. We had an open house at Misty Valley Arabians this year trying to educate newcomers to horses about the majesty of the SE Arabian. We had a food and wine the night before at a local Gallery that had some original horse pieces created for the event.

**I see that every year, there are fewer SE foals born in the US. Does PS do anything to better the situation and to promote breeding? What do you think will happen in the future?**

In the US I believe the number of straight Egyptian horses being bred is declining. I think that there was a large number of horses being produced years ago when they were being sold regularly to the ME. As more and more high quality horses were exported, there was a loss of many exceptional mares and Stallions. Now the SE horses being produced are much better globally. I think there has been an oversupply of horses in the US that is now improving. There are still great horses being produced here. The Pyramid Society has recently announced changes that I believe are positive. The All American Challenge Cup attempts to promote participation in many local shows throughout the US with money to the Top 5 at each show, with a Challenge Cup Championship at the EE in 2018. In addition, as mentioned before there will be classes for owners to show their own horses, with no horse that has had professional training for an extended period of time permitted to compete. A welcome change indeed.

**Which role does Misty Valley Arabians play in the context of SE breeding in the US?**

We have a small breeding farm. I choose these Stallions for our mares by what they have to





offer to each individual mare. I did actively look to have outcross blood. I felt that it was the best genetically to strengthen our herd in the long run. I did not seek a particular bloodline, but used what happened to catch my eye and “fit”. When we had five foals coming by five different Stallions in 2016 , it was a gamble in my mind as the horse sales had markedly slowed and Minstril/Desperado blood was unpopular to anyone calling to inquire about our horses.

Unfortunately we do not have the luxury to see a lot of different crosses to gain experience very quickly. It is helpful to see others horses at shows or farms. We have not bred any more foals since

this foal crop of 2016. We are small and right-sized for the moment. We were blessed with 7/7 fillies for two years after many colts. I am proud of what we have produced. We will have horses to breed forward with great promise, and we look to the 2018 show season.

**Thank you very much for this interview. I hope we meet again, in Germany in July, when Katharinenhof stud open their gates for their 50 year anniversary.**

We will be there! The breeders in Europe are important to us, as friends and as partners, so we can work together to develop and promote our horses. ■



## LIST OF HORSES

Name	Foaled	Gender	Color
KINDRED SPIRIT SG	04-June-1990	Mare	Grey
THEE PHOENIX	16-May-1998	Mare	Black
THEE DESERT ROSE	28-February-2005	Mare	Bay
MGM GRANDE MVA	30-May-2007	Mare	Grey
WARDAH KARIMAH MVA	05-May-2011	Mare	Bay
THEE DOMINION	02-March-2014	Stallion	Grey
MOUBARAK	26-April-2014	Gelding	Bay
SAHERAT AL LEIL	02-February-2015	Mare	Black
NASHEETAH MVA	02-March-2015	Mare	Grey
AZAN MVA	07-April-2016	Mare	Grey
JASSOURAH MVA	19-February-2016	Mare	Grey
ISSTOURAH MVA	03-April-2016	Mare	Grey
TAGREED MVA	09-March-2016	Mare	Bay
HEBAH MVA	28-April-2016	Mare	Black