

# Presenting The Personalities

## LARRY JEROME

by MARY KIRKMAN

Larry Jerome is busy—there is no other word for it. Has been all his life. When he was a kid, he kept calves, pigs and a wide variety of chickens, and showed many of them. Now he has horses (Arabians and Belgians), cattle (Holsteins and Brown Swiss in the dairy operation, registered Beef Shorthorns and Maine/Angus in the beef division), and German Shepherd dogs, all world class. He also has a wife, seven children, 22 grandchildren and a singing career, and as if that didn't take up enough of anyone's life, he also cooks breakfast for his employees every workday that he is at home. "Home" is Jerland Farm, in Barron, Wis. He is known in Arabian circles primarily for Jerland's top stallions Khadraj NA and MPA Giovanni, but Jerome himself is far more than that. The sky has always been his limit.

### It's In The Blood

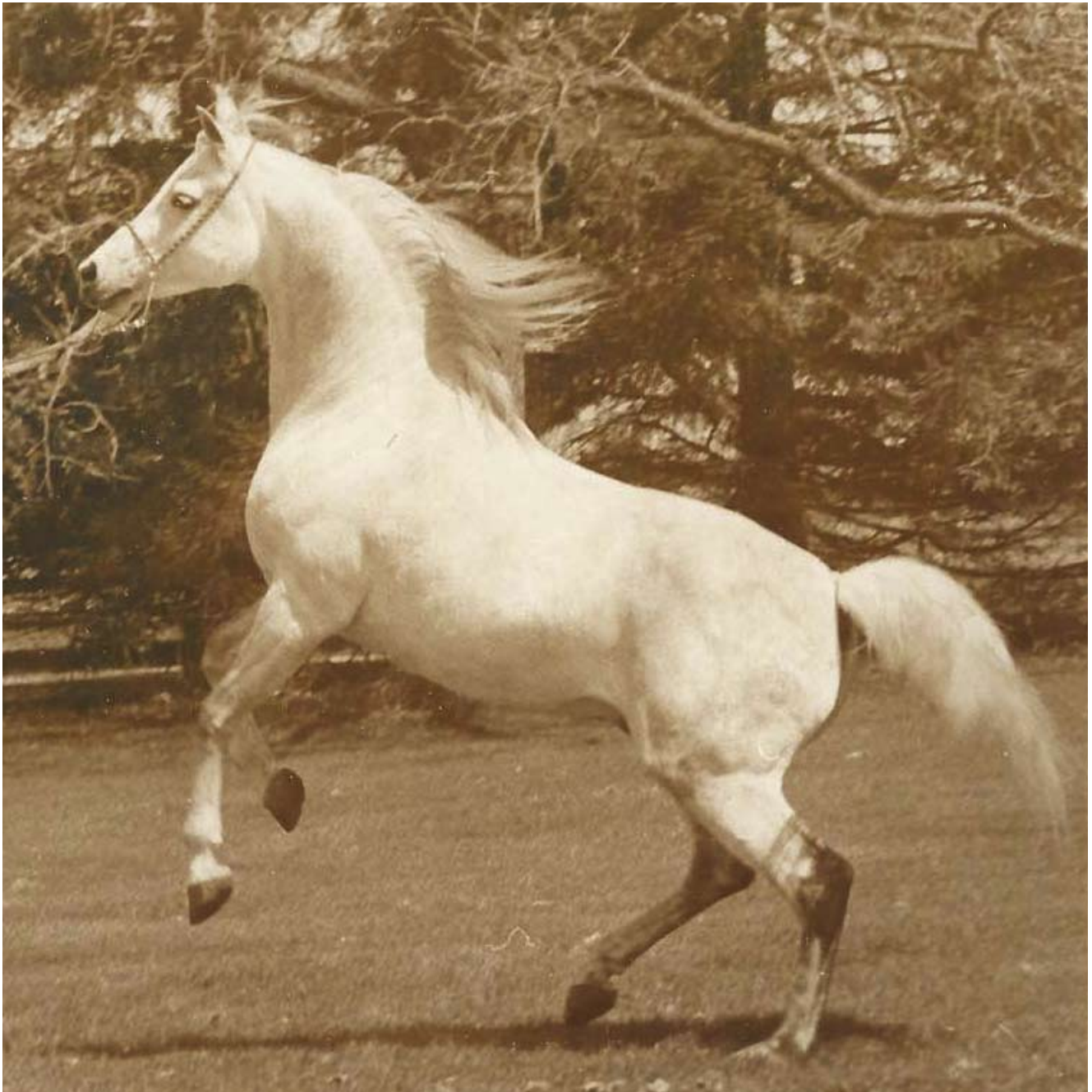
Larry Jerome was born in 1949, in Minneapolis, Minn. But that, he is quick to point out, is only because Minneapolis is where his mother's doctor was; he has been a lifelong resident of Barron. He comes by his extraordinary drive naturally. His father, Wallace Jerome, founded Jerome Foods, which became The Turkey Store and later, purchased by Hormel Foods, The Jennie-O® Turkey Store. That, however, was in a career that began when the elder Jerome was 13 years old. "My dad was always way ahead of his time," says Larry, adding that one of his father's concepts was preparing oven-ready turkeys. "He was thinking about doing things the way they're done 20 years later."

That didn't mean that the Jeromes were wealthy or that life was a breeze. When he was young, Larry recalls, his father's business survived difficulties. It was his mother, Marion, who was everyone's anchor. A high school graduate at the age of 16, she finished college in two years and went on to teach until she married Larry's father. Then her exceptional organization skills were put to the test of keeping her husband and five children in order.

One of Larry's favorite stories from his childhood is of his first calf, ironically called—a portent of things to



come?—Giovanni. The deal was that he would sell the Holstein female the following year, but of course he didn't. He talked his Uncle Willis into letting her live with his Guernsey herd. It wasn't long, however, before Giovanni produced calves and Larry's enterprise expanded, so the ambitious 14-year-old recruited his grandfather, his first mentor and close companion, to help him remodel an old pig barn. There he quartered his cattle on one end and his horses on the other, with pigs and poultry housed nearby. It was hectic, going to school and working his fledgling business (his Holstein herd numbered 11, and "poultry" encompassed not only an array of chicken breeds, but ducks and turkeys too), but it was successful—sort of.



*The young horseman: Larry, at age 8 or 9, with his first colt, Duke. In the background, the renovated pig barn (building with the row of five windows) that housed his cattle and horse operation.*



*Larry at age 8, with his first calf, prophetically named Giovanni.*



*Larry at 10, with his prized Brown Leghorn rooster.*





*An early ride with Daria in back and Moriah in front.*

"When I didn't have to pay for the feed or electricity in the barn, I was making pretty good money," he notes dryly. He also bred waltzing mice in the basement, raised canaries, and collected frog eggs in the pond to raise polliwogs. He was "wired," he says, interested in everything.

Like many kids of his generation and many since, Larry read all of Walter Farley's Black Stallion books, as well as Marguerite Henry's accounts of Misty of Chincoteague. By the time he was 8 or 9, he knew he wanted a horse. His father, while not enthusiastic, nevertheless took him to an auction, where he encouraged his son to buy a Palomino Quarter Horse. Larry, however, had his eye on a Morgan mare with a half-Quarter Horse foal at her side. "So, anyway, my dad wanted me to try out his horse," he recounts. "I didn't ride very well at that age, and the sales barn was right on a highway. I got to the end of the driveway, right? And this horse bolted and took off running down the middle of the road with cars coming both ways, horns blowing." From his point of view, it worked out well: with the Quarter Horse out of contention, his father purchased the Morgan mare and her foal, named Princess and Duke.

It was Duke who confirmed young Larry's reputation as being accident-prone. Grown up and trained, he was beautiful, but he was powerful. Larry came off him several times, the worst instance leaving him with a jaw broken in three places and a broken arm. "They didn't think I was going to live," he reports. "I was unconscious for quite a while."

He ticks through a recap of his exploits. "I backed our car out of the driveway when I was 2 or 3 and tried to run into the neighbor's house; I just about cut off my thumb when I was about 5; I had horse accidents, I had

car accidents—I probably totaled out four or five vehicles. Before we were married, my wife and I totaled out two vehicles in five days."

And that was all in a world that he describes as sheltered. "Saturday night was bath night," he says. "Sunday morning you got up, did your chores, put on your white shirt, your tie, and you were in Sunday School and then church. You had a sit-down family dinner, and after that, there was music. My grandpa would play, my aunt is a concert violinist, and that's the way we were raised. Sunday night was tomato soup and 'Lassie.'"

## Early On: Arabians

While Larry grew up around more Quarter Horses and Appaloosas than anything, he moved into the Arabian breed at an early age. From his Black Stallion days on, he followed the breed, learning everything he could. One of his favorite activities was visiting the Burton Arabian Farm, in Rice Lake, Wis., where Gazon was at stud. "I got to see Vadruff and Raffon and Gavard," he recalls, "all those great horses that have become a very integral part of the breed."

He was not able to own an Arabian until he bred one, and to be technically correct, his first was a Half-Arabian. It all started with a Shetland pony named Horse Creek Rose Leaf, purchased from friends in Minnesota about the time Duke and Princess were acquired. (Rosie would live to be 33 and teach his two oldest daughters to ride.)

"I had heard of a guy who had crossed a Shetland pony with an Arabian horse," he says, "so I went up to Birchwood and met Gib Ross. At that time he had Habu, and Synbad was there from Cedardell Farm, and a young horse by the name of Ambassador. I bred Rose to Ambassador and got my first Half-Arabian." At the age of 15 or 16, he bought a purebred from Ross named Marna.

"I was always going behind my folks' back and pulling things," he recalls of his plans for Marna. "I booked her to a horse by the name of \*Bask." Typically, he had not factored in the stud fee or transportation to Arizona for the mare. "My father found out about it and that was the end of the deal."

As he looks back, he observes that his Arabian horse involvement helped mold his approach to life. Not only were his parents consistently supportive of his ventures, but also, he gained valuable confidence from his relationships with some of the people he met. "Evelyn Burton always treated me like I was very important," he says. "I learned from her that you never know who's going to grow up to become what, so being respectful of a child and encouraging a child is a good thing."

# Life In The Real World

The horizons of Larry's life changed with adulthood. He chose to attend the University of Wisconsin Barron County so that he could live at home and care for his animals, and when he was 21, he married his sweetheart, Shelley Miller.

"My father was basically a tough German," he relates, "and after we married, it was 'Congratulations, you're on your own.' We really struggled! I liked to spend money—but if you spend money, you have to make money, and that's how I got into a lot of the other things that I do."

If Larry's life was busy before marriage, it qualified as nearly insane after, especially when he and Shelley started a family, which happened in pretty quick order. Over the next 13 years, the Jerome family would welcome Daria, Moriah, Lyndon, Jeremy, Alicia, Sacia and Indira—all of whom would follow in their father's footsteps of caring for animals, showing successfully, and playing music, among other activities.

To support themselves, Larry and Shelley maintained a marathon schedule. Larry farmed and was employed as a cattle inseminator, Shelley had a job in a bank and worked part-time at the turkey

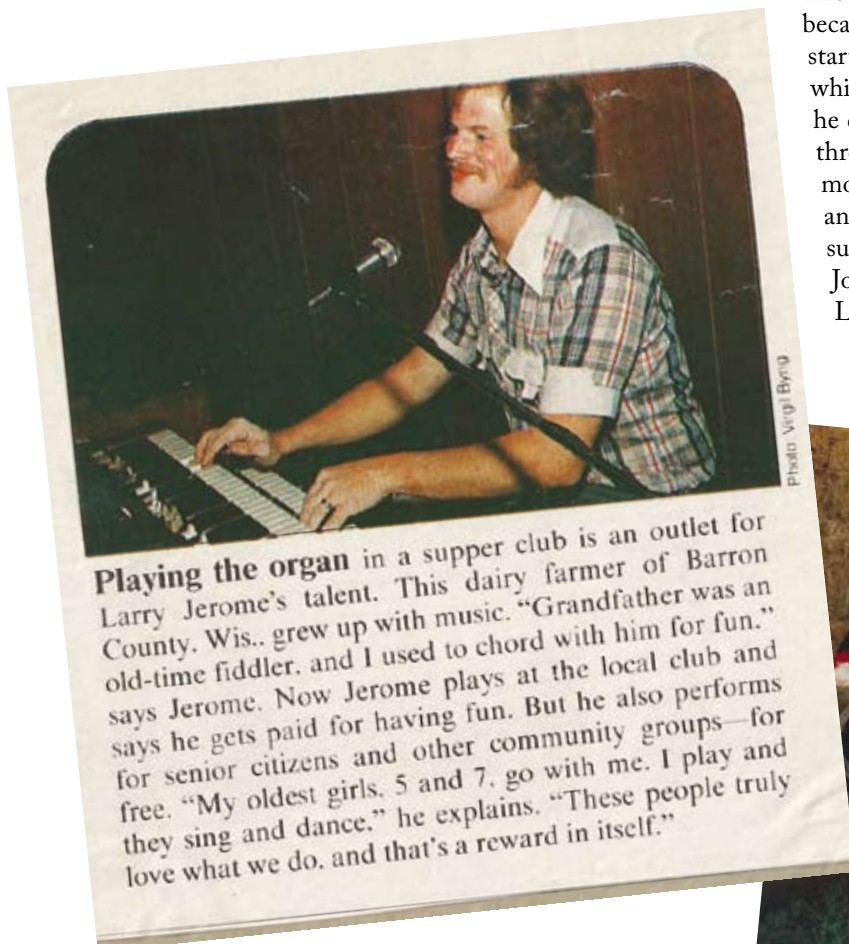


*Christmas card photo from 1984: front, l.to r., Moriah, Shelley, Indira, Sacia, Daria, Alicia; back, Jeremy, Larry, Lyndon.*

plant, they both milked cows after work (the kids did too, when they got big enough), and in the mid-1970s, Larry added gigs as a professional musician.

For Jerome, music for money—as more than just a family amusement—happened serendipitously. One evening, he and Shelley were having dinner with her parents at a place called Dean's Supper Club, which featured a live combo, and Mr. Miller informed its leader that they needed to let his son-in-law come up and play. The guy did, the band liked Larry, and not long after, he became a substitute member of the group. "That kind of started my career," he says. "I made about \$5 an hour, which was pretty good in those days." As time went on, he developed his own act and was on stage Wednesday through Saturday nights. (Even now, when the extra money is not an issue, his music is no idle pastime; he and his country rock band, Intrigue, have opened for such headliners as Sawyer Brown, Kenny Chesney, John Michael Montgomery, Confederate Railroad, Lorrie Morgan, and others.)

*Larry, second from left, with fellow members of the country rock music group, Intrigue*





Another tributary in the Jeromes' income stream was breeding German Shepherd dogs. Before they married, they had purchased one, and in no time, Larry's passion for genetics kicked in. They founded what is now a renowned breeding program of more than 30 years' standing. And then there were the canaries in the basement, more than 50 pairs of them sometimes. "At that time, it was not possible to import birds into this country," he explains. "The bird room would generate anywhere from \$14,000 to \$16,000 a year."

At that point, Larry and Shelley's Arabians were more about pleasure than anything. "We did show," he allows, "but it was the 'wash your horse and maybe clip the bridle path, put it in a trailer and show it' kind of thing." One of their mares exhibited in nearly every class except halter ("she really wasn't too cute"). Then, in 1977, he got a call telling him that Don and Shirley Johnson were selling their herd, which included the stallion Gavada, a full brother to twice-U.S. National Champion Raffon. For \$11,000, he and Shelley were in the serious business of raising Arabian horses.

## The Synergy Of Success

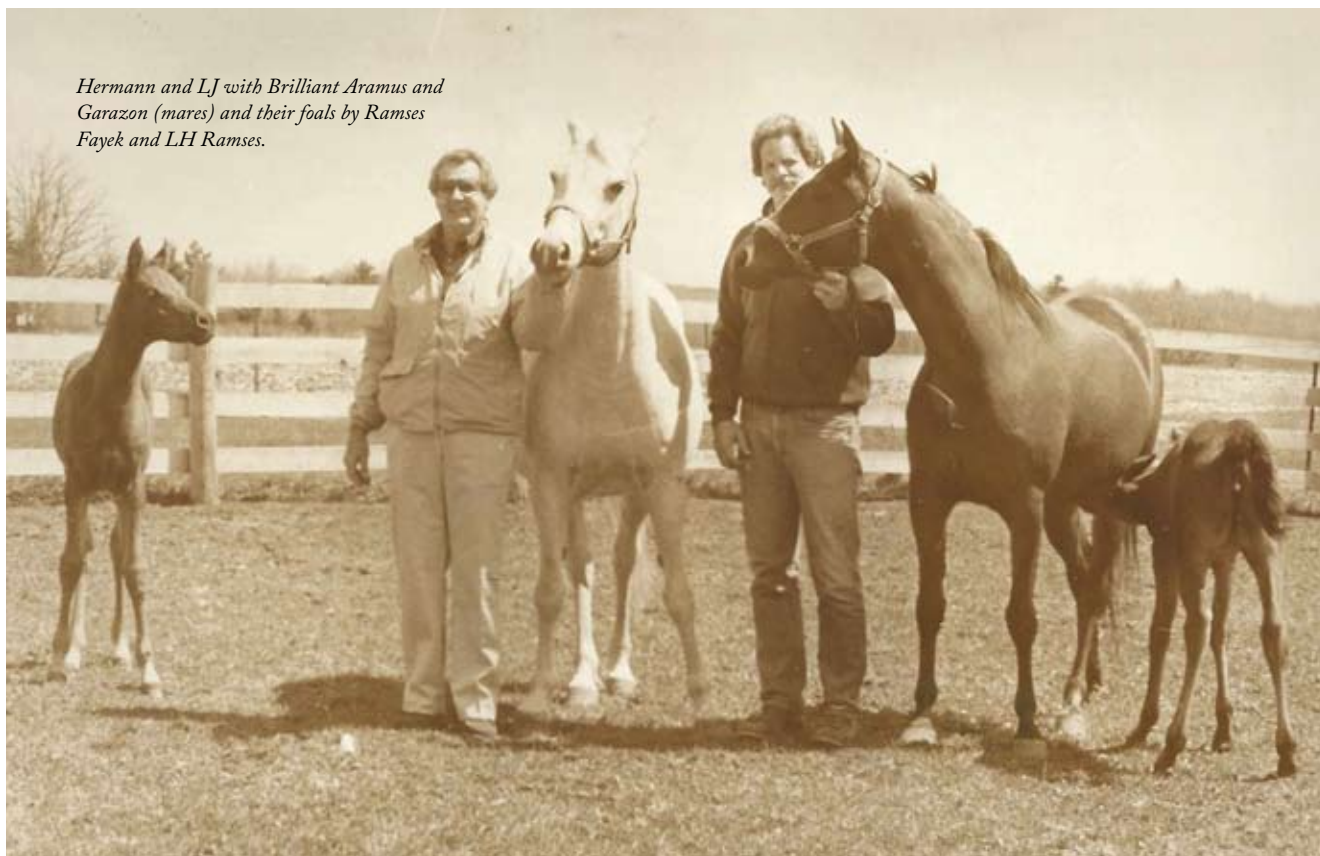
One ingredient in Larry Jerome's success over the years is that his myriad of involvements often conspired in his favor. One pursuit would lead to significant developments in another.

The most famous example of such intertwining was how, through the canary operation, Larry met the man who would become a special partner in the Arabian business. In the late 1970s, a gentleman arrived at the farm in search of a yellow or red canary, but unfortunately, the Jeromes had only green ones. The man was Hermann Blaser, he owned Arabians, and he and his wife, Lida, were destined to become two of Larry and Shelley's closest friends. Lida died in 2005, but Hermann remained in the family until his death earlier this year.

Larry loves to tell the story of how they bred and named LH Garcia, their headline stallion of the 1980s. "One of the things that I think is still pretty characteristic today is that when I go to horse shows, I watch all the classes," he prefaces the tale. "I'm constantly analyzing what I like and don't like, and keeping a score pad." At Scottsdale one year, his eye settled on the progeny of Jay and Dorothy Stream's Spanish import, AN Malik, so he enticed Hermann to go to the Greengate stalls for a look at the stallion.

"I knew Hermann's personality pretty well by then and I knew that he liked attention," Larry relates. "So, I went up to them and said, 'You know, I think we'd like to book a mare to AN Malik.' So, there was a crowd of people saying, 'Oh, Hermann Blaser's going to book a mare to AN Malik!'" He grins; Hermann, who could be fairly tight with a buck, never would back away from the pricey stud fee in front of a crowd.

*Hermann and LJ with Brilliant Aramus and Garazon (mares) and their foals by Ramses Fayek and LH Ramses.*





*Grandson Jerome with German Shepherd puppy stars of the future.*



*One of Jerland's German Shepherd foundation sires, the famous "Mutz".*

That night, Larry, Shelley, Evelyn Burton, Hermann and Lida adjourned to a Mexican restaurant named Garcia's to celebrate, only to be backed up in the bar, waiting for a table and passing the time ordering margaritas. By the time they finally sat down to eat—no worse for wear—the group had decided that if the AN Malik foal was a colt, his name would be Garcia and if it was a filly, she would be Margarita. And so began the life of LH Garcia, who would be named 1984 Canadian National Champion Futurity Colt, 1985 Canadian National Champion Stallion and 1986 Scottsdale Senior Champion Stallion and U.S. National Top Ten Stallion before being sold to Brazil.

From the dog world came other connections and experiences. "I showed my dogs and pretty much got my hind end handed to me on a plate," Larry says of his early days in

German Shepherds. "I didn't know what I was doing." The lesson? If you're going to run with the big dogs, you need the best stock and you need to know what you're doing.

When he acquired a mentor in German Shepherds, he found a friend in Arabians as well. Anne Mesdag, a highly-respected dog breeder in the Pacific Northwest, also introduced him to such horsemen as Joey Canda and Ron Palelek. A World War II prisoner-of-war, Mesdag had enormous strength of character, and Larry calls her not only his mentor, but also a second mother. Under her influence, he came to favor a European style of Shepherd. "I wanted a dog that didn't just look pretty," he explains. "It had to be functional." He and Mesdag traveled Europe together looking for dogs—and when they weren't looking at dogs, they were looking at horses.

His experience in the dog world taught him more than just breeding dogs. There, he saw firsthand the rancor and poor sportsmanship that can exist among top competitors. He was just getting started when he asked a dog show judge about Mesdag. "She said, 'Well, she's an outspoken old battle ax and I can guarantee you she'll never talk to anybody the likes of you!'" he recalls. He was shocked. "In our house, if you said anything negative about anybody, you might pick yourself up off the floor. If you can't say anything good, you keep your mouth shut."





*The Jerland Arabians crew: Hermann Blaser, Jeff Schall, MPA Giovanni, Mike Van Handel, Indira Jerome Van Handel, Larry and Shelley Jerome.*

Later, he would hear such spite about his own program, and he discussed it with Mesdag. "When they stop talking about you," she shrugged, "that's when you start to worry." By the time he owned world-class Arabians, he observes, the ups and downs of the show world were nothing new.

So fond did he and Mesdag become of each other that when she died in April 2008, he sang at her funeral. Her loss was already devastating; the day became a nightmare when, in the middle of everything, he received a call informing him that MPA Giovanni had broken his leg in a freak accident. The horse would recover. The memory of the day remains difficult.

There were countless other experiences. In Brazil, his musical talent made up for his lack of Portuguese, easing his entry into friendship with horsemen there. And trips to Europe became kaleidoscopes of ventures: some days were for cattle, some for dogs and some for horses. The

tapestry of his life was closely woven, and it worked to his advantage.

## Jerland Arabians Today

Over the years, Larry Jerome was never without horses and he attended shows regularly, but Jerland did not show routinely at the national level. It was not until 2003 that he returned to Arabians with an eye toward the kind of success he and Hermann Blaser had enjoyed with LH Garcia.

It began when he went to Arizona to be with his father, who was in poor health. Several days into the visit, as a break, he dropped in at Petroglyph Arabians, where Leo Hansen introduced him to a parade of horses. One mare, HJ Porcelain Bey, caught his imagination and wouldn't let go—but it was her granddaughter, an 18-hour-old foal out of Makena PGA, that stopped him cold. Not long after, he

bought the filly, Khenya PGA, for his youngest daughter, Indira. He was equally impressed with the youngster's sire, Khadraj NA (actually, "thrilled" is the word he used). Off and on in the ensuing four years, he told Brad Gallún, who was assisting Petroglyph's Devon Benbrook, that if the stallion ever came on the market, he'd be interested in buying him.

Khenya PGA, who would show to a Canadian National Top Ten in Futurity Fillies, became a catalyst for Jerome: she precipitated the purchase of the young stallion MPA Giovanni. "I felt that he was very genetically compatible with this filly," he says. "I loved how he looked physically, and I also loved how he looked genetically." It is the same in Arabian horses as it is in German Shepherds and cattle, he notes; an animal must be beautiful, but it also must be structurally and conformationally able to perform a job.

And there was another reason he bought MPA Giovanni, he admits. Lida Blaser had passed away and he felt Hermann needed an interest. "Gio," as the stallion is called, reignited Larry's partnership with his old friend.

A few years later, Larry was in Europe on one of his multi-purpose visits, working his way through a list of

top Arabian breeders. He was spending the night in a castle in Belgium, a guest of Josy and Kristel Everars-Van den Broek, when his phone rang in the wee hours of the morning. It was Brad Gallún; Khadraj NA was, at last, available. Unable to sleep, Larry debated the not-inconsiderable sum mentioned. "And then I looked at my clock, and I looked at the date," he recalls. "And I said, 'Well, it's my birthday. I'll buy myself a birthday present.'"

That was the summer of 2007. Larry Jerome's world was about as busy as any one person could handle in a 24-hour day. His Holstein herd, 10 generations deep, was producing milk at double the national average per cow. His German Shepherds were internationally respected. His music group was opening for headline acts. MPA Giovanni had been named U.S. National Champion Futurity Colt, and Khadraj NA's get were establishing his reputation for siring performance horses.

Over the next few years, there would be more to come. His youngest daughter, Indira, would become his partner in many of the horses and worked at the farm; MPA Giovanni would break his leg and then recover; Khadraj NA would be selected Arabian Horse Times Readers' Choice Sire of the Year; and Jerland would come within



*Hermann and Larry Jerome at Scottsdale with Gio.*



a whisker of being named Champion Breeder at the Las Vegas World Cup. Mike Van Handel would become the farm's trainer and marry Indira. The years would fly by with ever-increasing scope.

## Who Is Larry Jerome?

You can lose Larry Jerome sometimes in all that action. Finally, you stop to wonder, who is behind all that accomplishment? And why doesn't he slow down?

"I hate the two words, 'if only,'" he reflects. "My kids were never going to be able to say 'I wished I would have,' because I made damn sure that they did.

"If I saw something that I really liked, I probably went after it," he offers. "Maybe that wasn't always the smart thing to do, but I'm a passionate person. I'm not an analytical person." An analytical person, he adds, can talk himself out of things. That's never been his problem.

On the surface, his life looks like one big slide to success. Not so, he says, although

he clearly doesn't like to dwell on the dimmer moments. "I had financial difficulty," he admits, "and for a long time, I waited for the sky to open up and for something to solve my problems. Then one night I was lying in bed and I said to myself, 'You know you got yourself into this, Larry Jerome, and you'd better figure a way to get out of it.' I took the bull by the horns and I did."

He never forgot that hesitancy. "We all make mistakes, and sometimes we're more concerned about what other people think," he says. "We maybe don't give mankind the [benefit of the doubt]. It's like having a flat tire along the side of the road. Most people don't go driving by and say 'Hee hee.'



Larry and daughter Daria, showing three sisters named the Best Female Cows at the Minnesota State Fair.



Larry Jerome with Dr. Edwin Brade, General Manager of Sächsischer Rinderzuchtverband (SRV), in the former East Germany with Debica, the world's first eight-generation cow producing 40,000-lbs. of milk. Cattle breeder David Younger bred the first four generations, while Jerome bred the second four.

"I have a very strong Christian faith," he continues. "I have strong beliefs that have helped me get through a lot of very rough emotional times and health issues."

Most of all, he is grateful for the people in his life. His parents, he notes, set a great example of a loving relationship. "They were a team," he says. "And I'm married to the Patron Saint. There are very few women in the world who could tolerate my eccentricities. We grew together."

He took his own responsibility as a parent seriously. "We have an opportunity to influence our kids' lives," he says, adding his father always set very high standards and expectations. "My father wasn't my best friend; he was my father. So sometimes he directed me differently than I thought I should be, and I did the same thing with my own kids. Our kids have all been very hands-on in the



farm. I've always said that every person in life should know how to clean a chicken, how to clean their own toilet bowl, and how to pick out a fine wine. It's okay to get your hands dirty, you know. And it's okay to enjoy the finer things in life, but don't expect other people to do things for you that you would not do for yourself."

Now he follows the show careers of his grandchildren. There is a satisfaction, he says, in seeing the continuity of generations.

His biggest lesson so far? To be thankful for every day and every friend, he replies. "I have an aunt who always said that you have a choice every day when you get up to be happy or to be mad and ornery. Maybe I'm not happy every day of my life, but I try to be. I'm not shy about meeting people. They are all opportunities—friends that you haven't met."

He has slowed down a little in the last decade, he observes. Maybe some of that comes from those "rough health issues" (a heart condition that precipitated open heart surgery), or maybe it is just the natural process of aging, but he's not as intense as he once was.

His best philosophy of life comes from Martin Loeber, another of his mentors in the Arabian business, a self-made man who, like Hermann Blaser and Anne Mesdag, overcame tremendous adversity. "It hangs on my wall today," he says. "It says, 'Count your garden by the flowers, never buy the leaves in the fall. Count your days by golden

hours; never mind the clouds at all. Count your nights by stars, not shadows. Count your life by smiles, not tears. And with your joy on every birthday, count your age by friends, not years.'"

As he speaks, he focuses on a picture of Loeber in his office. Such things remind him of who he is, he says, where he came from and where he is going. "This journey is going way too fast. One of the reasons that I enjoy traveling so much is I have so much to learn, I have so much to see before I can't do it anymore."

Finally it is clear: the reason Larry Jerome can cram so much into his life is that he incorporates everything he loves—his family, his interests, the people he meets and likes—into not only his leisure time (such as it is), but also his business. There is no line of demarcation between work and play.

We could leave it at that, a rational answer to the question of who is Larry Jerome. But his own enthusiasm bubbles over any such serious conclusion. "Why do people work?" he asks rhetorically. "People work to take care of their families, to eat, to have a roof over their house, and all of those types of things. ... You probably can't use this in print, but you know what? There are two pleasures in life. One is food and the other is sex, and the sex doesn't last forever, so you'd better enjoy the food." And by his own experience, everything else good that rates your time. ■

*Larry and Shelley Jerome with their 22 grandchildren, Halloween 2012.*

