

~ COLORFUL ~

# A DREAM THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

*The colorful world of Upson Downs Morgans*

By Laura Hornick Behning

**W**hat young horse lover has not fantasized about the beautiful, well trained horses of the circus, with their fancy stepping high school movements and proud demeanor? A trip to the big top is a dream come true for a youngster fervently wishing for a horse of their own. It's even better if you live in Sarasota, Florida, the winter home of many circuses, and have the opportunity to see their trained high school horses every day.

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ABOVE: Mike and Karen Burridge with UDM High Waters. (Photo © Tami Johnson)



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** KM Betsy's Surprise (*Man of Fashion x Wyandot Betsy Ross*), 1988 chestnut mare, at an open hunter jumper show with the Burridge's daughter, Christina; UDM Twist Of Lemon (*Triple S Golden Bows x Rocking M Blondie*), 2001 palomino mare, competing in eventing.

Karen Burridge was one such lucky lady. Born in England, as a young girl her parents visited Sarasota and fell in love with the area. They bought land there and built a house, where the family spent their winters. Arthur Konyot, the acclaimed and well-documented master of circus dressage, lived on the same street. Formerly of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey circus, he had a riding school in Chicago but wintered in Sarasota. Arthur's family had a long and illustrious history as equestrian circus performers. His niece, Tina Konyot, is currently showing at the upper echelons of USEF dressage competition. Karen remembers "Papa," as they called him, "would allow me to watch him work horses in trade for helping to feed. He was very strict, exacting in what he did. I knew I had to have excellent manners to remain on premise." Seeing how the Konyot horses performed had an impact on Karen and would later influence her quest for balanced movement in her Morgans.

Because her parents traveled quite a bit, young Karen never did get her own horse, but "any opportunity I got I would ride someone else's horses/ponies or when traveling, I would rent a horse and go for trail rides with friends." She attended college at the University of Florida in Gainesville as a psychology major, where she met her husband, Mike, on a blind date set up by a friend. "We found we had much in common," Karen says. "We were born within two miles of each other in London, and we were both used to the British culture as my mother was English and my father was Swedish."

As a youngster, Mike's love for animals drove him to decide early on that he wanted to be a veterinarian. His wish was granted when he was accepted to the Royal School of Veterinary Studies at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. After working on research related to tick borne diseases in Africa, he left to complete a PhD in epidemiology at the University of California Davis. Mike was then approached by the Dean of the new College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Florida to initiate and direct a program in tropical veterinary medicine, an offer that he gladly accepted. Over the years his international research program blossomed

with grants, primarily relating to diseases transmitted by ticks, which posed threats to animals and people in the United States. He directed programs which developed new patented technologies for the control of ticks and tick-borne diseases.

Mike and Karen married on New Year's Day 1982, and have two daughters, Monica and Christina. The family's first exposure to the Morgan breed was through their next door neighbors, Dr. Bob and Helen Tolmach, in the early '90s. "They had a cute, typey Morgan mare named KM Betsy's Surprise (*Man Of Fashion x Wyandot Betsy Ross*) that Christina felt she couldn't live without," Karen recalls. "We purchased her for her eighth birthday with the understanding that she would take lessons." She drove quite well for a four-year-old, so under the tutelage of the Tolmachs, Mike and Karen took the mare to driving events put on by a statewide equine driving organization called the Florida Whips, and later, CDEs. A typical Morgan, Surprise did many things and did them very well. "My daughter took dressage, then hunt lessons and later showed her to top 10 4H in Florida," Karen says. "She jumped her, took her Western and later to summer camp. She was such an ambassador for the Morgan breed. All of 14.1, but with great heart." The Burridges were so impressed with Surprise that they bought a half sister, Lady Of Fashion (*Man Of Fashion x Mr. R's Tranquility*) two years later for Karen. Fashion also drove, showed hunt and jumped. Breeding both of their mares got them hooked on a new aspect of Morgan involvement. "We were lucky to get salt of the earth easy-to-manage foals on our first try," Karen says.

At this point the Burridges realized they needed a name for their farm, and the perfect one came to them while on a trip home to England. "Mike's parents had retired to the south coast of England, which wasn't far from the Upson Downs race track popularized in the British horse novels," Karen says. "The Downs' was also a play on the 'downs'—the gentle rolling hills of southern England." And so Upson Downs Morgans was born.

### GOLDEN BEGINNINGS

Karen traces her love of colorfults to another circus-based childhood influence. "I was

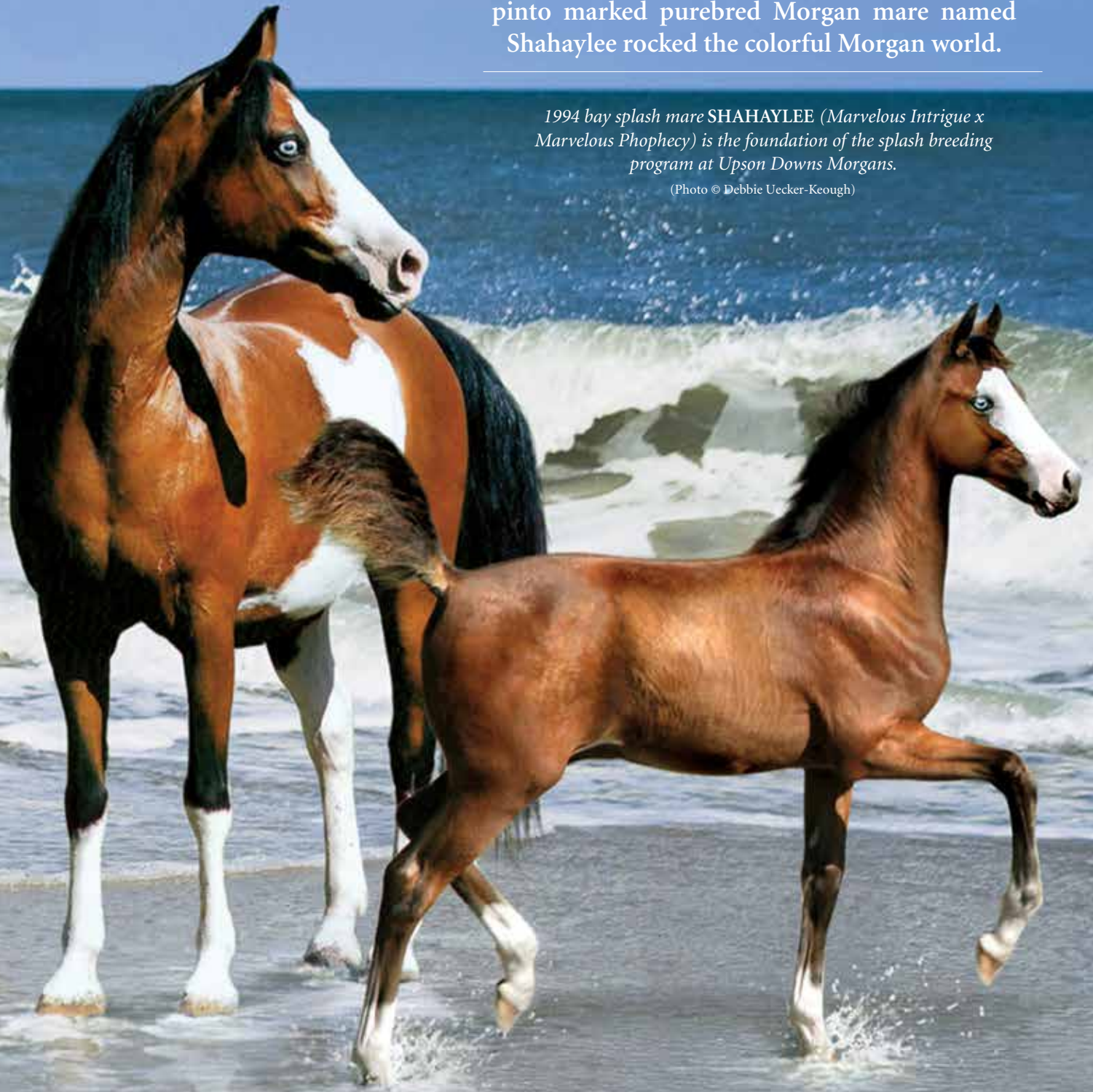
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Three years after silver was discovered to still exist in the breed, the appearance of a vividly pinto marked purebred Morgan mare named Shahaylee rocked the colorful Morgan world.

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*1994 bay splash mare SHAHAYLEE (Marvelous Intrigue x Marvelous Phophecy) is the foundation of the splash breeding program at Upson Downs Morgans.*

(Photo © Debbie Uecker-Keough)



## COLORFUL *≈* A Dream That Keeps On Giving



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** 1999 palomino stallion UDM Gold Mine (*MEMC Tequila Cuervo x Double M Gail Force*) with Valerie Siemer at the 2001 Southern States show where he was the Two-Year-Old Pleasure Driving Champion; UDM Twenty Four Carats as a foal with her dam, Spice O Life Apropos; 1997 palomino mare CK Southern Exposure (*Triple S Golden Bows x Three D Tomlin*) was bred by UDM but with the mare owner's prefix.

(Top photo © Howard Schatzberg)

close to the family that owned Tony the Wonder Horse as a child. Not only could he do tricks, he was a wonderful family horse. He was a good-looking palomino stallion that looked much like a Morgan, but he wasn't. He was an Andalusian, and was very attractive and nicely bodied. Kind of interesting in that the Andalusian is similar in silhouette to a tippy Morgan." Owned by TV and movie animal trainer Derrick Rosaire Sr. of the world-renowned Rosaire circus family, Tony made appearances in many venues, including on TV in "The Ed Sullivan Show" and "The Tonight Show." "I set about trying to find something similar in the Morgan breed and couldn't," Karen remembers. "That's when I decided to breed my own palomino."

In the mid '90s, quality colorful Morgans were still fairly scarce. Karen began following leads of mares that were for sale. "There was a palomino filly that caught my eye and I wrote to get pictures and video. When I was reviewing the video, this wonderful moving palomino mare literally floated across the screen. It was Rocking M Blondie (*Whippoorwill Mercury x Joley Blond*). Blondie had a powerful hind end, and simply trotting in the field, could go level barefoot." Former AMHA Executive Director Avo Kiviranna was training the Burridge's youngstock at the time, and he reviewed the sales tapes with Karen. "He had a very good eye for form to function and was able to pick out conformational flaws that most people wouldn't notice," Karen says. Avo also liked Blondie, so Karen flew to Alberta, Canada to see the mare and the filly, Scion Golden Opportunity (*Blue Diamond Jester x Hillsong Megan*), who had initially caught her eye. She purchased both mares in October 1997 and they caught a ride to Oklahoma City, where they rested for ten days before completing their long trek to Florida. Unfortunately, Scion Golden Opportunity was lame upon her arrival in Florida; something had happened to her hind end along the way, and she was never sound. She found a home with Elizabeth Davis in Kentucky and went on to have four foals by Elizabeth's stallion, Niobrara Bonfire.

Karen bred Rocking M Blondie to Symphonee Wired For Sound (*PJM Preferability x Wild Oaks Bernadette*) and



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“When I started my venture into breeding colorful Morgans, I had to have a little thicker skin and keep my vision. Now it’s certainly not that way anymore. We count our blessings that the atmosphere really has become so much more supportive these days.”

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*The Gold Mine daughter UDM CELINE, with Rick Gervasio up.*

(Photo © Tami Johnson)

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**TOP TO BOTTOM:** Bay silver mare Erber's April Joy and her 2008 bay silver filly, UDM Mia (by Hillfield Nightrider); UDM Fortune In Gold (UDM Gold Mine x LSC She's a Pistol) owned and shown by Dell Mitchell; 2008 buckskin splash stallion UDM Indian Summer (UDM Fortune in Gold x Shahaylee).

(Photos © Equine Design, Howard Schatzberg)

in 1999 the mare delivered a palomino colt, UDM Strike A Chord. He had his dam's floating dressage type movement and sold to a dressage home with a first-time Morgan owner. The following year Blondie produced UDM Persnickety (by Treble's Willy Wild) a brown colt whose kind and trainable nature made him a perfect fit for his new family, who camped with their horses and did a lot of trail riding. Blondie's last foal was the 2001 palomino mare UDM Twist Of Lemon (by Triple S Golden Bows) who would grow up to become an eventer in her new home.

In the summer of 1999 Karen saw a sale ad for a half sister of Blondie's, Rocking M Cassandra (Rocking M Vaquero x Joley Blond), and ended up purchasing her to add to her growing herd of golden Morgans. "Although she didn't have Blondie's bold impulsion, she was a nice large mare who was well conformed," Karen says. "Those Rocking M mares were salt-of-the-earth in terms of temperaments. They were both raised on the Canadian range when young. Blondie could be a bit spicy at times, but Cass was an 'anybody can ride' kind of gal. I had video of the family calling the horses in from the range for feeding and the kids crawling up and standing on Cass' back. She was one of the kindest mares I've known." Rocking M Cassandra had two foals with the UDM prefix, the 2000 chestnut gelding UDM Flash Fire (by Symphonee Wired For Sound) and the 2005 flaxen chestnut mare UDM Tropical Breeze (by UDM Gold Mine). "You simply could not upset either one of them. They practically trained themselves," Karen says. Cassandra unfortunately had respiratory allergies in Florida, so Karen found a home for her with Debbie Farrell in Connecticut. Debbie uses Cass as her trusted pleasure mount, and the mare also serves in a lesson program. Karen concludes, "So, that closed the chapter on my Canadian mares. It's hard to beat the temperament from the good Western working horses."

### UDM GOLD MINE

Karen decided her next step in breeding the type of colorful Morgan she envisioned would be to take traditional colored mares to colorful stallions that she felt were the best crosses for them. "That worked well for me; the first endeavor was a mare I leased and crossed on Triple S Golden Bows. Her name was CK Southern Exposure (out of Three D Tomlin). The owner wanted to retain his prefix on the breeding. She was a Century On Command granddaughter, nicely bred and a good looking mare that was 15 hands with a gorgeous head."

It was at a regional Morgan show that Karen spotted a mare she really liked, Double M Gail Force (Double M Blue Command x Mar Jer Ben Her). "I wanted that mare in the golden color. I was familiar with the Double M lines and had seen her grand dam, Double M Misty Blue win a four-year-old championship in pleasure driving at Grand Nationals. I liked her balance and cadence and, although a bit spicy, she had wonderful presence." Karen talked with Gail's owners and they agreed to a breeding lease. "I crossed my fingers that the dam line would be consistent and potent, and bred her to the cremello stallion MEMC Tequila Cuervo (Triple S Bald Eagle x Twine Pines Sara)."

In 1999, Gail produced a handsome palomino colt, UDM Gold Mine, who was to be her only foal. Gold Mine showed in



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**Communication with horses involves reading their body language, which Karen finds is not that different from the autistic children she works with that don't use the spoken word as their primary source of communication.**

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*2010 wild bay mare UDM MILANNE (Minion Millennium x Aljaks Miss Whamerica) with her palomino half sister UDM MARIPOSA (UDM Fortune in Gold x Aljaks Miss Whamerica), foaled 2012.*

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pleasure driving as a young horse, and then went on to a successful career in the Western pleasure division on both coasts. But it wasn't always easy to have a winning colorful campaigner. "When I started my venture into breeding colorful Morgans, I had to have a little thicker skin and keep my vision. Now it's certainly not that way anymore. We count our blessings that the atmosphere really has become so much more supportive these days."

Gold Mine was the beginning of many wonderful golden offspring for Upson Downs. The Burr ridge's palomino Gold Mine daughter, UDM Twenty Four Carats (out of Spiceoflife Apropos),

showed in Florida in 2008 and 2009, taking several reserve junior Western pleasure championships. Winning in the hunter division was another palomino Gold Mine daughter, UDM Celine (x LSC She's A Pistol). Celine's full brother, the palomino stallion UDM Fortune In Gold, has had a nice career in the Western pleasure division with owner Dell Mitchell.

Gold Mine offspring have done well in the show ring for other breeders, as well. One of his best-known sons is the palomino gelding, BPM Gold Dust (out of Treasure Merrigold), owned by Kris and Al Breyer. In 2011 "Dusty" helped his young rider Taylor Gruenberg to the Grand National Champion 10-11 Walk/Trot Western Equitation as well as winning the World Championship in Walk/Trot Western Equitation 11 & under.

UDM Gold Mine has a wonderful home with Elizabeth Abernathy of Disputanta, Virginia. The Burr ridges have retained frozen semen on him, and he will continue to be a future influence in their breeding program.

### SEGUEING TO SILVER AND SPLASH

In 2002 the silver gene was discovered in the Morgan breed. Silver is a dilution gene that only dilutes black pigment on the horse, turning it chocolate on the body and legs, and a silvery gray on the mane and tail. Chestnut horses can carry the gene but since they have no black pigment to dilute, they do not show any effect of the gene. Silvers can actually be mistaken for flaxen chestnuts, but genetically, they are black and not chestnut. Found only in a handful of individuals at the time, the quest was on to save the silver color in the Morgan, and astute breeders took up the challenge. Karen was among them. "I noticed a silver dapple mare for sale and loved her nice deep hip and sweet face with big wide set eyes. About that time fellow Morgan breeder Marilyn Esteb and I found that we seemed to be inquiring on the same mares and had very similar tastes in what we liked. We decided that we would go in together on the silver mare Erbers April Joy (Erbers CF Onyx x Pegasus Prime Joy) and alternate/rotate breeding years. We then found another bay silver, Lone Pine Starlite (Dutch Royal

Tribute x Pegasus Polka Dot) who we also liked, so we purchased her. Daisy went to live with Marilyn in Colorado, and I had April in Florida." The team's first few breeding attempts were not successful in getting the silver color. On Karen's fourth and last attempt at breeding April, she finally got a silver filly, UDM Mia (by Hillfield Nightrider), in 2008. Mia is now of breeding age and Karen plans to breed her to the black dressage stallion, GLB Coal Magic. Lone Pine Daisy also produced a silver in 2008, the bay silver stallion, Stone Pine Logan (by PL Chosen For Glory), who is owned by Marilyn.

The decade of the 2000s was a momentous one in terms of color milestones in the Morgan breed. Three years after silver was discovered to still exist in the breed, the appearance of a vividly pinto marked purebred Morgan mare named Shahaylee (see *TMH* April 2007 "Making a Splash: The Story of Shahaylee") rocked the colorful Morgan world. Though color testing was limited at the time, through process of elimination it was determined the mare was a splash pinto—and homozygous for the pattern as well. Upon seeing the photos of Shahaylee it was love at first sight for Karen. "I called her owner, Liz Alanne, and found out 'Shay' had never been bred and was ten at the time," Karen says. Shahaylee (Marvelous Intrigue x Marvelous Prophecy) had been a surprise to her breeder, Ellie Mason, and the mare was only able to be registered after the High White Rule was rescinded in 1996. Karen told Liz what a genetic treasure the mare was, and encouraged her to breed her if she was so inclined. Liz said that was her intent. Karen says, "I called Liz the following year and she said the stallion that had interested her had moved and it didn't happen. She was going to find another stallion. She called me the following spring and said she had done a lot of thinking, and with her luck she would get a colt and didn't know if she wanted to 'go there.' She offered to sell her to me. I don't think I waited a second before gleefully agreeing to give her a super home."

Shahaylee started the Burr ridges on the path to producing pinto Morgans and preserving the splash gene in the breed. Not only has the mare been a genetic treasure, her kind nature and good training have



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** 2009 bay splash stallion UDM High Waters (Sharp Dressed Gentleman x Shahaylee) shown here with trainer Rick Gervasio up; 2013 bay splash filly UDM Savannah (Faircrest Dark Night x Shahaylee) is the latest addition to the growing herd of splash Morgans at Upson Downs.



# UNDERSTANDING THE SPLASH GENE

The splashed white pinto pattern is the result of an incompletely dominant gene. What this means is that heterozygous splashes have less white than homozygous splashes—the gene has an additive effect when there are two of them present. It is like the cream gene in this respect. There are three splash mutations that have been identified, called SP1, SP2 and SP3. The currently available splash test checks for all three. This test is available from UC Davis (<http://www.vgl.ucdavis.edu/services/coatcolorhorse.php>) and several other equine color testing facilities. So far, only SP1 has been found in Morgans. SP2 and SP3 have only been found in stock horse breeds, and appear to be lethal in their homozygous state, unlike SP1 which is not.

The availability of the test for splash, which came out in 2008, made identification of splash Morgans much easier than the previous guesswork method based on markings. This is particularly true since many tested, confirmed heterozygous splash horses have turned out to have very little white—in some cases, just a tiny star! Heterozygous SP1 horses tend to have a blaze and white leg markings, but as mentioned, may be very minimally marked. They may have one or both blue eyes. Homozygous SP1 horses appear more obviously “pinto,” with blue eyes and white markings that extend from their undersides up onto their bodies.

There are at present three known, confirmed splash lines in the Morgan breed: descendants of Royal Glo (Emerald’s Aristocrat x Caven-Glo Saguaro), f. 1963, found in horses from the Marvelous Morgans breeding program; Lady In Lace (Sky Chief x Rhythm’s Tonga), f. 1959, found in Morgans descended from the “Sweet’s” breeding program; and Icestone Whitewing (Townshend Don Bird x Tamarlai Pa Waltz), f. 1980, found in Morgans with Vicki Greer’s W-B prefix. Interestingly, all these splash sources are mares. Well known splashes from each of these three sources include Marvelous Intrigue (Royal-Glo line), Old Ways Bimbeau (Lady in Lace line), and the MEMC prefixed splashes such as MEMC On Target (Icestone Whitewing line).



Shahaylee

(Photo © Debbie Uecker-Keough)

In March of 2007 I posted on the Morgan Colors discussion group that I had noticed one very interesting commonality in the pedigrees of these three splash source mares: all three have old Midwest breeding in close relationship. A mare named Byrrh

(Handy Allen x Abner Royce Mare) is in all three of these pedigrees through two of her offspring, Archie O or his full sister Rose Bay. A third offspring of Byrrh, the stallion Selim’s Best, also appears in one of the three pedigrees. Though Archie O was a very popular sire in his day, this family is fairly rare in Morgan pedigrees today. Only a handful of breeders, like Harry and Mabel Sweet and their daughter Georgia in Kansas, as well as a few breeders in New York and Pennsylvania, bred them on in any quantity until recently. Now there are a number of working Western and colorful Morgan breeders who are making an effort to preserve this family.

It is interesting to discover that our three confirmed splash lines all have old Midwest roots in common. Unfortunately, we cannot go back and color test long dead ancestors, so we have very little other than produce records to go on. Uncovering more photos of these individuals may help, or it might not, as little can be inferred by the markings a splash suspect might have. One thing is certain: there is a major interest developing in the pinto Morgan and splash in particular. Perhaps looking back is not as important as looking to the future, and breeding the best splash Morgans that we can. ■

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made her a valuable family mount. “My grandchildren adore her,” Karen says, “and all of her kids have her kindness.” Shahaylee has had four foals to date: the buckskin splash stallion, UDM Indian Summer (by UDM Fortune in Gold) in 2008; UDM High Waters (by Sharp Dressed Gentleman), a bay splash stallion, in 2009; UDM White Waters (by Sharp Dressed Gentleman), another bay splash stallion, in 2011; and UDM Savannah (by Faircrest Dark Night), a 2013 bay splash filly. UDM White Waters was sold as a yearling to Gloria James in Washington state, and is the sire of a chestnut splash filly born this spring, his first foal. The other three Shahaylee offspring still call Upson Downs Morgans their home.

UDM High Waters won the Yearling Sweepstakes in Florida in his show ring debut, then later went into training with Rick Gervasio in Western pleasure and was very successful showing in his junior years throughout the Southeast. “He is such a great ambassador for our breed,” Karen says. “He seems to be a real crowd favorite wherever he goes. I think at first you notice his striking appearance, his chrome and the matching four white socks. When you go to meet him you are impressed with how gentle and kind he is. It seems everyone that knows him loves ‘Gentleman Jack.’”

### CAREER PATHS FOR COLORFULS

The young Morgans at Upson Downs Morgans are not pasture potatoes once they reach riding age. They are trained for a job, whether it is in the show ring or as a leisurely trail riding mount. “As they are maturing they show us what they would like to do,” Karen says of the method used to pick a horse’s future career. “If we have a horse that goes into training, I want them to cross tie, clip, bathe, stand quietly for maintenance and in general be well mannered. It makes a trainer’s job easier if they can get on with training and not have to worry about teaching basic skills. The horses that we think would make great dressage, trail, endurance or kid’s horses are taken through the building blocks here with support from trainers who come to our farm. Unless we sell a youngster, we try to make sure that all of the mature horses side pass over to the mounting block, stand quietly when mounted, do lower level dressage and jump at least cross rails. Most have done trail riding. We live in an equestrian neighborhood that has five miles of trails that wrap around a wild life preserve, so we’re blessed with opportunities to work on off-the-farm skills.” Turning out good, well-rounded citizens has served the Burridges well; they’ve sold eight horses in the last couple of years. The most interest comes from mature clients that want something to have fun with. “They want good thinkers and they don’t want to get hurt,” Karen emphasizes. “Most don’t want a challenge, but want a willing partner.”

Karen’s work with special needs children has helped her better understand and train her horses. “There is a spectrum from under-responsive in a sensory area to hyper-responsive. This can be in any of the six senses. The sense of touch in horses comes to mind. There are those horses that you lay a finger on them and they quiver. They are hyper-responsive to touch. These are the horses that when ridden that you think it and they’ve received the cues. You then on the other end of the spectrum have horses that seem to have little response to touch or an aid. Some are more visual and see everything around them. Others are not visually concerned

with their environment. It’s the same with sounds, smells and taste.” Communication with horses involves reading their body language, which Karen finds is not that different from the autistic children she works with that don’t use the spoken word as their primary source of communication.

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE WITH AN EYE TO THE PAST

Karen chooses what Morgans to cross only after much research. “I spent countless hours looking at videos of horses moving through their paces when selecting mares. Most all were seen in person after reviewing tapes. Although I did homework on pedigrees and pictures of the grandparents, I looked at the movement and the grand dam most of all,” she says. “I then chose stallions that I thought would maintain and improve the traits I admired. As a breeder, I think our task is to continually improve each generation. Another key element is consistency. I now have consistency in the daughters/sons from my former stallion UDM Gold Mine. They have the attributes I admire and are good thinkers.”

There is a wide variety of bloodlines that Karen admires for adding specific characteristics to the breeding equation. She cites the beauty of the Serendipity lines, the square trot that Arboria Noble Victor gives to his get, the pretty neck and polls from Aljaks Double Whammy, the wonderful temperaments of the Western working lines, the great feet of the Brunk horses, and the very Morgany look of many of the Lippitts. She admires the Marvelous lines bred by Ellie Mason, which are mostly Lippitt, and specifically Marvelous Intrigue, who is Shahaylee’s sire.

In 2014 the Burridges plan to show their mare UDM Milanne (Minion Millennium x Aljaks Miss Whamerica) in Western pleasure with trainer Rick Gervasio. “Millie” as she is known to her friends is what is called a “wild bay”—a primitive lighter bay coloring with a silvery mane and tail and very low black points on the legs. This year will be Millie’s last year in the junior division. In the future Karen hopes to send UDM High Waters back into training and eventually, to Grand National.

Mike Burridge retired in 2009 from the University of Florida Veterinary School and now spends his days managing the health of their horses and taking care of the farm. Karen stays busy with her work as an Occupational Therapist and with her involvement in the Rainbow Morgan Horse Association, where she has served for many years as the club’s vice president.

Sometimes when we don’t realize it, someone or something can inspire us in such a way that can leave an indelible foot print later in our life. In Karen Burridge’s case, the circus horses of her youth influenced her desire to own and breed a beautiful, curvy, well trained horse, and Morgans came along and fit the bill. The same is true for the many people who see one of the Burridge’s colorfults at a show and follow them back to their stalls to learn more. The Upson Downs Morgans have inspired many other Morgan breeders with their beauty, type and style. It is, after all, what every Morgan breeder hopes for: to leave a little something behind that says “I was here, and I loved this breed.” To make a change, however small, for the better. Mike and Karen Burridge are well on their way to leaving a legacy of fine colorful Morgans for future generations to enjoy. ■