

# Strength of Spirit

## Celebrating Judith Forbis's



Judi in her kayak



by

JENNIFER OGDEN

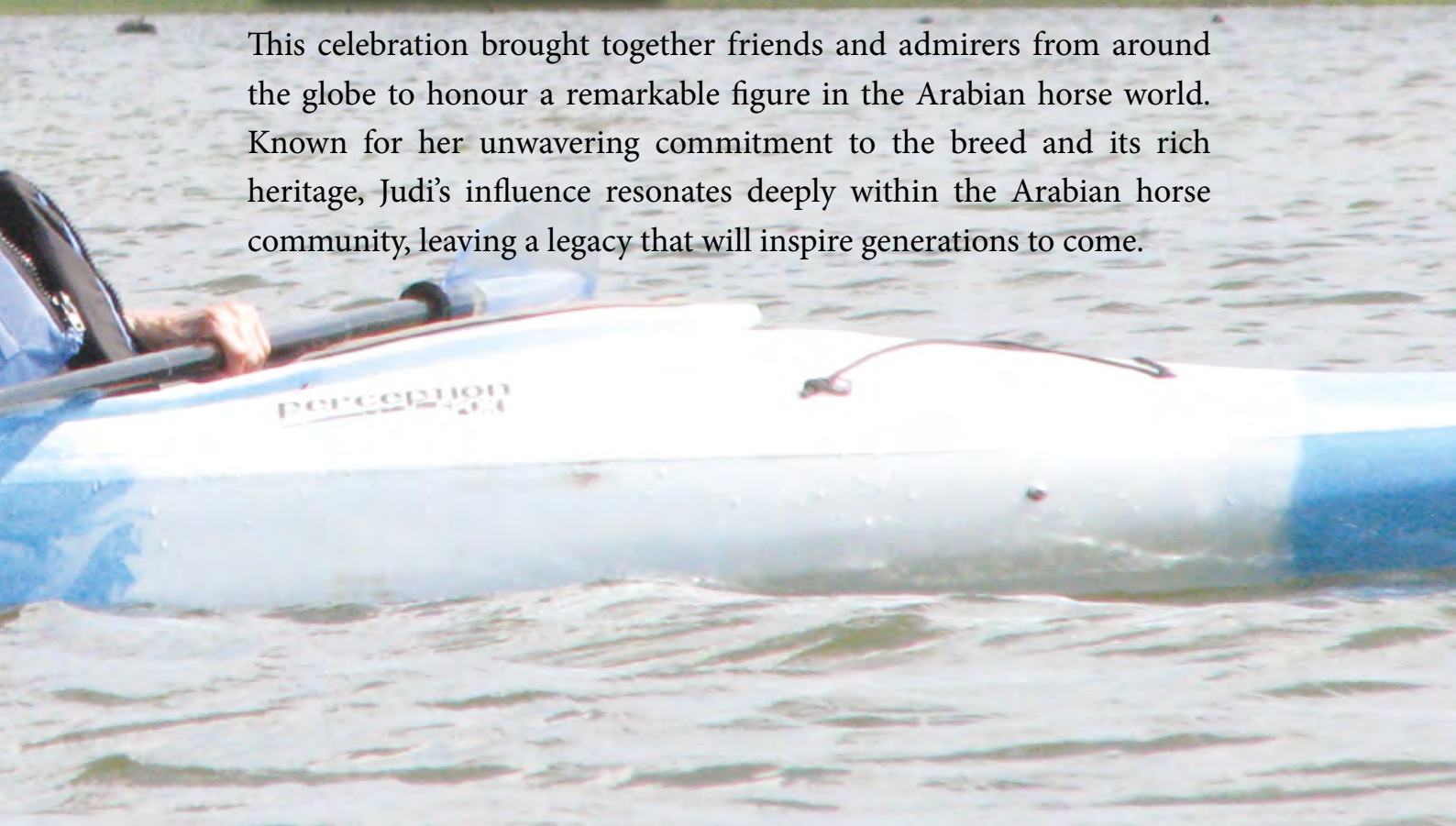
# 90th Birthday

Renee Caspar Painting of Judith



As the Arabian horse community gathered to celebrate Judith Forbis's 90th birthday, it became evident that this occasion signified more than just a personal milestone; it represented a life rich in passion, creativity, and deep connections with both horses and the people who love them.

This celebration brought together friends and admirers from around the globe to honour a remarkable figure in the Arabian horse world. Known for her unwavering commitment to the breed and its rich heritage, Judi's influence resonates deeply within the Arabian horse community, leaving a legacy that will inspire generations to come.





When longtime friends Walter Mishek, founder of \*Arabian Horse Times\* magazine, and his wife Cheryl learned of Judi's upcoming birthday, they felt compelled to celebrate it in grand style. With infectious enthusiasm, they organized an invitational gathering at the beautiful home of Frank and Robin Semple in Tulsa, Oklahoma, coinciding with the 2024 US National Arabian Horse Show. They didn't stop there; they collaborated with their friend Stan Morey to arrange a short presentation in the ring where Judi would be honoured for her contributions to the Arabian breed, recognizing that many of today's successful horses worldwide carry the blood of her Ansata breeding program. Notably, between 2011 and 2023 at the US Nationals, 16 Ansata horses were represented among the pedigrees of Senior Stallion and Mare Champions and Reserve Champions, with a total of 84 lines traced back to the Ansata breeding program, including Ansata Ibn Halima, who appeared 42 times.

As Judi's friends and family gathered to celebrate, it became clear that this was not just a birthday party but a tribute to the relationships and memories woven throughout her lifetime.

The ambiance of the Semples' home, adorned with exquisite Native American art, was filled with laughter, heartfelt conversations, and an outpouring of love and gratitude. Guests eagerly shared their personal stories of how Judi's passion for Arabian horses had shaped their own lives. The evening culminated in a special video tribute to Judi's journey, produced by longtime friend Darryl Larson, followed by a heartfelt presentation recognizing her lifetime of contributions to the breed and community she so dearly loves.

David Gardner then read a beautiful tribute he



Don and Judith Forbis



Judith and David Gardner



Forbis's books



from left to right, Frank Semple, Cheryl Mishek,





Judith riding Her first Arabian  
mare Ceylon

had written for Judi a few years earlier, which she proudly keeps framed in her office.

*She is a woman of letters and deeds, learned in the ways of desert horses. She knows of what she speaks. Regrettably, most people and their passions never cross paths. Others only brush sleeves with their passion in a hushed passing. Too often defeated for a thousand good reasons or ploughed under by life's unequal circumstances, they are ever wed to their passion. Scarcely one person each hundred years, in the rarified air of great creativity and dogged pursuit, chase their passion to the highest level of excellence and metaphysical understanding. The passion for desert horses is no exception. It is an exhaustive, unbending, unfaltering, all-consuming pursuit which taken in its entirety, leads to unprecedented*

*accomplishment. The result is a great and meaningful body of work for centuries hence. It is the most unselfish gift to others that will be embraced well beyond the grave of its giver such accomplishment, at the highest level imaginable, is the greatest glorification and the highest evidence to God that a gift that He has lent to us has infinite depth and meaning. This is you. With great admiration and affection, David Gardner.*

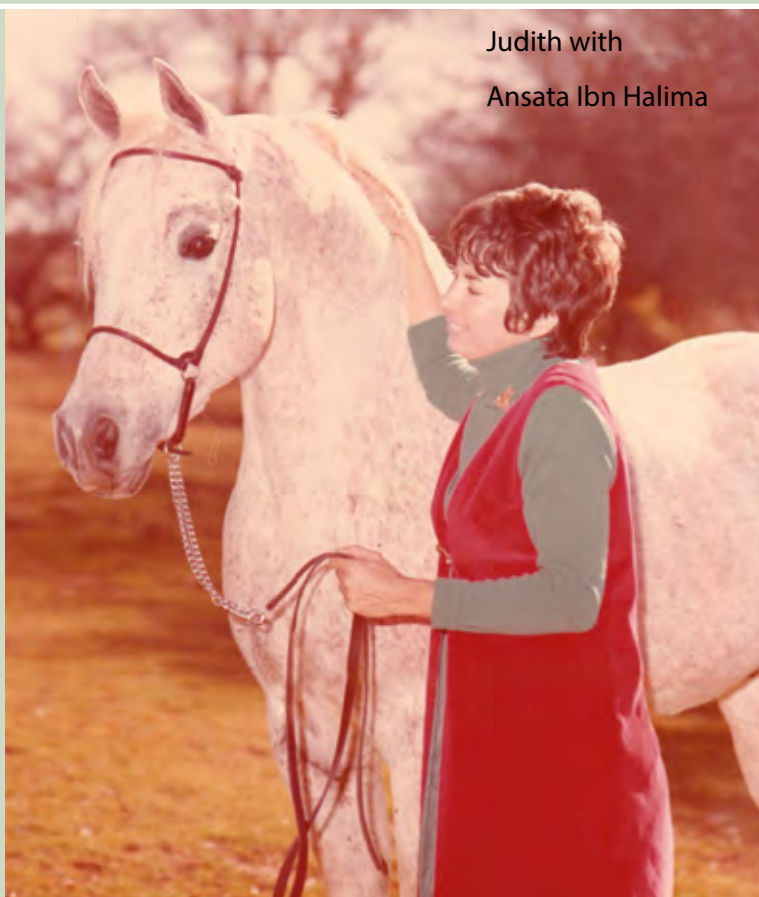
*After the show, my husband Paul, Bart Van Buggenhaut, and I travelled to Judi's home in Mena, Arkansas, where Paul and I settled into her cozy log cabin guesthouse for the week. Our days were filled with the warmth of her home, which overlooked Lake Wilhelmina, with every corner adorned with cherished art and mementos from a life devoted*



Judith is a wonderful horse woman, here she is handling Ansata Ibn Sudan for one of many presentations



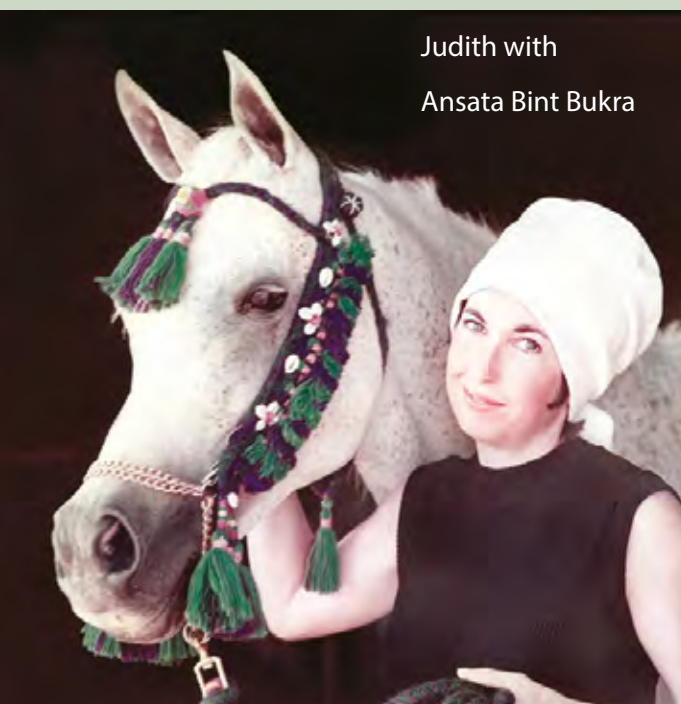
Judith with Ansata Ibn Halima



Judith with Ansata Ibn Halima and Poopsi her first Chihuahua



Judith with Ansata Bint Bukra



Judith with Prince George & Sassy  
the six toed cat in front of the picture  
window overlooking Ouachita  
Mountains and Valley Below.

*to travel and to the Arabian horse, particularly the legacy of the Straight Egyptian Arabian.*

*The first few days were spent relaxing as we indulged in delicious meals prepared by Judi while taking in the stunning Autumn colours through a large picture window that framed views of the Ouachita Mountains and the valley below. On the 29th, Judi's actual birthday, Bart invited all of us to enjoy lunch at the Queen Wilhelmina Lodge, perched atop Rich Mountain. Later that evening, several of Judi's local friends joined us at her home.*

*I was not surprised to discover that Judi was a talented artist and illustrator, having worked for a greeting card company in her earlier years, mentored by someone who had worked for Walt Disney. In addition, Judi has written and illustrated several children's books and stories about the animals in her life. We spent an afternoon exploring some of her old portfolios, filled with delightful stories, illustrations, and cartoons.*

*During our stay, I had the privilege of conducting an interview with Judi, during which she shared her profound insights and memories. It was a remarkable opportunity to hear her story in her own voice, illuminating the treasures of her past. I also took the time to capture some memorable photos of her with her cherished and pampered Pomeranian, "George", and 6 toed cat "Sassy" for this article.*

**Jennifer: What is the secret to your success?**

Judith: Not everyone has the opportunity in life to do what they love, my advice is to do what you love, and love what you do.

There are things in life that are foreordained and that we come into this world for a purpose and if we are smart enough to make the sacrifices needed



to fulfil that purpose that is the greatest recipe for success. And you must have mentors along the way that believe in you. I was very lucky in that my parents and family supported my dreams, but I was determined to make them come true, regardless.

**Jennifer: How did your passion for Arabians developed?**

Judith: My passion for horses began at the age of three when my parents took me for an afternoon drive, and we passed a pony ring. Within minutes, I was riding the ponies-Minnie, a black pony, and Silver, a white one who quickly became my favourite. As I grew older and outgrew the ponies, I transitioned to riding Zsa Zsa Gabor's black gelding, Black Watch, which led to my first blue ribbon victory. At the time, Zsa Zsa was married to Conrad Hilton and lived near our home in Bay Shore, Long Island, New York.

When I was around five years old, my parents, William and Audrey Freni, divorced, despite the



separation, they maintained a connection with my Aunt Evelyn and her husband, George Whitwell. George, who was crippled from polio and unable to travel, had a deep passion for the mysteries and history of Egypt, which he instilled in me, sparking my own fascination with the Middle East. He also nurtured my love for animals; for my 12th birthday, he and my aunt gifted me Walter Farley's book, \*The Black Stallion\*. This book profoundly changed my life, inspiring me to dream of racing Arabians across deserts in Arab lands and envisioning a future filled with Arabian horses. Both of those dreams eventually came true, and I later became friends with Walter Farley, who encouraged me to continue writing my own books.

### Jennifer: Which have been the most important animals in your life?

Judith: I've had a deep love for animals for as long as I can remember, and I'm fortunate that my parents encouraged this passion. My first pet was a little black-and-white Fox Terrier named Skippy, who was my best friend until a tragic day when he escaped our backyard and was run over. I was heartbroken; however, it prepared me to handle life and death at an early age and to understand that animals are loaned to us only for an appointed time. Throughout the years, I have owned many dogs, each an important part of my life. I developed a particular fondness for Collies, inspired by the movie \*Lassie Come Home\*, and eventually bred

Judith riding Silver  
her first pony



Judith with Black Watch  
owned by Zsa Zsa  
Gabor, a Black gelding  
that she won her first  
blue ribbon on







Rudolph Valentino and Elizabeth Taylor like the movie stars. They were sitting on a Harley Davidson



Judith with Poopsie a gift from Don

and showed several of this breed. Later, a special silver Miniature Poodle named Bel Tor Floodtide entered my life; he was a successful show dog who accompanied Don and me to Iran. One Christmas, Don surprised me with a tiny chocolate brown Chihuahua that we named Poopsie, a name chosen for obvious reasons. This sparked our love for this spirited little breed, and after Poopsie sadly passed away at the age of 14, we welcomed several more Chihuahuas, all named after movie stars: Charley Chaplin, Joan Crawford, Rudi Valentino, and our shining star, Elizabeth Taylor. Elizabeth loved to pose for the camera, and Richard Bryant captured some fantastic photos of her and Rudi dressed in Harley Davidson outfits, sitting on a black Harley bike!

After all the Chihuahuas had passed, I went for a period without any dogs. Then, while at a horse show, I laid eyes on an adorable Pomeranian puppy and instantly fell in love. I decided to enrich my life with a dog again and reached out to the puppy's breeder. She had a little blonde pup born on the same day as Prince George of England, so I named him Prince George of Ansata, who joined me and my rescued six-toed "Hemingway" cat named Sassy,

who has ruled the house for years and continues to do so at the age of 14.

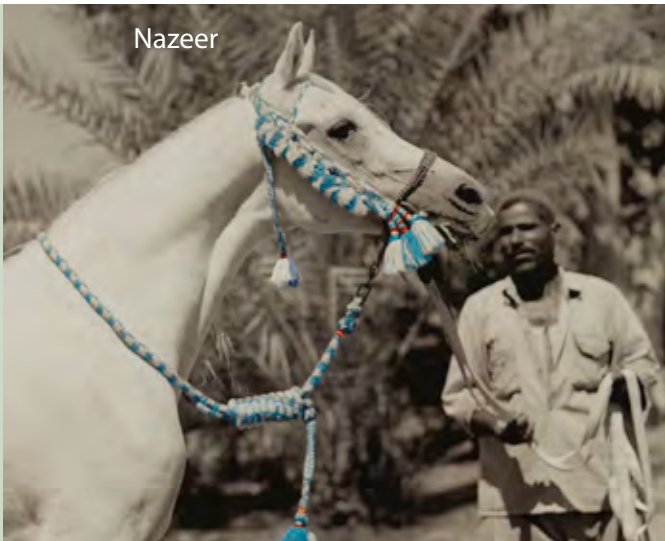
**Jennifer: Of all the horses in your life, which one did you connect with best.**

Judith: There were a few but for the mares, Bint Mabrouka was the love of my life. She only had one filly, and it died. That broke my heart, but she had three wonderful sons that have left serious marks on the breed. I loved Ansata Ibn Halima, but Ansata Ibn Sudan was my first love; he craved constant attention. I was there when he was born, and he was like my child. He loved people and loved to show off. He would bang on the stall walls until I would come and give him attention, and he would even sometimes play dead in the stall! He was a real character.

Sudan was the ultimate show horse, he had that special "look at me" attitude, and this is why I decided to show him. As many people know Hansi Heck and I had a real love hate relationship, but the same year Sudan won US National Champion, Hansi called and asked if I could look after Serenity Sonbolah and prepare her for the US Nationals so we had National Champion Mare and National



Nazeer



Nazeer Daughters



Champion stallion at our farm at the same time.

**Jennifer: What are the most memorable experiences in your life?**

Judith: There are certainly many unforgettable experiences to reflect on. Meeting Don Forbis while I was working with USAID in Ankara, Turkey, and later marrying him there stands out as a pivotal moment in my life. This relationship led us to race Arabians in Turkey and eventually travel to Egypt. Don grew up riding quarter horses, and the first horse he raced was named Silver—ironically, the same name as the first pony I rode when I was three years old. After our marriage, we purchased two Arabian racehorses, one of which was a chestnut mare named Sohret. I rode her in races throughout southeastern Turkey, and she saved my life on several occasions. Despite her offset front knees, she carried me to many victories, teaching me that heart and determination often outweigh the imperfections of a horse's conformation. This story is lovingly chronicled in my book, *\*Hoofbeats Along the Tigris\**.

Another memorable experience was witnessing the magnificent horses at the Egyptian Agricultural Organization (EAO) in 1959, including celebrated

stallions like Nazeer, Aswan, Morafic, and El Sareei, as well as notable mares such as Bukra, Moniet el Nefous, and Mabrouka. That year, we also imported our first three yearlings: Ansata Ibn Halima, Ansata Bint Mabrouka, and Ansata Bint Zaafarana.

I also cherish the moments I spent watching the first foals sired by Ansata Ibn Halima, born to Ansata Bint Zaafarana (Ansata Ali Pasha) and Ansata Bint Mabrouka (Ansata Abbas Pasha and Ansata Ibn Sudan), all of whom became successful champions and sires.

Publishing my books has been another significant milestone in my life. My first book, "Hoofbeats Along the Tigris", followed by "The Classic Arabian Horse" and "Authentic Arabian Bloodstock"—affectionately known as "the blue book," which has become a vital resource for Egyptian Arabian breeders—are all achievements I am proud of. Additionally, finding the Abbas Pasha Manuscript with the Ahmed Sherif family in Egypt and collaborating with Gulsun Sherif to translate and publish it in English, was a notable accomplishment.

Each book I have written serves as a milestone and provides valuable insights, regardless of the



bloodline's breeders choose. I take great pride in my articles for Arabian horse magazines and my published works, just as I do with the Ansata breeding program.

Don's and my contributions to the Arabian horse community have been widely recognized, which brings me immense pride. However, the true joy for me lies in witnessing the profound connections formed between horses and people—a bond I have cherished throughout my life.

**Jennifer: How do you see the competitive environment of Straight Egyptian horses?**

**In today's competition arena, it has become increasingly challenging for Straight Egyptians to secure victories at the US National Championships, let alone for Egyptian horses to dominate both the senior mare and stallion classes in the same year. What factors do you believe contribute to this shift in competitiveness, and how do you perceive the current state of the show ring?**

Judith: I find it unfortunate that Straight Egyptian breeders have been less involved in open shows compared to their participation from the 1960s to the early 2000s. During that period, Straight Egyptians consistently showcased their competitive edge, capturing prestigious titles at major events. Breeding programs like Ansata, Gleanloch, Imperial, and others, including Al Shaqab, Al Naif, and Al Nasser, played pivotal roles in highlighting the excellence of Straight Egyptian horses.

The inception of the Egyptian Event in Lexington, Kentucky, was primarily aimed at being a social and educational gathering rather than a conventional horse show. However, over time, the event began to

add more Egyptian-related and Straight Egyptian classes, evolving into the competitive landscape we see today. Unfortunately, this change led many breeders to pull their Straight Egyptians from open competitions, choosing instead to focus solely on the Egyptian Event.

This shift has fostered the emergence of exclusively defined Straight Egyptian shows worldwide, which, while advantageous for marketing and social engagement, has created a disconnect from broader competitive arenas. By concentrating their efforts exclusively on these specialized events, many Egyptian breeders have stepped back from open shows. As a result, international bloodlines have come to dominate the open competition circuits, with the finest Egyptian horses largely featured at Egyptian events and farm presentations.

It's essential to remember that Egyptian blood has been infused into the first three generations of many of today's top-winning show horses, including Marwan Al Shaqab, Gazal al Shaqab, and WH Justice, among others. The original intent behind preserving Egyptian bloodlines as a "breed within a breed," as outlined by The Pyramid Society, was to maintain this unique lineage developed over centuries to emphasize "classic type." Consequently, breeders who make use of, or mix various bloodlines—be they Spanish, Crabbet, Polish, or Russian—can tap into this dominant Egyptian blood when desired.

With this perspective, I genuinely hope to see a resurgence of Straight Egyptians competing in open shows, reclaiming the significant presence they once enjoyed. It is crucial for the future of the breed and the preservation of its legacy that breeders showcase their exceptional horses within





Ansata Ibn Sudan and Maurice Wingo winning US National Champion Stallion



Ansata Bint Mabrouka

the broader competitive arena, highlighting their impressive capabilities and contributions to the Arabian horse community as a whole.

**Jennifer: What was your breeding concept for Ansata? Your breeding program was renowned for excellent conformation with strong bodies, the Dahman strain seemed to dominate, what do you think of the other strains, which cross worked well for you and which were not as successful?**

Judith: Although we were unaware at the time, our initial imports were based on two of the most

esteemed strains admired by Abbas Pasha I of Egypt: Dahman Shahwan and Saqlawi Jedran. This realization dawned on us later while translating the Abbas Pasha Manuscript.

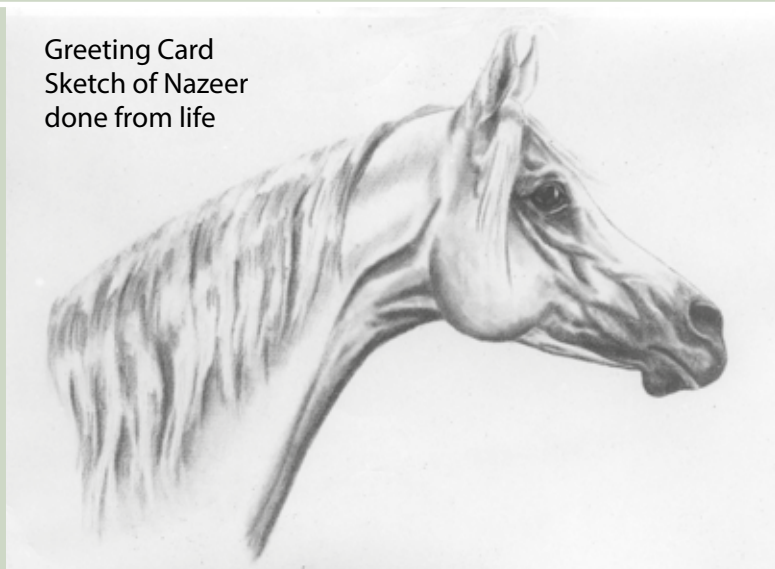
The Dahman strain provided us with a strong foundation, contributing to robust bodies and beautiful heads, exemplified by horses like Ansata Ibn Halima and Ansata Bint Bukra. In contrast, the Saqlawi strain added elegance and refinement, as seen in Ansata Bint Mabrouka and Ansata Bint Zaafarana. While we originally didn't have any direct lineage from the tail female Hadban Enzahi (specifically from the Samiha line of Nazeer), this Hadban influence was



Judith Painting of  
Moniet El Nefous



Greeting Card  
Sketch of Nazeer  
done from life



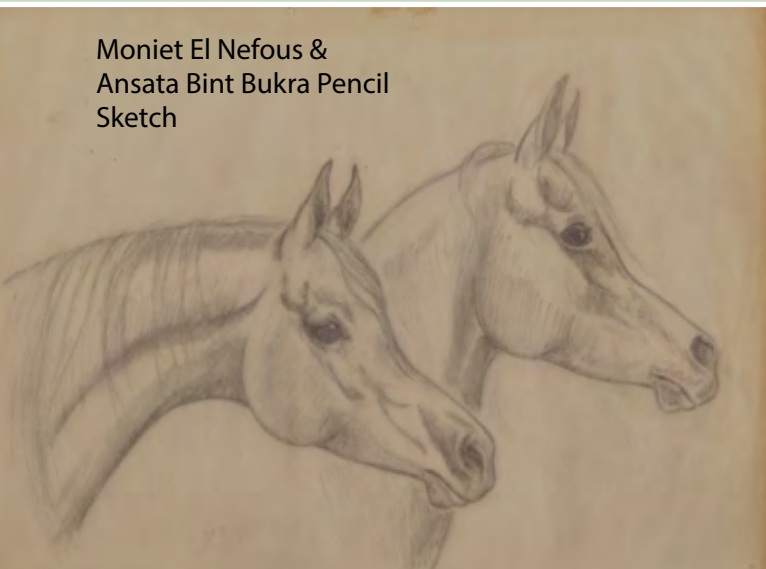
Judith's first and  
only sculpture,  
"The Pharoah's  
Stallion" sculpted  
in Egypt



Ink sketch of The  
Three Wisemen



Moniet El Nefous &  
Ansata Bint Bukra Pencil  
Sketch



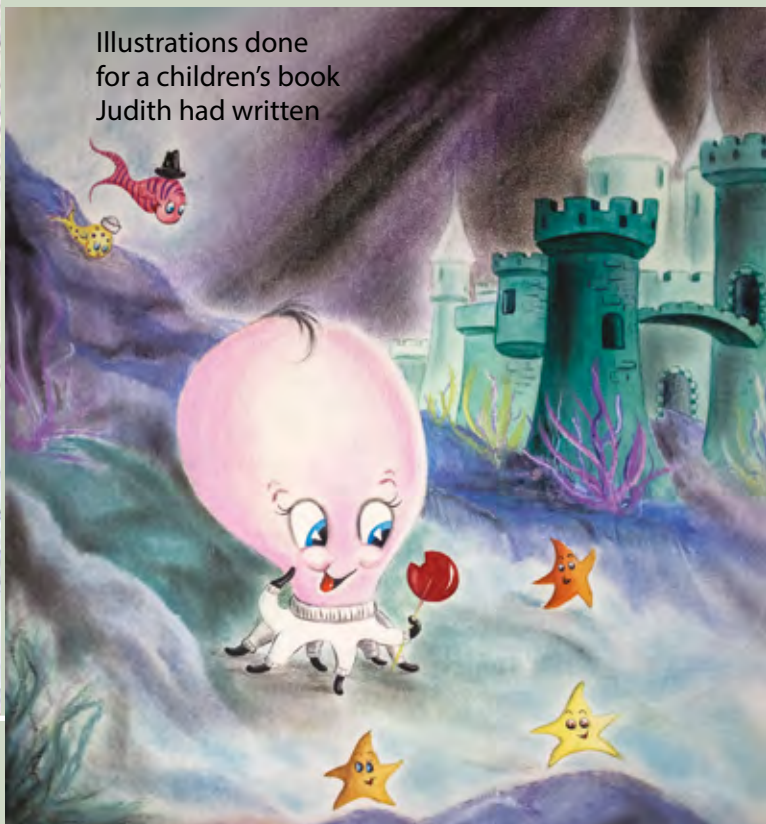
Watercolor study of an  
Arab Raid for potential  
painting



Cartoon Illustrations  
of animals that had  
been in Judith's life



Illustrations done  
for a children's book  
Judith had written



Ceramic horse  
head - Al Dahma-  
created in Egypt





Judith and Bart Vanbuggenhout

prominent through Nazeer, the sire of our initial imports. This doubling of Nazeer in our program created a remarkable synergy.

Over the years, until we closed the Ansata farm in Mena, we successfully incorporated various strains in different combinations while staying true to our original vision. The effectiveness of these combinations ultimately depends on the breeder's creativity and selection process, including the percentages of each lineage and the specific goals of their breeding program. One really must study pedigrees, and the individuals represented within the pedigree - what they looked like (phenotype) and how they produced (genotype) - consistent or not consistent for the attributes the breeder requires.

**Jennifer: Finally, what is your advice to young breeders and new people falling in love with the Arabian horse?**

Judith: Know your breed before you try and breed it. Love is the guiding force of the universe. For me, it was love at first sight at the age of three when I saw Silver, the grey pony - no explanation needed. Love was always the motivating force behind wanting to be with horses in some way all my life. One doesn't have to be a breeder to belong to the Arabian horse world. There are many avenues available besides being a breeder - so be sure you can deal with the joys as well as the heartbreaks in raising horses, be willing to make the sacrifices you will have to make, and "never give up"!

Becoming a breeder requires - most of all - learning about the breed through historical and current books, acquiring some knowledge and appreciation of all the arts (very important in understanding balance, rhythm and beauty) spending time with breeders, visiting horse shows and exhibitions, to discern the type and bloodlines one wants to breed. Cost factors enter in - it is expensive. "It is better to have once significant piece rather than many





From left to right, Bart Vanbuggenhout, Paul Ogden, Jennifer Ogden, Judith Forbis

insignificant pieces" applies equally to horses.

I want to emphasize the importance of following your passion, whatever that may be. Again, Love what you do, do what you love! Life can take unexpected turns, just as mine did, but it is that very passion that will guide you and give you strength. Most importantly, cherish all the animals in your life—they are not just companions; they are teachers that impart invaluable

lessons about love, loss, and living in the moment. I would recommend anyone who is involved with animals to read: *Kinship with All Life* by J. Allen Boone. It is still available through various book shops and Amazon.

**Jennifer: Thank you, Judith, for this interesting insight into your life and thoughts.**

Beyond her profound contributions to the Arabian horse community, Judi Forbis possesses a zest for life and a lively sense of fun that many may not fully recognize. Her laughter is infectious, and her love for her animals radiates through her every action, revealing a playful spirit intertwined with her nurturing nature. Many who know her primarily through her work may be surprised to discover this vibrant side of Judi—its warmth and joy echoing through her interactions and her story.

As I listened to her speak, I felt a profound sense of admiration and gratitude wash over me. Judi's dedication to the Arabian horse community, her incredible journey, and her unyielding spirit continue to inspire everyone who has the privilege of knowing her.

Celebrating Judith Forbis at 90 was not just about marking the passage of time; it was an honour to recognize a life that has woven a legacy of love, passion, and endless dedication to the things she holds dear.