

The Parting Shot in the Back of the Book

When I was a horse crazy kiddo (1970s) and the *Arabian Horse World* would arrive at our house, I did not start reading from the front cover. I opened the magazine to the inside back cover. Nichols Arabians—owned by film and theater genius Mike Nichols—had what is known in the trade as “cover three” in every single issue on a contract basis. Each monthly ad would be one photo, taken by the master Jerry Sparagowski, bleeding to all four edges of the page, featuring a single horse, with only name, breeding, logo. His mares, mostly imports from Poland, got equal billing to stallions or show winners. I can mentally call up the images of *Bufa, *Fantazja, and *Elkana to this day.

As my work in media developed I learned more about the “back of the book.” It’s an advertiser’s hot spot, the theory being that a magazine lies facedown as much as it is face up. *MacLeans*, the *Time* magazine of Canada, put their clever columnist Alan Fotheringham on the last page opposite cover three. *Vanity Fair* reserves the position for its “Proust Questionnaire.” These get called “parting shots” and their high readership makes the inside back cover ad premium placement.

I have now been involved with four different horse publications over a career starting in 1982. And there’s always been a parting shot.

Today in *The Morgan Horse*, that spot is the domain of “Blood Will Tell,” the intense research of Marsha Valance into the history of signature Morgan horses whose influences date back to the 19th and early 20th centuries. I’ll be honest—we didn’t solicit her columns, they dropped in our lap. They come in, sometimes in batches, without *TMH* staff ever needing to nudge her for more. Editing several of them one morning in order to have them banked for our 2020 issues, I realized if I didn’t know much about this most constant of contributors, chances are neither did most readers.

Marsha lives in Wisconsin. I sent her some questions that had developed in my mind, again as a result of reading several of her pieces during one sitting. She got me back her detailed answers in what seemed like a very few minutes. Our conversation via email is featured below.

Each “Blood Will Tell” column is about a specific horse, many times Morgan names not on the tip of the tongues of younger or newer enthusiasts. How do you choose the subjects for your columns?

MARSHA When my daughter and I purchased our first Morgan, Gay Tribute 28853, in 1981, all we knew about Morgans came from Marguerite Henry and, later, Jeanne Mellin Herrick. We subscribed to *The Morgan Horse*, reading it from cover to cover.

I remember asking “Trib’s” breeders, Don and Yvonne Epley of Solon, Iowa, about the horses such as Quizkid cited in *TMH* classifieds. Trib was foaled in 1975, but his sire, Gay Commander, was foaled in 1950, and [Gay Commander’s] dam, Walla Walla, was foaled in 1929. Her dam, Dewdrop, was by General Gates. Trib was only ten generations from Justin Morgan! Thus, my interest in Morgan history was born. When, at our 2010 Wisconsin Morgan Horse Club Christmas party, a quiz was distributed that revealed many members did not know Figure had more than three sons, I began writing a monthly column for the WMHC newsletter about historic Morgans. I set my criteria to Morgans foaled more than 50 years ago who made a significant contribution to the breed.

Your columns reference many things not recorded in AMHA’s online registry—names of breeders of Morgans from way back, dates ownership was transferred. What are the sources for this information?

MARSHA When they stopped breeding, the Epleys kindly gifted me the first 12 volumes of the *Registry*. These volumes, especially volumes I–III, contain a great deal of information not in the online Registry. I also purchased Calvin Hanson’s CD and his book, *The Morgan Horse Foundation—A Computerized Analysis*, which meticulously recorded information on Morgans (registered and non-registered) and their ancestors through the closing of the Registry to part-Morgans in the late 1940s. Other useful resources include *Battell’s American Stallion Register*, *Wallace’s American Stud Book*, *Wallace’s American Trotting*



Marsha Valance with Tony Fennelly, a grand-daughter of her foundation mare, Mikks Gay Gladly.

Register, Chester's Complete Trotting and Pacing Record, collections of essays by LaVonne Houlton, Ina Ish, Mabel Owen, and Robert Riley, posts I saved from Joanne Curtis's Morgan history chat list, complete runs of Laura Algranti's *Classic Morgan Admirers*, *Simply Morgan*, and *The Waddie*, and many other resources I've accumulated over the years. I must thank Gail Perlee who, whenever I begin researching a new subject, consults her index for me; and my faithful beta readers Joanne Curtis and Mary Ellen Gray, whose helpful suggestions always lead to clarity and improvement. Without the three of them, my work would be much harder.

The introductory prologue for each horse ends with the phrase "Eight generation coefficient of inbreeding..." What does that mean? How do you calculate it?

MARSHA The coefficient of inbreeding is the probability of inheriting two copies of the same allele from an ancestor that occurs on both sides of the pedigree. The inbreeding coefficient is also the fraction of all of the genes of an animal that are homozygous (two copies of the same allele). In his 2003 paper, "The Ins and Outs of Pedigree Analysis, Genetic Diversity, and Genetic Disease Control," veterinarian Jerold S. Bell of Tufts explained, "For the calculated inbreeding coefficient of a pedigree to be accurate, it must be based on several generations. Inbreeding in the fifth and later generations (background inbreeding) often has a profound effect on the genetic makeup of the offspring represented by the pedigree. In pedigree studies, the difference in inbreeding coefficients based on four versus eight-generation pedigrees varied immensely. A four-generation pedigree containing 28 unique ancestors for 30 positions in the pedigree could generate a low inbreeding coefficient, while eight generations of the same pedigree, which contained 212 unique ancestors out of 510 possible positions, had a considerably higher inbreeding coefficient. What seemed like an outbred mix of

genes in a couple of generations appeared as a linebred concentration of genes from influential ancestors in extended generations." As I am a subscriber to The All-Breed Pedigree Database website, I use their linebreeding report to calculate it, [as shown below].

What purpose do you think it serves for readers, breeders, owners today to have close up information about horses far back in pedigrees?

MARSHA I believe knowing your horse's ancestry provides a better understanding of who your horse is and, if linebred, what its abilities might include.

What do you love about researching Morgan horse history?

MARSHA Finding out interesting facts that shed light on our Morgans' abilities. For instance, I thoroughly enjoyed Brenda Tippin's article in the current *TMH* on the daughters of Justin Morgan and the large heart. I talked with Joanne Curtis last week, and she's unearthed a wealth of information on Sherman Morgan's dam.

I agree with Marsha that knowing who is in the pedigree tells you so much about behavior and talent. Sometimes, when an issue arises around training a horse, someone might contact a horseman with a certain expertise, an answer to a problem. When I needed advice with a Morgan I was working, I learned it also helped to contact the person who trained its great grandsire. I'd learn he or she may already have dealt with that issue.

Thank you Marsha. Your research makes our back of the book unique. ■

Stephen Kinney, Editorial Director

DENNING ALLEN H, 1874						
HORSE	INBREEDING STATS	CROSSES	LINES	BLOOD %	INFLUENCE	AGR
BLACK HAWK9	3S x 3D x 7D x 6D	4 4	(3) (1)	27.34%	3x3	35.67%
SHERMAN MORGAN	4S x 4S x 5S x 4D x 8D x 8D x 7D x 7D	8 5	(4) (1)	24.22%	3x4	29.97%
JUSTIN MORGAN	5S x 5S x 7S x 9S x 6S x 5S x 6S x 5D x 7D x 8D x 9D x 7D x 9D x 9D x 9D x 8D x 8D x 9D x 8D x 8D x 8D	22 9	(5) (4)	23.05%	3x4	23.60%
GIFFORD MORGAN	5D x 7D x 6D	3 3	(2) (1)	5.47%	5x6	16.21%
WOODBURY MORGAN	6D x 6D x 9D x 8D x 7D x 7D	6 4	(1) (3)	5.27%	5x6	15.76%
CHURCHS WILDAIR	8S x 8S x 8S x 8S x 9S x 8S x 9S x 9S x 8D x 8D x 8D	11 2	(1) (1)	3.71%	6x6	4.63%
SAUNDERS WILDAIR	7S x 7S x 7D x 7D	4 2	(1) (1)	3.13%	6x6	3.42%
OLD DOLL	7S x 7S x 7D x 7D	4 2	(1) (1)	3.13%	6x6	4.88%
MARE BY JUSTIN MORGAN	8S x 7D	2 2	(1) (1)	1.17%	< 6x6	12.68%
8 GENERATION COEFFICIENT OF INBREEDING: 7.36453533172607%						

ABOVE: Allbreedpedigree.com allows researchers to run linebreeding reports like this one on Denning Allen.