

≈ COLORFUL ≈

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Three generations of one family's careful breeding lives on at MtnTop Morgans, and these horses have found an impressive following.

By Laura Hornick Behning



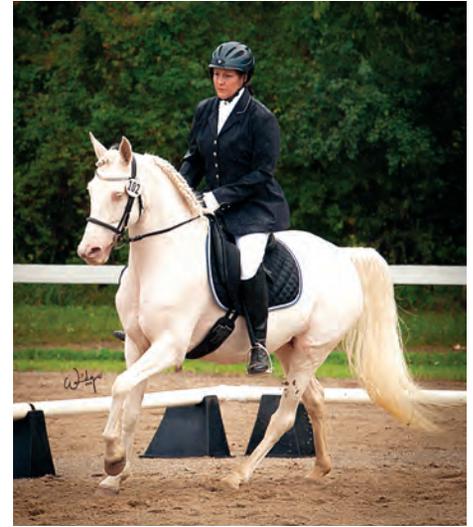
Looming high above the ground, the giant cat paused, seemingly waiting for prey. It gently swayed with the prevailing breeze, animated for a moment. Nearby, a huge colorful dragon snaked its way out of the ground, a fierce grin on its face. A short distance away lay an enormous white unicorn. Strips of colorful cloth flutter in the air.

This isn't a scene out of a fantasy movie, but a creative obstacle course that Kristal and Kurt Homoki have built on their Brooklyn, Michigan, hillside farm. The Morgans here are routinely exposed to the course's "residents," as well as its more traditional obstacles. The idea is to provide exposure to as many potentially frightening things as possible, which helps the horses to gain confidence—both in themselves and in their handler. "I try to add something new every year," Kristal says. "There are tires to walk up and stand on, barrels to walk over, bridges, a cowboy curtain, water obstacles, tarps, flags. I have some Halloween type air powered obstacles, like an 11-foot inflatable kitty, and a 12-foot ghost that moves in the air. There is a dragon, and other play things like a

giraffe, umbrellas, plastic bags, and cans on a pole." Work on the obstacle course becomes part of the basic training that every horse at MtnTop Morgans receives.

Kristal grew up in Florida and was the typical horse-crazy child. Her first equine friend was a pony named Sandy; she then graduated to an Appaloosa. But it was not long after her great-aunt Ethel Gardner moved to Florida in 1974 that Morgans entered the picture. Ethel's famous flaxen stallion, The Yankee (Whippoowill Duke x Jenney Lake by Senator Graham), founded a dynasty of Cascade-prefixed Morgans for his owner and was the inspiration for the organization of the northeast's Versatility Show, which began in 1960 and ran for more than a decade. Ethel had some wonderful mares of old bloodlines. "She believed that the mares were the biggest part of the offspring equation," Kristal says. "She had three main amazing mares. Lippitt Dulcie (Lippitt Sam x Lippitt Dusky Kate) she bought as a 15-year-old. Cascades UDonnafly (Ulendon x Flyette), was the granddaughter of Flyhawk and the daughter of Ulendon. I don't know how Ethel came about

ABOVE (LEFT TO RIGHT): Kristal Homoki riding MtnTop Whippoowill Tanek (Whippoowill Talisman x Spring Lake Katefly), 2005 black stallion, and Spring Lake Thistle (Yankees Anhingo x Southbrook Trophys Summer), 2004 chestnut stallion (photos by Kurt Homoki).



TOP ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT): Spring Lake Katefly (Yankees Anhingo x Yankees Pleasure), 1999 black mare, at the 2012 Midwest Dressage Show with Kristal, up (photo by Wendy Peterson); MtnTop Goodness Gracious (Spring Lake Pallidin x Universal Selection), 2011 buckskin mare, and Kristal on the pair's tenth ride together (photo by Kurt Homoki); Universal Selection (Universal Trigger x Universal Terrific Cross), 2006 cremello mare, with Kristal, up, at the 2013 Michigan Dressage Association show (photo by Wendy Peterson); **BOTTOM ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT):** Coulee Bend Silver N Gold (Unconventional x Coulee Bend Nirvana), 2016 palomino (carrying silver) filly; MtnTop Truly Scrumptious (Baptiste Blue Hawaii x Amberfields Dun Lovin), 2012 smoky grulla filly, owned by Judith Dexter and MtnTop Easter Lily (Baptiste Blue Hawaii x Universal Selection), 2012 cremello filly, now a member of the broodmare band at MtnTop Morgans.

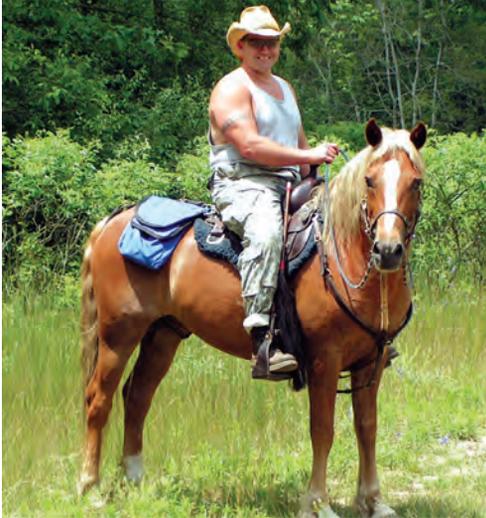
owning a Flyhawk daughter, Flyette, but she was bred to some of the greats like Senator Graham and Ulendon. Ethel's favorite mare was Anna Marie Mar-lo. She was the daughter of the great Mickey Finn, and she held many trotting speed records throughout the Eastern Seaboard."

Ethel gifted her grand-niece a Morgan colt by The Yankee. "I named him Yankees Echo as he looked so much like his sire," Kristal remembers. "He was not only my first Morgan, but my first horse to raise from foal to adulthood, with all the messed-up training that a kid does with a horse. We never gelded him, and I rode him with all my friends and their horses with never an issue. He loved to learn, and we had such fun. I trained him to do tricks like counting and shaking his head yes and no. At that time, central Florida was not crowded, and we could ride everywhere. My friends and I would ride all day through the orange groves, sand mines, and the 10-mile trip to town to ride our horses through the

McDonald's by the highway for lunch. Never did we think we could not ride through the drive through." No doubt this adventurous background provides a little of the inspiration behind the modern-day obstacle course at MtnTop Morgans!

Tragedy intervened when Yankee's Echo died of a twisted gut the day before Kristal's 15th birthday. "At that point I nearly gave up on horses. The pain was something a young kid had trouble understanding," she says. "But the year of his passing his one and only foal was born—a lovely chestnut colt I named Valeck (Yankees Echo x Yankees Valentine). Valeck helped me come back to horses again and there was no going back."

Ethel Gardner was a firm believer that the Morgan horse could do it all, and she was always willing to show young Kristal a new discipline. "She was the strictest teacher out there, and that is putting it mildly," Kristal says with a smile. "But between her and my mom they certainly instilled in me that the horse comes first,



LEFT TO RIGHT: Dusky Duke (Yankees Anhingo x Yankees Pleasure), 1995 flaxen chestnut gelding, with Kurt Homoki, up; MtnTop FlyWithMeJosephine (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x Tan War Bird), 2014 bay mare, with her owner Angela Pollard.

and one should always do what is right and best for the horse. She didn't pull any punches, and she didn't want you wasting her time. If you were serious, she was there to answer any and all questions and help you out. If you were just fiddling around she would walk away. She was the hardest riding instructor I have ever had, and I feel I still ride under her supervision all these years later."

Ethel inspired Kristal's mother, Niven Owings, to breed Morgans. "My mom wasn't really sure she wanted to be in the horse business," Kristal says. "Having horses, yes, but the horse business she wasn't sure. When Ethel approached her, she said she would give it five years." That was more than 40 years ago; the last Spring Lake-prefixed foal was born this year. The farm's foundation stallion was Yankees Anhingo (The Yankee x Lippitt Dulcie), foaled in 1974. Ethel had originally sold him as a youngster to a lady in the Philippines, but when the buyer found it difficult to arrange shipping, she backed out of the deal. Kristal remembers the main mares that formed the nucleus of her mother's fledgling program. "Yankees Pleasure (The Yankee x Cascades UDonnafly) was a do anything and do it all type of mare. She did any discipline asked of her, something she passed on to her foals. Firepride Trill B (Lippitt Bunyan x Firepride Sprite) was an amazing mare that could trot like there was no tomorrow. This mare taught me how to ride saddle seat. She produced Spring Lakes Peter D who was a Grand National Champion driving horse back in the 70s. And then mom found a lovely strong Trophy bred mare with a nice touch of Lippitt. Southbrook Trophys Summer (DSF Trophy Medallion x Jades Belle Star) turned out to be an incredible producer. She produced my mom's last stallion, Spring Lake Thistle (f. 2004 by Yankees Anhingo) who now lives with me here at MtnTop Morgans. Spring Lake Not Yet, Thistle's full brother, has been winning in the Morgan Open Competition program for years now."

Another mare that would prove influential to both programs was Dulcie Lenda (Yankees Anhingo x Yankees Pleasure). Niven had sold her, but when the man who owned her got a divorce and his new wife didn't want the "old" wife's horse he offered her back

to Niven. "Mom offered her to me in foal to Ironbrook Trophy Too (DSF Trophy Medallion x Doulton)," Kristal says. "This stallion was similarly bred to "Summer" (Southbrook Trophys Summer) so I jumped at the chance to branch off and start my own breeding program. That cross produced a lovely black colt who we named Trophy Lippitts Ethan Sam (f. 2000). What a mouth full, huh? We wanted to emphasize all his incredible breeding." "Ethan" only attended one breed show, the Penn-Ohio Morgan show, but he did his breeder proud, placing second in Three-Year-Old Stallions and second in Senior Champion Stallions. Their competition featured some of the biggest-name farms and trainers in the breed.

Dulcie Lenda was ridden by Kristal and her two daughters, Brittany and Morgan, but she began to have problems with pain in her fetlocks from bone chips resulting from an old injury. Kristal asked Niven if she could exchange "Dulcie" for her then-yearling full sister, Spring Lake Katefly, and she agreed. The search was on for a suitable match for "Katie." Kristal wanted to bring the Whippoorwill lines behind her great-aunt's and mom's bloodlines back to her own program. She contacted Mary Jean Vasiloff of Whippoorwill Morgans and arranged to lease her black stallion Whippoorwill Talisman (Whippoorwill Newmoon x Whippoorwill Locket). "I picked 'Talisman' up at Mary Jean's and took him right home to Pennsylvania where we lived at the time and bred him to Katie," Kristal says. "I knew in my heart that the foal would be fantastic, but what graced me that day at 11:30 a.m. as my mare laid down in front of me and foaled out this beautiful black colt was blessed by God and sent to me. I knew I would keep the foal no matter the sex. After talking with Mary Jean and asking if she would mind if I used Whippoorwill in his name, we named him MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek. He was the first to carry our farm prefix." The name Tanek (pronounced Tan eck) means immortal in Greek, and to Kristal's delight he tested homozygous for black. "I knew he was special by a month old," she continues. "I gelded my then-current stallion, Ethan, knowing 'Tanek' would be the one."

The search was on for mares to cross with Tanek when he



LEFT TO RIGHT: MtnTop Miss Sunbird (Coachman's Cognac x Tan War Bird), 2008 palomino mare, owned by Shelley McRae. Her granddaughter Emma is riding; MtnTop Phoenix Rising (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x WAR Le Fire Bird), 2011 black gelding, owned by Sandra Kosek-Sills and ridden by Kristal.

came of age. Kristal focused on two lines in particular: Californio and Triple S, crosses that Mary Jean had also used successfully in her program. "I have always loved colorful horses," Kristal says. "My heart always leaned towards buckskins. I don't know why, since I don't remember any being in my life." In the spring of 2006 she found Tan War Bird (Myrhhwood Marcello x WAR LE Fire Bird), a 2002 buckskin Morgan mare, for sale nearby. "Birdie" was a broodmare-only; she was unsound due to a leg injury as a weanling that cut her hind leg through the tendon. "When I went to look at her she was heavy in foal," Kristal remembers. "I was offered her in foal or bred back. We were making plans to move out of Pennsylvania that year. Taking that year's foal would not be possible, so I bought her with a breed back." Tan War Bird would go on to produce nine foals with the MtnTop prefix. Her 2016 foal, a smoky black filly named MtnTop Lady Bird Brooklyn (by MtnTop Sir Gallant Knight), has been retained for future breeding at MtnTop Morgans.

"Birdie was a fabulous mom and had been bred basically every year of her life from the age of three on," Kristal continued. "She never looked it and had the body of a young mare. Each year my vets would check her and be shocked that she was tight, not tipped in the uterus, and always held her weight. We did give her one year off and she was so upset that year she tried to steal all the foals. After that, I allowed her to have her foals whom she loved." Sadly, Birdie was laid to rest last fall with acute peritonitis. "By the time the vets and I figured it out it was too late," Kristal says. "Birdie was in foal with her 13th foal when we laid her to rest beside her mother. It was sad to not just lose her but the foal she carried. To complete the circle, the foal Birdie carried when she died had been purchased in utero by the owner of the foal that I didn't take when I bought her."

With an eye to breeding buckskins with her black stallion Tanek, Kristal knew she wanted to add a mare who would contribute a cream gene to the mix 100 percent of the time—one which also had at least one Agouti gene. She also wanted the specific bloodlines of Whippoorwill, Californio and Triple S. It took three years, but in

2007 she finally found what she was looking for in the then-yearling cremello mare Universal Selection (Universal Trigger x Universal Terrific Cross). "Trying to find a cremello, carrying specific blood lines, 100 percent foundation with an Agouti gene, and with breeding quality conformation was not an easy task," she remembers. "I would find a few mares that were close and while I was always willing to purchase them, something would come up. One seller would not color test the mare for me to see if she carried the Agouti gene, even when I offered to cover the \$25.00 test fee. Then I came across a cute foal picture of this stark white filly. The owner wasn't sure she could carry Agouti, but after much debate they agreed to test her and she carried one Agouti gene. Within a few weeks she was in my pasture." Kristal's new mare was given the barn name of "Faith"—because she had faith that she would find her one day.

In addition to a show ring career in dressage and Western classes, Faith has given Kristal six foals to date, two of which she has retained for her program. The first, MtnTop Goodness Gracious (f. 2011 by Spring Lake Pallidin) is Kristal's "go to" riding mare. Together they trail ride, do police clinics, and have been extremely successful in Kristal's newest competitive interest, Western Dressage. The duo won multiple championships and year end championships in the Great Lakes Dressage Club and The Western Dressage Association of Michigan in 2016 and 2017, as well as a champion and reserve in the AMHA Open Competition Program. Grace now has the next couple of years off while she has her first foal, which, like the majority of Kristal's foals, has sold in utero.

Also, in the mare lineup at MtnTop is another mare out of Universal Selection, MtnTop Easter Lily, a cremello with one Agouti gene just like her dam. Lily is by the late Baptiste Blue Hawaii, a stallion Kristal had in for training at the time. "I knew not only did I want to breed to him because of the incredible crosses he carried to Jubilee King, but he had the most amazing temperament," Kristal says. "Lily is one of those fun mares. She has that Morgan attitude and while she is trained to ride, she is currently having foals, which have all sold in utero as well."



LEFT TO RIGHT: MtnTop Tru Melody (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x BRMF The Yellow Rose), 2009 black mare, owned by Diana Lynne Overly and ridden by Kristal; MtnTop Xavier (Coachman's Cognac x Spring Lake Katefly), 2008 chestnut gelding, owned and ridden by Virginia Halfpenny
(photo © Karen Morang Photography).

At this point, Kristal felt her broodmare band was complete. But among the photos submitted for the Rainbow Morgan Horse Association newsletter's 2016 Color-Foal Pictorial she spotted a pretty palomino filly that had the "it" factor. "She was by the silver dapple Unconventional, by Gone Gold, who was a stallion I had once owned," Kristal says. "I knew those lines crossed well with mine, as I had bred Gone Gold to Tanek's dam Katie a couple of times and just loved the outcome. So, the sire's lines were ones that I knew I loved, carrying Californio. Upon checking out the dam's breeding I was thrilled to see all the Triple S lines. As an extra bonus, this young mare carried the silver dapple gene like her sire." Not long after that Coulee Bend Silver N Gold (Unconventional x Coulee Bend Nirvana) arrived at MtnTop Morgans from Canada. "As it turns out she was also the last foal by Unconventional, as the breeders were retiring and selling most of their horses," Kristal says. "Annie (as we call her) is in foal to Tanek, with that foal also sold in utero. Whether or not it is a silver dapple, I know the foal will be outstanding."

Operating a farm on a small acreage means limited room for stallions, so Kristal has usually only had one on the farm at a time. But with Niven's retirement from breeding Kristal had the opportunity to bring Spring Lake Thistle (Yankees Anhingo x Southbrook Trophy's Summer) into her breeding program. This typy and pretty headed stallion has an incredible temperament; anyone can ride him, including children and seniors. "He was my mom's last stallion that I trained when he was four years old," Kristal says. "I am excited because I can breed him to Tanek's daughters, and vice versa (Thistle daughters to Tanek)." Joining her sire at MtnTop Morgans was his yearling daughter Spring Lake Cali's Bingo (out of Whippoorwill Calisto). Originally the plan was for Kristal to work with the filly and sell her. "She wasn't here but a short time when I called my mom and said, 'can we keep her?'" Kristal says. "Not only was she so easy going and looked very much like her sire, but I could cross her in the future with Tanek, once again bringing all the lines for the past three generations full circle.

The resulting foal would most certainly be one that was royally bred on every single line of its pedigree."

Kristal's husband Kurt is a great supporter of his wife's Morgan endeavor. The couple has been married for 33 years and they have two daughters and three grandchildren. Over the years Kurt has learned to take great pictures and video, a talent that has proven to be very useful in his wife's business. "He was not a horseman in the beginning—actually he wasn't sure he even liked horses!" Kristal jokes. "But he really never said no. He was not the show dad to our girls, but he was our worker bee at home, building stalls, fixing fences, and caring for the animals when our daughters and I were off showing." Kurt wasn't interested in riding at first, but eventually started on their family's token Paint mare. One day the mare was acting as mares sometimes do, so Kristal put Kurt on their then-stallion, Ethan. "His first comment was 'Man is he a smooth ride. Why can't I ride a Morgan?'" Kristal says. "So, I paired him up with our gelding Dusky Duke (Yankees Anhingo x Yankees Pleasure) a.k.a. Dude (the name fits him well). Dude had been there, done that from the show ring in breed shows to 4H shows with the girls and me—Western, English, speed events, in-hand, and then endurance riding. Dude lives up to the versatility that he was bred for. By the time I turned him into my husband horse, Dude had grown tired of the show ring and was happiest on the trails. He led many mountain trail rides for the club when we were in Pennsylvania. He has always taken the best care of Kurt. I truly believe that if Kurt asked Dude to jump off a cliff, Dude would do it."

A Morgan purchased from MtnTop will not only have the usual age-appropriate training but will have become more self-confident through working on the farm's elaborate obstacle course. "For my foals and adult horses I get in for training, these challenges are confidence builders and a test of the horse's trust," she says. "Yes, they serve to desensitize the horses, but there is no way to desensitize them to everything they may encounter in the world. You never know what you might run into on the trail or at a show. What the obstacles do is provide a way to teach the horses to trust



LEFT TO RIGHT: MtnTop Sweet Anticipation (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x Tan War Bird), 2017 black mare, pictured as a yearling. “Sweetie” was her dam’s final foal. Owned by Dana Crossland; MtnTop Alegria (Universal Gold Card x Tan War Bird), 2011 buckskin mare, with Lilly Trauboth, up, and owned by Michael and Katrin Trauboth of Germany. MtnTop Macchiato (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x Amberfields Cafe Au Lait), 2013 smoky black colt, with Kristal’s granddaughter Aurora.

and depend on their human partners when things get a bit weird and worrisome. Not all horses perfectly master all obstacles; each horse does some better than others. But I don’t worry about that, because it isn’t the point. What I want is for the horses to be willing to try, whether they do it perfectly or not, because that tells me they trust me enough to perform the task simply because I ask them to. Even my own Springlake Katefly, who has been there and done that in many different disciplines and situations, doesn’t like for me to carry a flag while riding. It’s not her thing, but she does it for me because I ask her to. It isn’t pretty, but it isn’t an argument, either. It’s like a kid eating spinach while holding his nose—he does it because he’s asked to, even if he doesn’t like it.”

The other thing the obstacles accomplish is to teach the horse to move its body in response to the handler’s cues. “The obstacle itself isn’t important,” Kristal explains. “What matters is that I can ask a horse to put its feet, or a specific foot, somewhere, to walk under something calmly without rushing, and to allow me to control its hips, shoulders, and feet separately in a variety of situations. All these things are variations on giving to pressure. This is all a requirement for more ordinary things like trailer loading or going through brush and under trees or through strange footing on the trail. That’s how they learn to stand tied, and to remain calm in a tight situation.”

The benefits of this work are echoed over and over by Kristal’s customers. Sandra Kosek-Sills of Maumee, Ohio, owns the 2011 black gelding MtnTop Phoenix Rising (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x WAR Le Fire Bird). “Even as a yearling I could have my then six-year-old daughter lead him safely because he was completely responsive to even the small amount of pressure she could manage on the lead line,” she says. “If startled, he would look to his handler as a safe spot and readily stop and settle down with even a small tug. Because of this foundation, as a riding horse, he’s easily the most supple of the horses in our barn of all ages. I had the opportunity for an upper level rider/trainer to ride him, and she was quite impressed with his lateral work even at Training Level. She was able

to get him into renvers and a couple steps of half-pass, and at the end of the ride exclaimed, “this horse would be fun to show,” due to his willingness, ability, and most of all understanding of the new movements she was asking, because his fundamentals are there.”

Kristal is particularly pleased that many of the customers who buy foals from her send them back to her for their under saddle training when the time comes. Quite a few have become repeat buyers as well. Shelley McRae of Langley, British Columbia, found her palomino mare MtnTop Miss Sunbird (Coachmans Cognac x Tan War Bird) at a time when her confidence level was low, and she wasn’t even sure she wanted another horse. “I had never had a Morgan and the sweet lady who sold her to me assured me she was amazing,” she says. “I was a bit hesitant as ‘Fanny’ was young, under four years old and had 90 days training by Kristal and only some light riding since her training. Turned out she was the confidence builder I needed and has been my amazing riding partner ever since. She is a pleasure to ride, fearless on the trails, and equally awesome in the ring doing dressage. After a couple of years of owning Fanny my hubby retired his long-time trail horse. On a whim I contacted Kristal to see if she had any horses available or if she knew of someone who did. As luck or fate would have it, Kristal just happened to have a three-year-old bay, MtnTop Erin Go Braugh (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x Tan War Bird), back with her that she was just starting to train and hadn’t advertised for sale yet. I immediately jumped at the chance to buy her. Wanting another horse like Fanny and just knowing Kristal’s unique training program with her foals and how she starts young horses was all I needed to know to be 100 percent confident that she was the horse for us! Kristal put 90 days training into her and some trail rides and sent her on a trailer to me clear across the country. We have ridden many miles of mountainous trails, worked in the ring on dressage, English and Western pleasure, and through winter months with little to no riding to being able to hop on and ride as if we had been riding daily. What could be better than that? These horses are sane, uncomplicated, honest, and good natured and

COLORFUL ≈ ALL IN THE FAMILY



LEFT TO RIGHT: MtnTop Forever Hawk (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x Gar-Don Lady Glimmer), 2007 black gelding, ridden by his owner Carol Yates and with his breeder Kristal on the MtnTop Morgans' obstacle course. The smoke is from the course's resident dragon, somewhat hidden in this photo.

they are horses that our grandchildren are now safely riding and will soon be showing. It's the winning combination of knowledge, good breeding practices, and unique training methods that have resulted in these very special horses. Like Kristal says, 'Morgans are like potato chips, you can't just have one,' and I agree!"

Angela Pollard of Three Rivers, Michigan, had searched far and wide looking for an old type Morgan filly to take over for her aged mare. She spent a year traveling Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio and even obtained her passport so she could look in Canada as well. Auctions proved disappointing, so she turned to the internet. One day she found a horse that looked exactly like her old mare—and practically in her own backyard. "I called and immediately Kristal answered the phone," Angela says. "I have since purchased two beautiful Morgan fillies from her: MtnTop FlyWithMeJosephine (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x Tan War Bird) at 2 1/2 years old and MtnTop Be Still My Heart aka Mya (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x MtnTop Easter Lily) (in utero). Let's be clear about something, when I purchased these girls I was coming 50 years old and had been riding the same mare for 18 years. The last horse I broke out to ride I was 18 years old. I may have considered myself as a trainer then, but now, no way! I'm just a gal that knows how to sit on a horse and feed them very well. So, imagine my thoughts and lack of confidence when starting all over again on a coming three-year-old! Since I am so close to the location of MtnTop Morgans I was encouraged to come visit my fillies as often as I could. Even if I couldn't make it, I would receive pictures and videos on a regular basis of their progress. I now have both my girls home, and from time to time I have a training question and I have to call Kristal. A quick phone call or a short video and Kristal has the situation resolved—proving that Kristal knows her Morgans and that I am not a trainer." Angela spent the summer of 2017 showing then-three-year-old Josephine in Western dressage, and she credits the mare with giving her the confidence to do that.

Also, looking for a younger Morgan to take over for their retiree was Carol Yates of Leonard, Michigan. Like Angela, she found her

search—specifically for a pony-sized Morgan to drive and perhaps take into Western dressage—more difficult than expected. "I ran the customary searches on equine websites, followed postings of Morgan horses across the United States, called friends, called breeders, and no luck," she says. "Horses were too tall, older than what I was looking for, no training completed, were not handled, or I would hear, 'oh we just sold our Morgan that would have been perfect for you.' Late one evening while surfing the internet for older breeding lines of Morgans, I ran across an article about the great Morgan, The Yankee. The Yankee could do it all, and versatility was what I was looking for. I discovered Ms. Gardner's great-niece Kristal Homoki was living in Michigan and was continuing The Yankee line at her farm, Mtn Top Morgans, so I called her and asked if perhaps she had a Morgan for sale that would fit my goals. Kristal stated she only had younger stock, but she said 'come visit us at Mtn Top and see if you like my babies.' When I arrived at Mtn Top a beautiful black gelding, MtnTop Forever Hawk (MtnTop Whippoorwill Tanek x Gar-Don Lady Glimmer), came trotting up to me, as sweet as can be and handsome all over. Kristal offered to help me with "Hawk" because he was not yet under saddle, so we arranged to have Hawk stay at Mtn Top so Kristal could finish his training. I could not have been more pleased with the results. MtnTop Forever Hawk is now a very handsome 15.2+ Morgan (I didn't get my pony!). We have competed successfully in dressage, obtaining reserve champion at several shows." In 2016 Carol asked Kristal to give Hawk some refresher training and expose him to some of the Mounted Police training she had just completed with her horses. One of the tasks involves crossing a fire line. The first time Hawk faced the fire he walked calmly over it. "This is the trust Kristal gives to her Morgans," Carol says.

Clarkston, Michigan, resident Jennifer Kroll has owned other breeds over the years, but her heart always longed for a Morgan. "When we moved to a larger property I started really looking harder; researching breeders, bloodlines, training methods, etc.," she explains. "I found Kristal's farm and loved her horses. It was



LEFT TO RIGHT: Kristal and MtnTop Meadowlark (Spring Lake Thistle x Universal Selection), 2018 palomino filly, showing her confidence with the unicorn “obstacle”; MtnTop Mi Ami D’Or (Spring Lake Thistle x MtnTop Easter Lily), 2018 palomino colt, and Kristal working through “scary kitty” on the MtnTop Morgans obstacle course.

several years of trying to decide exactly what I wanted, but I kept coming back to her farm. I have had a lot of horses and I knew I wanted one with plenty of good sense and ground training. I knew I wanted a foundation bred horse, curves in all the right places, and good bone. We have children with special needs and I needed a horse that I could eventually trust with them. Palomino color would be icing on the cake.” Jennifer talked with Kristal and found out a breeding was planned that ticked all her boxes. She put a deposit on the unborn foal as soon as the pregnancy was confirmed. “My filly, MtnTop Meadowlark (Spring Lake Thistle x Universal Selection), did not disappoint when she arrived in late February 2018,” Jennifer continues. “I cannot wait to see where we go in the future. My daughter has also fallen in love with Kristal’s horses and training and hopes to get one of her foals in the future. To me, the amount of training alone is worth the price she asks for her foals. ‘Lark’ has done more on the ground in five months than most horses have done in five years. I know the amount of time that takes, and it’s a priceless gift to her horses and their future owners!”

In recent years all of Kristal’s foals have sold in utero. She even has reservations for foals years in advance. “I don’t usually have many foals each year,” Kristal says. “2019 is a large foal year for me with four foals coming, and all have sold in utero. I feel truly blessed about that.” Candy and Chuck McCrary of Iva, South Carolina, are one of the customers who have purchased a 2019 foal from Kristal. This will not be their first Morgan from this breeding however; they own five other Morgans bred by Kristal’s mother, Niven Owings. “Their athletic ability, willingness, and correct conformation make them perfect for my husband and me,” Candy explains. “We are avid competitors in Cowboy Mounted Shooting, a timed event requiring rapid acceleration, pole bending, barrel turns, agility, and controlled speed. All while shooting black powder, single action pistols at balloon targets. In addition, we enjoy horse camping, team penning, trail riding all over the Southeast, and an occasional hunter pace fun day. Our Morgans have never let us down, and I am greatly anticipating the arrival of

the 2019 MtnTop Morgan foal by Spring Lake Thistle and out of Universal Selection!”

Today, MtnTop Morgans can be found all over the United States and Canada. The Gardner/Owings/Homoki family bloodlines continue even as far away from their original home as Germany, where MtnTop Alegria (Universal Gold Card x Tan War Bird) lives with her owners Michael and Katrin Trauboth. Alegria’s first foal, LHD Mondprinzessin (by Karizmas Legacy) attended the National German Morgan Horse Championship in 2017. At the tender age of three months, this pretty buckskin filly won the foal class, mares under six years class, and was high point horse and Best of Show—better rated than any other Morgan of any age there.

“I am proud of all my foals and the people who love them, no matter what they do with them,” Kristal says. “I love working with the babies and enjoy watching them grow. They are like giant sponges that will absorb all types of information good and bad. I try to make that good positive information. I am a firm believer that we are the stewards to our horses and should give them the best advantages that we can. It pays off in buyers who are happy with happy horses. And I am here if they need me, have questions, or would love to show me what the babies are doing.”

Kristal’s granddaughter Aurora, now seven, has spent many hours learning the rewards, hard work, and high expectations that come with raising horses. “Aurora has been riding since she was six months old,” Kristal says. “She loves riding so much that once we had to bribe her with Christmas cookies to get off the horse. As soon as she finished her cookies she wanted to get back to riding. Talk about single minded!” The apple certainly doesn’t fall far from the tree, and the future of this family’s Morgan heritage looks bright.

It has been said that a satisfied customer is the best business strategy of all. This has certainly held true for three generations of Kristal Homoki’s family. From the breeding legacy left to her by her great-aunt and her mother, Kristal has not only created a distinctive family of Morgan horses, but another one as well—a family of happy and loyal customers. ■