



Anyone who has seen a beautiful portrait photo of an Arabian horse capturing its true expression, the soul in its eyes, and beauty that words cannot describe, has probably seen a photograph by Polly Knoll. The magnificence of her portraiture has become hallmark to her style. But she is not just a photographer, she is also an Arabian horse lover who began her profession at a time when many now famous ancestors of Egyptian horses were alive. So she had the opportunity to know most of them and interact with them. After over 40 years as a photographer, Polly Knoll continues to accept photo shoot commitments on a limited basis because photography and Arabian horses continue to be her passion. She is also actively working on production a forthcoming unique and artistic book covering over four decades of her beautiful photography. This book reflects her personal selections of photographs many depicting several generations of important horses and includes informative narrative about the horses. Those interested in supporting this special project can contact Polly Knoll at [pjknollphotos@charter.net](mailto:pjknollphotos@charter.net). So now it is indeed a pleasure to be able to listen to Polly share her wealth of experiences in this interview.

# An interview with

# Polly Knoll

■ by **Joe Ferriss**  
photos by Polly Knoll

**JF:** Polly, tell us a little about your background as it relates to both horses and your photography, growing up experiences etc.

**Polly Knoll:** When I was just a little girl I already liked horses but my parents did not encourage me to own one. However, my father was a very good photographer, and art and photography were his passion. So his influence on me led me into learning photography. I used to help him in the darkroom making prints, so early on I learned the principles of photography.

**JF:** What was your first exposure to Arabian horses?

**Polly Knoll:** The first time I remember seeing Arabian horses was in nearby Beaver Dam, Wisconsin when a Doctor had bought a horse from the Babson Farm. The man kept his beautiful little stallion in his back yard in a small pad-



dock and it was exciting to see him. Another man in town who was a good horseman had a grey Babson gelding and one time when he needed to be moved from the fairgrounds, and I had the privilege of riding him. One thing that stood out in my memory was that I was told you could tell he was unmistakably Arabian by the "lines in his face". And of course these early Arabians were especially special distinguished by their looks. The first horse farm visit that really made an impression on me was a visit to Cedardell Arabians, which was managed by the renowned horseman Red Byers. I went with some friends to see the horses and we got to see everything. I was testing out my brand new Leica camera so I took pictures. I was impressed with Juliep [by Gulastra and out of the lovely Aziza bred by Prince Mohammed Ali] and when I got home I sent them a little booklet of the photos I had taken and they were very impressed. I also visited the Babson farm. I saw Fa-Serr [by Fadl who was bred by Prince Mohammed Ali and out of Bint Serra who was bred by Prince Kemal El Dine] and he was so handsome and a rich black color. I thought how wonderful it would be to get a black colt by Fa-Serr but realized I could not afford it at the time.



The famous portrait of Morafic (Nazeer x Mabrouka) showing his magnificent face

**JF: So as time went on how did your love of horses and photography become a profession?**

*Polly Knoll: My daughter was born in 1961 and shortly after ward in the early 1960s I began taking more photos of horses. I was studying the work of George Ford Morris and other professional horse photographers in the magazines realizing that there is a need for good horse photography. I was working as a medical secretary at the time but it was a dead-end job. Unfortunately my marriage ended after eleven years and I had a daughter to raise so I needed to make my photography into a business. It was at the time when the Arabian horse business was really starting to grow so the demand was great. It was the right time for me.*

**JF: Your name has become synonymous with some of the most prized portrait photos of Arabians, particularly famous Egyptian Arabians, such as your famous Morafic portrait. Share with us now some memories of your experiences around some of the famous Egyptian horses that you have photographed.**

**Polly Knoll: Morafic (Nazeer x Mabrouka)**

*I first saw Morafic in 1972, when I did the now famous photo of him with the black background. Before that, the first photo I did of a horse with a black background was Morafic's son Amaal. I was photographing him at Deer Run Farm in Virginia, and Beverly Szriasky suggested that we could use a black background and it worked. At Gleannloch I used the same approach. We were a little concerned how to do it with Morafic because he was so energetic. However I knew Tom McNair had a good relationship with Morafic. All we had in front of him was a rope but he listened to Tom and the rope was sufficient to contain him while he showed how truly majestic he was. He conveyed such royalty, everyone would listen to his whims, and his skin was so soft and fine, almost translucent in appearance, and his bone structure was so clean and sculptural like a fine sculpture. He was a beautiful free moving horse. Another picture that came out well of Morafic was taken late in the afternoon. Tom actually had a piece of fine braided nylon that was as thin as a*



Morafic taking a late afternoon walk at Gleannloch Farms



Shaikh Al Badi (Morafic x Bint Maisa El Saghira)  
as a yearling at Ranch Ruminaja

an area between pastures where we used a pipe across the two pastures with a mare on the other side quite ways back. A wind came up blowing his mane just as he called out to the mare flaring his nostrils and raising his front leg. When cropped, the resulting picture looked just like a close up of a beautiful Arabian running into the wind.

***Ibn Moniet El Nefous (Morafic x Moniet El Nefous)***

There have been very few horses that I had problems with and I think most of it is man made--getting too rough or misunderstanding the horse and destroying its trust. I photographed Ibn Moniet El Nefous as a young horse shortly after he was imported by Jay Stream. Later in

filament and he could walk Morafic with it and you could hardly see it in the photo. Morafic was just so unforgettably ethereal to see.

***Shaikh Al Badi and his brother Amaal (Morafic x Bint Maisa El Saghira)***

I photographed Shaikh Al Badi only as a youngster but he was very nice. You could tell as a yearling he was going to be really impressive and have a good show career. His brother Amaal had fractured his ankle when young so he had no show career, being physically limited but Beverly took excellent care of him. He was different than his brother but still a fine horse with a big eye. Both of course turned out to be great sires, though Amaal's injuries limited his opportunity.

***Ruminaja Ali (Shaikh Al Badi x Bint Magidaa)***

He was beautiful and showy. He was a wonderful horse to work with and we got many good pictures with him. You could do anything with him. The often used picture of Ali which appears to look as though he is running toward you with wind in his mane was an interesting story. He was not running at all, he was standing. We had him in



"Drinker of the Wind" the famous photo of Ruminaja Ali  
(Shaikh Al Badi x Bint Magidaa)

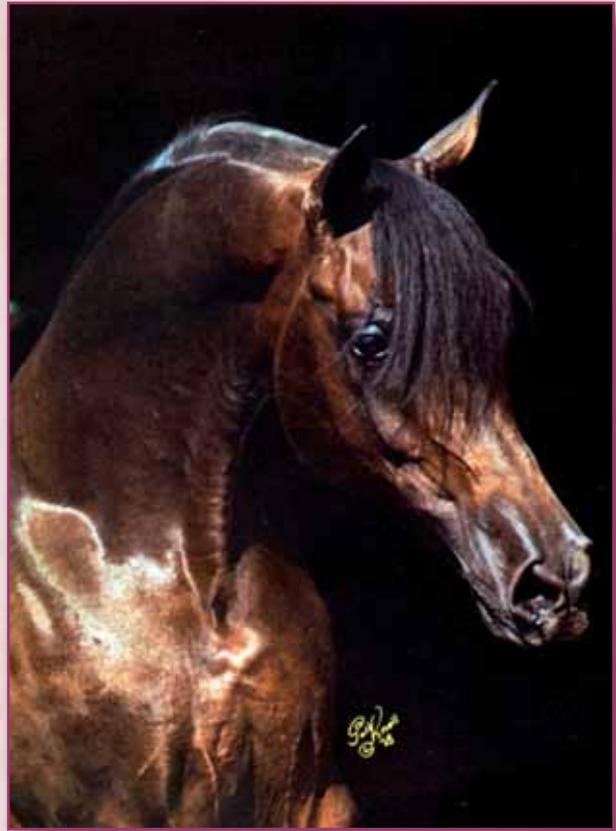
California, he had a reputation for being ill tempered, but he was just fine for me although the photos weren't as special as I wished. We had to be careful. A few years later I got to ride him a little at Bentwood and he was no problem under saddle. But on the ground he did not yet trust his handler. I was very impressed with him as a yearling. He had a beautiful face and was very nicely proportioned. I could tell he was going to be a very special horse.

**Soufian (Alaa El Din x Moniet El Nefous)**

He was a very striking horse with good conformation. He was an easy horse to work with. He did not know how to stand up very well, but the picture that I liked the most was when he was in front of the stallion quarters with the pillars and fountain in the background and for some reason he stood like a statue with his right rear leg held up. He looked more like his famous mother Moniet El Nefous with the same color and streaking in his mane. I photographed him at the new Barksdale Gleannloch facility and wanted to use the black background for a head portrait like I did with Morafic but we had to create it with a lot of straw bales and a big dark brown blanket.

**Fakher El Din (Nazeer x Moniet El Nefous)**

Both Fakher El Din and Talal (Nazeer x Zaafarana) were essentially rescued out of Egypt during a war betwe-



The magnificent Tuhotmos (El Sareei x Moniet El Nefous)



Another popular portrait this one of Fakher El Din (Nazeer x Moniet El Nefous). This photo was used on horse product labels and publications for the Farnham company

en Egypt and Israel by Sara Loken with the help of Jim Kline, the Marshalls and others. The only way they could get them through restricted military roads to the export shipping area was using a horse ambulance. In the U.S. Talal went to Jim Kline and Sara kept Fakher El Din. He had been ridden and trained for show but a trailering accident prevented his having a show career. Fakher El Din was a very nice horse, a fine chestnut, slight, not very big. He was a beautiful free moving horse like Morafic. He had a very pretty face. He crossed very well with other blood lines as well. Bill Lowe had searched all over for the perfect Egyptian stallion and decided that Fakher El Din was the one. He put a lot of work into getting him purchased and even had to build special high quality facilities but the deal did not go through. [This likely led Bill Lowe to the importation of Farazdac and Tuhotmos later.]

**Tuhotmos (El Sareei x Moniet El Nefous)**

He was a very showy horse always moving with light bouncy movements. He loved to show off and was used in parades in Egypt. He had the most amazing bone structure and dryness. You could photograph him from just about any angle and come up with something good. He was really very special. He had a very free nice easy going trot, he was a bit narrow, not unlike some other imports of the time, but moved very freely. One has to remember that many of the-

se earlier imports were raised in Egypt at a time of great economic struggle which affected issues like feed and farrier work. Later as conditions improved horse management was better. Tuhotmos was very easy to work with. Getting full body shots of Tuhotmos was a challenge because if there were no enticing mares around to get him to tighten up he was like a gelding. He was not interested in looking at another stallion. But bring out a mare and he would come alive. However, he was such a breeding horse that as soon as he saw a mare he would instantly let down himself exposing his desire. Back then the only thing that could be done was to air brush to remove the unmentionables from the scene. But it was not often done.

**Farazdac (Alaa El Din x Farasha)**

He is another horse that was very ethereal like Morafic. He had that same fine skin and clean sculpted bone structure. He was a bit taller than Morafic, with longer legs. When he arrived from importation he was very thin and not feeling very well. It was palm Sunday when Bill needed pictures for the cover of Arabian Horse World. So we had to put a decorative breast collar on him to help cover some of the thinness. The photo shoot was interesting at the time because Farazdac did not yet know any English, only Arabic. He was an energetic horse but he was very nice in



Imported as an outcross to Morafic breeding at Gleannloch, the handsome Ibn Hafiza (Sameh x Hafiza) as an older horse wearing the silver Egyptian Rashma

disposition and easy to work with. He was very kind. Also he could really move. On one photo shoot, we went over to the fair grounds and Bill Lowe had brought a four wheeled cart. We unloaded Farazdac, and Bill handed him to me and Farazdac just stood still and looked all around but did not move at all. He was studying his new surroundings but he stood completely quiet. We hooked him up and he was no problem at all and enjoyed his cart ride around the track. He had been raced in Egypt and did very well. He was just a wonderful horse to be around and a beautiful horse to see. Everyone loved him.

**Ibn Hafiza (Sameh x Hafiza)**

He was an exceptionally flexible horse, a fantastic mover, springy trot and a very easy way of going. He must have been fun to ride. The last time I got a portrait of him was as an old horse when he was in New Mexico. We put on the "rashma" a beautiful fine silver chain Egyptian halter and got a very nice picture of him. Because he was such a nice horse to handle we could use the fine chain without worry of him breaking it. The most memorable impression was of his excellent movement.



The incredibly ethereal Farazdac (Alaa El Din x Farasha)



The beautiful moving Deenaa (Sameh x Dahma II)  
grand dam of Anaza El Farid

***Deenaa (Sameh x Dahma II)***

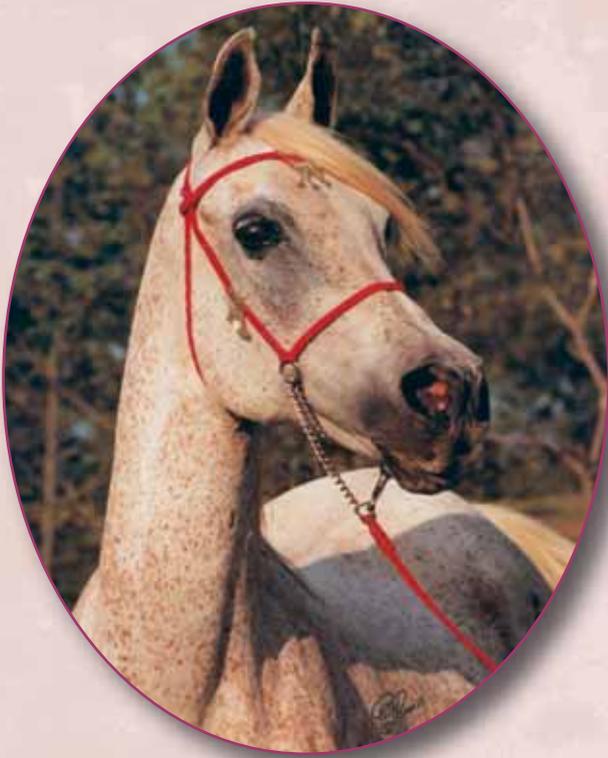
*She also had excellent movement. She could trot really well so was good for an action shot that I took at St. Clairs. She was such a free moving horse. Les and Lois really loved that mare and bred some really great horses from her daughter Bint Deenaa (x Ansata Ibn Halima).*

***Nabiel (Sakr x Magidaa)***

*Bill and Pat Trapp went down to Gleannloch and picked out Nabiel out of all the yearlings available. Bill was a great horseman and he picked right because Nabiel turned out to be exceptional. Nabiel grew to be a big horse, with a beautiful head, long neck and good overall quality. He was a big winner in the show ring at the National level but also proved a great sire no matter how you bred him. He crossed well with all lines. He was another horse who worked very well with me in photo shoots.*



Nabiel (Sakr x Magidaa), a great horse and a great sire



The regal Binte El Bataa (Nazeer x El Bataa)  
one of the last Nazeer daughters

***Binte El Bataa (Nazeer x El Bataa)***

*She was an old Nazeer daughter at Bill Larsen's. She was queenly and very noble. I had stayed with the Larsens for a few days and I had given Binte El Bataa a bath shortly after foaling and before photographing her. She was very elegant and regal but was not interested in getting her picture taken and we could not get her to present herself properly. She probably wanted back in the barn. Then Kaia Larsen got the idea to get her hang glider out and it really got her attention resulting in the Binte El Bataa portrait that appeared on a magazine cover.*

***Ansata Ibn Sudan (Ansata Ibn Halima x Ansata Bint Mabrouka) and Ansata Ibn Halima (Nazeer x Halima)***

*I was at the Nationals in Oklahoma when Judi Forbis asked me to take photos at her place. On that day Judi had to handle the horses, and since she is small like me, it was a challenge to get Ansata Ibn Sudan to raise his head up high enough. Ansata Ibn Sudan had been National Champion and had been shown to his win by the tall Maurice Wingo who was easily tall enough to display Ibn Sudan's beautiful long neck but we did not have his assistance on that day. Ansata Ibn Sudan was a great National Champion, very handsome, but on his photos that day he was leaning somewhat. Later in Lufkin, Texas when I was photographing horses at other farms, Judi asked me to stop at her farm. When I arrived Judi had already arranged a beautiful black background in a barn doorway but we had little*

*help. Ansata Ibn Halima, such a beautiful horse was very quiet that day and perhaps he was not feeling all that well so we did not get a really animated shot. This was not too long before the move to Mena, Arkansas, and shortly after that move Ansata Ibn Halima passed away.*

***Ansata Bint Misuna (Nazeer x Misuna) and Ansata Bint Mabrouka (Nazeer x Mabrouka)***

*She was a pretty mare but had a split in her nostril so the right angle for photographing was necessary. Bint Mabrouka was also lovely with beautiful eyes.*

***Ansata Bint Zaafarana (Nazeer x Zaafarana)***

*This mare was lovely. I thought she was just beautiful and I had said to Judi that she should be a show mare. She was beautifully proportioned and just a really nice mare. She became a broodmare and her foals were definitely special. I also really liked her full brother Talal that James Kline owned.*

***Ansata Abu Nazeer and Glorieta Sayonaara (Ansata Abu Nazeer x Glorieta Shahlima)***

*Ansata Abu Nazeer was by Ansata Ibn Halima and out of Ansata Bint Zaafarana. I really liked him. Every time I photographed him I got something good. He was beautiful, a perfect little horse. Sadly he died as a nine year old but he was a great sire. I fell in love with his daughter Glorieta Sayonaara. She was so beautiful but also so wonderful to work with. She was very agreeable and with the sweetest disposition. She was a joy to photograph and be around.*



The lovely Ansata Bint Misuna (Nazeer x Maysouna),  
dam of Ansata Abu Nazeer



One of the sweetest mares, Glorieta Sayonaara  
(Ansata Abu Nazeer x Glorieta Shahlima)

# An interview with Polly Knoll



## *Imperial Imdal (Ansata Imperial x Dalia)*

*I got to know him when he was owned by the Vale's in New Jersey. He was an absolutely wonderful horse. He was so good. His conformation was excellent, and he was a great horse to photograph. He enjoyed doing anything you asked of him. One time at the Egyptian Event, we decided to have some fun with him at the steeplechase track. So we got Whit Byers up on him just bareback, no saddle, and let him run around the area of the track for some interesting pictures. It was a very fun photo session.*

*JF: After all these years of seeing and photographing Arabian horses, generally describe what you think is the ideal Arabian horse.*

*Polly Knoll: He should look like an Arabian in every sense, he should show good spirit but be smart and kind, he should appreciate people and be balanced so that he is a good ride as well as great to look at. □*



Imperial Imdal (Ansata Imperial x Dalia) at liberty with Whit Byers