

# AN INTERVIEW WITH Judith Forbis

BY JUDITH WICH-WENNING



Judith Forbis at the 2012 Egyptian Event Gala Fund Raising Dinner.  
Photo by Lisa Abraham.



Mohammed Al-Marzouq, owner of Ajmal Stud, and Judith Forbis at one of the Kuwaiti horse shows. Al-Marzouq was a guiding light in the re-establishment of the breed in Kuwait after the Gulf War. Ghazy photo.

**A**nsata Arabian Stud is legendary – the breeding program founded by Judith and Don Forbis has changed Egyptian Arabian horse breeding on an incomparable scale. When they imported their first Arabian horses Ansata Ibn Halima, Ansata Bint Mabrouka and Ansata Bint Zaaфарana from the Egyptian State Stud of El Zahraa in 1958, they laid the foundation for a unique story of success. Innumerable people and breeding programs worldwide were influenced by the Ansata breeding program as well as by Judith Forbis' standard works "The Classic Arabian Horse", "Authentic Arabian Bloodstock I + II", etc. In 2008, Don Forbis sadly passed away and the farm in Mena, Arkansas was closed. Judith Forbis lives today on her picturesque lakeside property, not far from the old stud farm. Arabian horse enthusiasts around the globe currently eagerly await her latest book about the legendary stallion Ansata Hejazi. Being interviewed by Judith Wich-Wenning, Judith Forbis shares with us her personal thoughts regarding current projects and everyday life. She talks about Ansata's unique history as well as today's developments in Egyptian Arabian horse breeding. Moreover, Judith Forbis gives us an insight into her plans for the future.

**Judith Wich-Wenning:** *At the All Nations Cup in Aachen in 2016, you received the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award. Please describe your thoughts during the award ceremony.*

**Judith Forbis:** *The main thing that went through my mind during the ceremony, and even before, was that this recognition belongs to the many Arabian breeders, trainers, photographers and enthusiasts who supported the*



Great times in Bremen, 2013. From left to right: Judith Wich-Wenning, Judith Forbis, Omar Sakr, Marion Richmond, Lisa Lacy.





Judith Forbis receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2016 All Nations Cup from former WAHO president, Dr. Hans-Joachim Nagel and Wolfgang Eberhardt, Chairman of the VZAP. Judith Forbis is the first person to receive this newly established award.  
Photo by Lisa Abraham.

*Ansata vision and "the Ansata look" for nearly 60 years. It was my privilege to judge the Nation's Cup in the past. I remember how much I enjoyed the concept of the show and the quality of horses being exhibited at that time, and I was amazed to see the many new improvements that made it even more exciting and attractive this year. I have been blessed with numerous breeder achievement awards, but to*

*receive this acknowledgement at the Nations Cup, which I have admired so much in contrast to the way many other shows are run today, was an overwhelming honor indeed.*

**Judith Wich-Wenning: Please tell us about your current projects.**

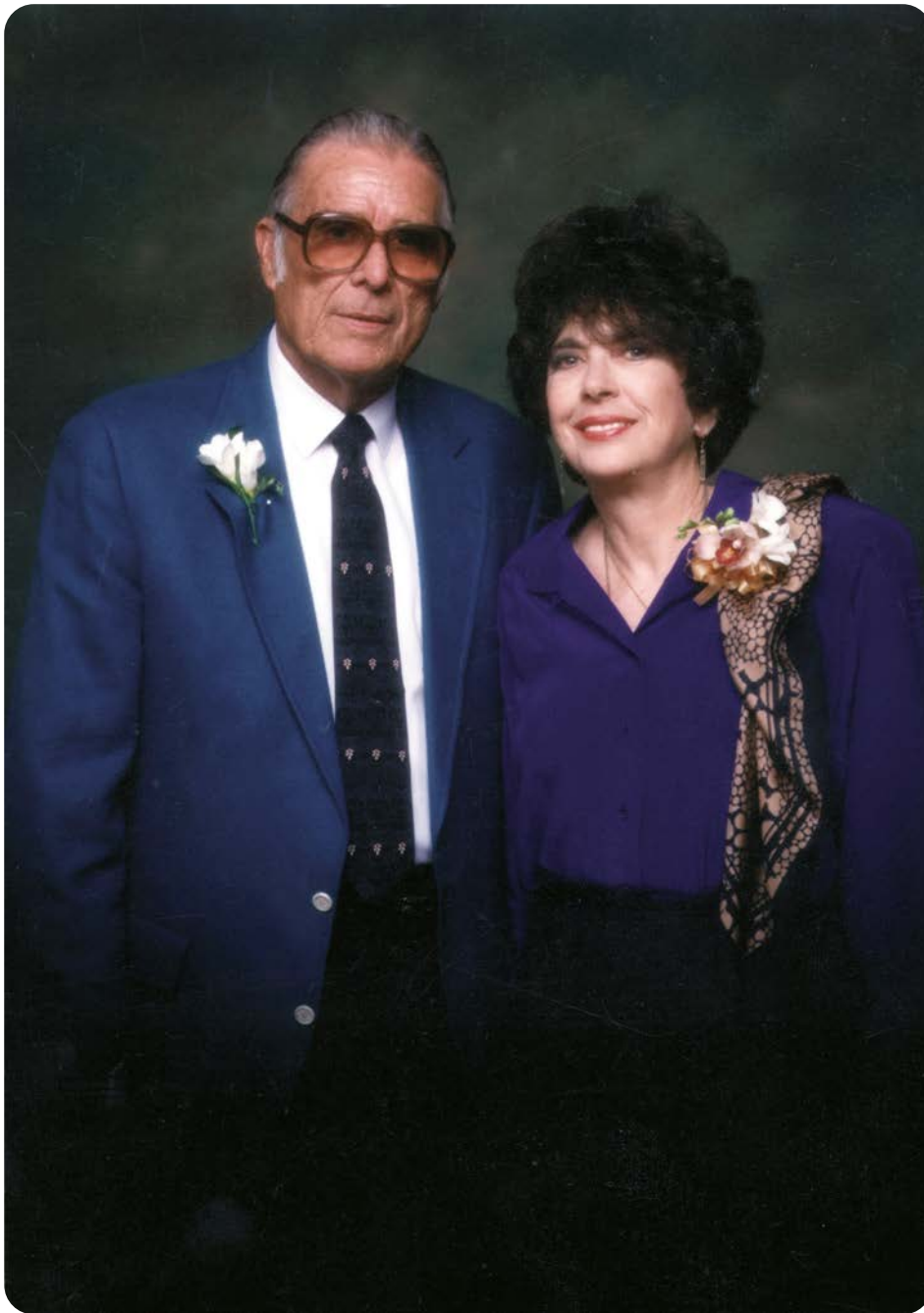


Judith Forbis and Dr. Hans-Joachim Nagel at the 2016 All Nations Cup in Aachen.  
Photo by Lisa Abraham.

**Judith Forbis:** *The Arabian horse community keeps me active in various ways, but particularly through writing articles and books, the most recent being: "ANSATA HEJAZI - Born to Rule. Inspiring Lessons from the Life of a Majestic Arabian Stallion". My long-time friend and associate, Cynthia Culbertson was managing editor and contributor and we have worked tirelessly to produce a*

*one-of-a-kind historical documentation about a wonderful horse who truly made a difference in the breed worldwide. Ansata Hejazi literally put Kuwait back on the map of breeding superior Arabian horses after the Gulf War decimated the breed in that country. Additionally, I recently wrote an article about Ansata Halim Shah as well as one honoring HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani*





Judith Forbis and the late Don Forbis pictured at the time they were inaugurated into the Arabian Horse Trust Tent of Honor.

(ruled Qatar 1972-1995), for his devotion to Arabian horses leading up to the renaissance of the Arabian horse in the Arab world. As a member of the Board of Trustees, there are always Pyramid Society activities, such as breeders conferences, Reference Handbooks, etc., that I participate in.

remodeling job. Recently I purchased an adjoining lakeside property with an attractive A-frame home and large workshop that is perfect for holding gatherings. Developing the properties along with looking after a few chickens, my Pomeranian dog, Prince George, and Sassy, my seven-toed mitten cat, occupy my time. I love to sit on the back porch and watch the bald eagles fish the lake and

**Judith Wich-Wenning:** *Do you currently own Arabian horses?*

**Judith Forbis:** *In 2008, just after we sold the Ansata ranch in Mena, Don passed away. I no longer own any Arabians, nor do I intend to. However, I maintain private cooperative ventures as a consulting partner with certain breeders. I have also retained frozen semen from many of my important stallions and will be using that judiciously with select mares in the near future. With so much of the Ansata blood having been exported and now being bred in foreign countries, it would be rewarding to restore some of it in America.*

**Judith Wich - Wenning:** *Please tell us about your everyday life.*

**Judith Forbis:** *Developing the properties I've purchased overlooking Lake Wilhelmina in Mena, Arkansas has kept me busy. The original residence, which I rebuilt, has a magnificent view of the lake and Ouachita mountains. A charming log cabin guest house was another*



*listen to the Canadian geese who live here. Huge white pelicans always stop by during their migration; they are fascinating to observe. Occasionally friends and I go kayaking on the lake. Sharing my home and nature's bounty with many guests who come for a visit is my pleasure. I travel fairly often, but most frequently to Kuwait and the Middle East. In addition to writing, I'm thinking about painting again. Drawing horses at an early age, and later as a commercial artist, honed my eye to recognize balance, beauty, and harmony.*

**Judith Wich-Wenning:** *What would you tell someone who is thinking about buying an Egyptian Arabian horse?*

**Judith Forbis:** *Most important is: Why do you want an Egyptian Arabian horse in particular? Initially you must understand the breed characteristics and history (i.e., know your breed before you breed it). If breeding quality horses is your goal, that is*

Friends: Sheikhha Sarah Fahad Al-Sabah (left) and Judith Forbis (right) at Bait Al Arab Kuwait State Stud. Sheikhha Sarah is much admired for her dedication to the Arabian horse and for her major assistance as Assistant Undersecretary of the Amiri Diwan and Chief of the Arabian Horse Center, Bait Al Arab. Sheikhha Sarah was responsible for overseeing the transfer of the Bait Al Arab State Stud to the protectorate and sponsorship of the Amiri Diwan. Photo by Richard T. Bryant.



A lovely day in 2013. From left to right: Sheikh Dr. Ali Nasser Al-Sabah, Judith Wich-Wenning, Judith Forbis and Fatma Hamza.





Judith Forbis, Ansata Samiha and Mauri Chase. Ansata Samiha is by Prince Fa Moniet and out of the famous Ansata Samantha by Ansata Ibn Halima. She is the dam of the head stallion Ansata Sheikh Halim at Bait Al Arab Kuwait State Stud and Ansata Marengo at Sakr Arabians in Egypt. Richard T. Bryant photo.

*a long-term proposition. You must commit years of dedication to achieve recognizable success. Vision, purpose, sacrifice, and patience are requisite. It is critical to visit reputable breeders, attend Arabian horse events, and study pedigrees and photos of horses past and present. Be discerning. There are different types even within the Egyptian breed. It is important to decide what pleases **your** eye, not somebody else's. I also suggest reading my*

*books **Authentic Arabian Bloodstock**, Volumes I and II, as they outline and profusely illustrate successful breeding principles. My forthcoming book about Ansata Hejazi perfectly describes what makes Arabian horses and their owners special and provides a completely new way of looking at and constructing a pedigree.*

*I would also advise anyone to learn to draw horses; it*



Anna Bishop, long-time Executive Director of the Pyramid Society, and Judith Forbis, a past president and member of the Society's Board of Trustees, enjoy their visit during a recent Kuwaiti International Show. Ghazy photo.

*focuses and trains the eye to recognize values and faults in live horses. Learning to photograph horses is also valuable; it also trains the eye and teaches one that photographs often lie and can easily be manipulated. Never judge a horse just by its photo or a film; if you intend to buy, it is best to go and see the horse and its relatives if possible.*

*I absolutely encourage all newcomers to join The Pyramid Society and attend the annual Egyptian Event in Lexington, Kentucky, as well as other similar activities around the world in Europe, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt etc. Here one can meet and visit with members of the worldwide Arabian horse community as well as see a broad scope of Egyptian Arabian horses. This breed belongs to the world, no longer just to Egypt, and it is important to understand its*





Sunset over Lake Wilhelmina as viewed from the back porch of the Forbis residence.  
Lisa Abraham photo.

*worldwide attraction and those who hold its reins in their grasp.*

*This interview is certainly not long enough to answer your question, Judith, but the above suggestions can be a helpful guide.*

***Judith Wich-Wenning:*** *If you could have dinner with anybody from the past or present, whom would you choose?*

***Judith Forbis:*** *It's hard to choose – there are so many. Among them would be Abbas Pasha, Lady Anne Blunt, and Elizabeth Taylor. All have influenced my life in some way.*

***Judith Wich-Wenning:*** *What was for you emotionally most rewarding during the many decades of breeding Egyptian Arabian horses?*

***Judith Forbis:*** *Anyone who breeds Arabian horses for decades has had many rewarding experiences. However,*





Surprise visitors to the tree beside the back porch, this family of young coons was very inquisitive. The Forbis estate, named Eagles Rest, is home to various creatures, large and small. Van Natta photo.

*receiving the University of Louisville's 2004 Galbreath Award for Outstanding Entrepreneurship in the Equine Industry was especially meaningful because I was the first woman to ever receive it. Established in 1990 it was named in honor of John W. Galbreath, a true horseman, entrepreneur, sportsman, longtime owner of the Pittsburgh Pirates and owner of the famed Darby Dan thoroughbred farm. The award is presented annually to an individual selected from entrepreneurs in the horse industry worldwide and who have changed the industry in some*

*positive way. D. Wayne Lucas, John Lyons, John A. Bell are just a few of the famous horsemen who have been honored.*

**Judith Wich-Wenning:** *What do you find most challenging about breeding Arabian horses and how can we overcome this?*

**Judith Forbis:** *There are many challenges to breeding Arabian horses and some of them cannot be overcome;*





Sassy the seven-toed "mitten" cat, with her mistress.  
Lisa Abraham photo.

they are part of life. Accidents will happen, plans will be decimated by losses of many kinds. Another big challenge is overcoming certain diseases that pop up out of nowhere. Understanding them, defeating them through research and new management methods or medicine, or circumventing them through changing certain breeding practices, is critical without jumping to conclusions and "throwing the baby out with the bath water". Breeding out certain faults or striving for desired characteristics is also a challenge - It requires thoughtful study and perseverance. Sometimes it is necessary to take a step backwards before going forwards, since heredity often jumps a generation. It also

critical for everyone in the Arabian horse community to realize is that it requires strong unselfish leadership within the breed's various organizations to assure the breed moves forward.

**Judith Wich-Wenning:** *How do you evaluate the current development in Egyptian Arabian horse breeding?*

**Judith Forbis:** *I look back to 1959 when Don and I first visited at El Zahraa in Egypt and the stallions Nazeer, Sid Abouhom, El Sarie, Sameh, Antar, Alaa El Din, Morafic, and the historical mares Moniet El Nefous, Mona, Mabrouka, Bukra, Maisa, Futna, among others were alive. About a week later we saw the stallions Fay El Dine, FaSerr and Fabah, and the mares Maaroufa, FaHabba, Fada, Aana, Fay Negma, Aaroufa, Fay Roufa, Fay Sabbah among other splendid individuals at the Babson Farm in Illinois, USA. First impressions stay with you forever. To some degree I measure what I see in the present by the horses that impressed us in the past, for it was they who determined Don's and my future dedication solely to the Egyptian bloodlines. Today certain breeding programs have maintained that classic quality and type that we first saw. A visit to select farms in Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt confirms that this type is alive and well in that region of the world. In North America and Europe some excellent programs exist, but the days of the big Straight Egyptian*

*breeding farms in America such as Gleannloch, Ansata, Imperial, Lancer, etc., are mostly gone and have been replaced by much smaller programs and establishments.*

*The Pyramid Society has recently published **The Pyramid Society Stud Book for Straight Egyptian Arabian Horses Worldwide**. This is an invaluable step in establishing - in print - an indisputable reference list of Straight Egyptian horses as defined by the Society. The indiscriminate bloodline bashing of certain horses by self-serving individuals or groups to make particular bloodlines less marketable has hurt the industry. This has to stop. There is*



The Forbis residence above Lake Wilhelmina in Mena, Arkansas. Van Natta photo.

*literally no basis in fact for these accusations. Anything defined as "Straight Egyptian" by the Pyramid Society is indisputable. Personal choices in bloodlines and individual horses are always a factor in anyone's breeding choices and program, but a Straight Egyptian embraces all horses within the Society's definition.*

**Judith Wich-Wenning:** *Where do you think is the future of the Egyptian Arabian horse?*

**Judith Forbis:** *The entire Arabian horse world has seen many changes, and in some countries a decline in registrations these past ten years due to world economic reversals. The renaissance of the breed in the Arab countries has seen many of the finest horses sold to and now bred in those regions. However, there are still excellent ones remaining in other parts of the world. While horse shows provide competition and exposure to the public, too much emphasis has been placed on winning and prestige by any means. Other entertaining activities and educational events must be developed so people can enjoy celebrating their horses in a relatively non-competitive basis. The challenges for discretionary income,*

*the dislike of "horse shows" in general as they exist today, and the financial constraints of attending shows and long-distance activities have forced many breeders and owners to stay home and/or quit breeding. Again, strong leadership in the Arabian horse community in eliminating abuse to the horses, and "thinking outside the box" to develop broader activities, are needed to maintain what we have today and to attract new people to the breed.*

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

**Judith Forbis:** *I look forward to remaining somewhat active in the Arabian horse community worldwide. Judging horse shows and living abroad during Don's years in the oil business have taken me to many countries worldwide. However, India, Scotland, Italy, and more of the United States, Canada, Mexico are on my "bucket list." I am anxious to host occasional gatherings of like-minded breeders and Arabian enthusiasts here at the lake to discuss the arts and their relation to the art breeding Arabian horses. Life remains exciting in so many ways. Every day when I wake up and look at the beauty of nature before me, I am glad to be alive! ■*



Judith Forbis and her special Nile blue kayak. Van Natta photo.