



the *Ken & Charlene  
Robinson Family*  
of Sweet Home Arabians

BY MARY JANE PARKINSON



*Top: Charlene Robinson at ten years old, a “wannabe cowgirl.”*

*Bottom: Charlene on her first horse, Ginger. She and the gelding excelled in trail-blazing, pole-bending, barrel-racing, and track racing. “Ginger taught me a lot about life and about horses,” says Charlene.*

“Horse-crazy girl” might be an apt description for Charlene Robinson as a child, but the description is hardly strong enough. “I was mesmerized by horses from the day I was old enough to know what they were,” Charlene remembers. “Cowboy star Roy Rogers and his Palomino ‘Trigger’ were very popular then, and I was in love with Trigger. Each week, as I was growing up, I wrote to Roy Rogers, asking to buy Trigger. Can you believe he wouldn’t sell to me? I even promised I could keep Trigger in my bedroom and that my mother wouldn’t care.

“If a horse trailer went by our house, my heart would race just to think of what might be in that trailer. I walked or rode my bike for miles just to see horses in the fields. To touch one sent me flying to the moon. I even licked the salt blocks, just because horses did. And, like any horse-crazy kid, I read the Black Stallion books over and over again, along with any other horse stories I could find. When I was nine, I joined the Kitsap Saddle Club just so I could be around people with horses. There I met several Arabian owners.”

When Charlene was 11, her father — possibly out of desperation and a wish for survival — bought her a horse. He was well-intentioned of course, but came home with a yearling colt, a “Heinz 57” (Mustang, Quarter Horse, Thoroughbred cross) and as wild as they come. The colt had never been

handled, ran with two other horses in a 20-acre pasture, his only previous encounter with humans being shot at by boys with slingshots and BB guns. Charlene rode her bike to see the colt each day, tempted him with apples, and eventually was able to touch him. “He sometimes turned on me though, and it broke my heart to think he didn’t like me, but I was determined to capture the love and trust of this colt.”

When “Ginger” was old enough, he was sent to Earl Craig, a well-known trainer in the area. “I thought I had died and gone to heaven,” Charlene remembers of her first visit to the training stables. “A real horse stables filled with beautiful horses. Mine was the runt and of course the ugliest, but he was mine and I loved him.” Ginger acquired a special distinction at the stables: the only horse to ever throw the trainer, who upon gaining his feet immediately suggested Ginger could earn a fortune as a rodeo bronc.

Finally, understanding prevailed, and Ginger became Charlene’s one-person horse and best friend. She rode him every day, come rain, sleet, or snow. If she fell off his back, he waited for her to remount. If she visited neighbors, he broke out of his stall and tagged along, afraid he might miss a trail ride. In competition, Charlene and Ginger starred in trail-blazing, pole-bending, barrel-racing, and track racing (against the local sheriff’s posse). In parades, Ginger would leap high in the air and the parade-watchers thought



that was part of his exuberance, but it was really his protest against anything moving ahead of him. He gained a statewide reputation in Washington as a little horse with a big heart and as a definite one-person horse. "Ginger taught me a lot about life and about horses," Charlene recalls. In the usual pattern of horse ownership, Ginger was followed by two three-quarter Arabians, one of which she broke and trained.

"Ken did not know he liked horses until he was about 35 years old and always found himself hanging over fences and studying them," says Charlene. Ken was involved in a cattle-raising partnership, which meant horses were needed. Ken walked the well-worn path from non-Arabians to a three-quarter Arabian.

One summer, Ken was asked to serve as "pit crew" for a friend's horse in the Tevis Cup Ride (100 miles in one day) in Northern California. He was so much impressed by the quality and performance of the Arabians on the ride that he decided that someday he wanted to own Arabians. With that enthusiasm, Ken put \$2,000 in his pocket and he and a friend headed off for a yearly auction of Arabians at Spokane. Even with his \$2,000, Ken was not able to open the bid on any horse, and he came home very disappointed.

Later, Ken bought an Arabian mare in foal for \$2,000. The mare produced a filly that Ken sold for \$2,000. That sale opened the prospect of making money by breeding and selling



*Top: Baskfibia (\*Bask x \*Amfibia) with Ken Robinson in 1983. Ken brought the \*Bask son home from Scottsdale as a two-year old. He quickly gained attention in Washington Arabian horse circles.*

*Bottom: Baskfibia daughters from left to right: Shea De Luv out of Shad-E Lady; Baska Hari out of Gai Lana), dam of 1989 Regions 4 and 5 Top Ten Yearling Sweepstakes Colt SH Top Brass by DWD Tabasco, and 1990 Regions 4 and 5 Top Ten Yearling Sweepstakes Filly SH Crown Jewel by DWD Tabasco; SH Matinee out of Aladdin's Prelude; and SH Shalika out of Shani Baha), dam of 1988 Region 5 Reserve Champion Mare and 1986 Regions 4 and 5 Top Ten Yearling Sweepstakes Filly SH Katrina by DWD Tabasco; 1990 Region 5 Top Five Three-Year-Old Futurity Filly SH Hearts Desire by Eagle NA, and 1990 Region 5 Top Ten Yearling Sweepstakes Filly SH Shalia Bey by Bey Shah.*

Arabians. Again, he walked the well-worn path by buying a yearling colt Ali Naji (Swain x Basedi by Abu Baha) as his first purebred. Later he purchased two inbred \*Raffles mares, then Desdamona (Gai-Adventure x Mirindey by \*Mirzaz), a two-year-old filly who won first place in a field of 32 at Washington's important Daffodil Arabian Show, this win in competition with the best of the Kale Arabians and other established breeders in the area. The win was a highlight for Ken and made him even more determined to get into the Arabian horse business. He bred mares to \*Silver Drift and Khemosabi, then began thinking he wanted a new stallion, and a new Polish stallion, as much of the breed talk was about \*Bask. Ken went off to Scottsdale with high hopes and even higher expectations as he brought home Baskfibia, a two-year-old \*Bask son out of \*Amfibia by Sedziwoj. The colt caused quite a stir in Washington Arabian horse circles,



*Top: SH Chauvenist (DWD Tabasco x Shad-E Lady) Champion and Reserve Champion of local Washington shows, and currently owned by Thierry Barbier, France.*

*Middle left: DWD Tabasco (Traditio x Bask Vienna by \*Bask). When the Robinsons acquired the colt, then two, he had just won a junior championship. "We instantly knew he was the one we were looking for," Charlene recounts. "He was very athletic and pretty with a great disposition, and linebred to \*Bask. He was like having another \*Bask son."*

*Middle right: SH Prince Chrming (WN Ultimate Star x Cinderella WC), a halter and reining champion and Charlene's trail horse. Ron Copple up.*

*Bottom: Eagle NA (\*Elkin x Elzunia) "We bought Eagle NA from Mike Nichols in partnership with Ron and Margie Wilson, dba Sands Northwest," says Charlene Robinson. "We eventually bought the partners out."*



known mostly for the Kale, Madsen, and Egyptian lines. Ken was sure Baskfibia would do well as a sire in this new territory.

Then came the meeting of Ken and Charlene, as arranged by a friend of Ken's. "He tried to get me to go out with him, but after four sons (Mark, Brad, Joel, and Tim) and a divorce, I wasn't ready to date anyone," says Charlene. Finally she agreed to go on a trail ride with him. That started it all,

and later Charlene and Ken were married. They postponed their honeymoon briefly while they attended a horse show, then went on their way to Vancouver, British Columbia.

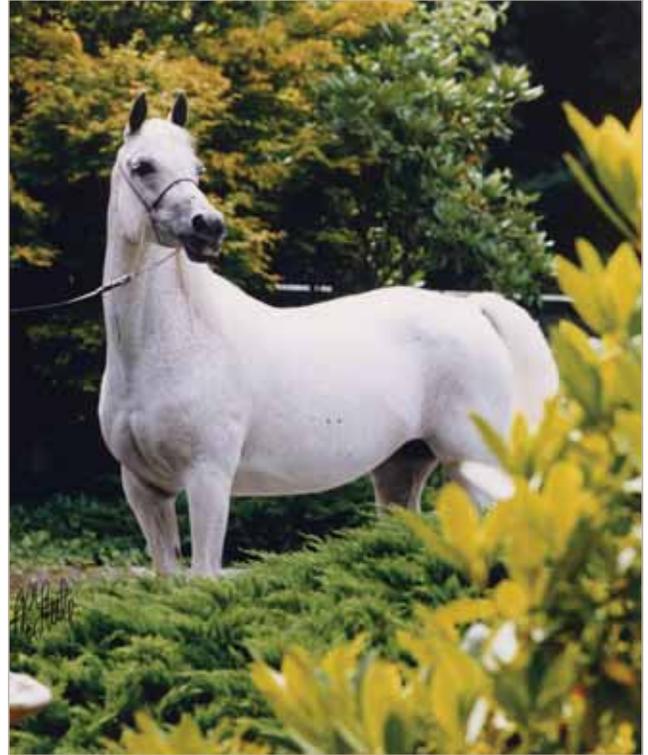
Their combined horse effort needed a name, Ken and Charlene decided, and, as they drove through Oregon, they spotted a sign for a small town named Sweet Home. With that, they decided their farm was to be known as "Sweet Home Arabians" at Olympia, Washington, a place where everyone would feel welcome and enjoy being there.

The Robinsons, like many others, were caught up in the frenzy of the Scottsdale auctions of the 1970s and 1980s. "We decided we'd better get real serious about breeding Arabians after our SH Nadizja (Baskfibia x Desdamona), a beautiful, elegant, black bay filly, sold for \$60,000 in the 1979 \*Bask Classic," Charlene remembers. "SH Nadizja was used as our Sweet Home logo, because we felt she was the one who





*Above: Dr. Armand Hammer with Ken and Charlene (standing). "We bought GW Dansktezza (Gdansk x Nieta Witez) as a yearling," says Charlene. "She became a multi-champion mare winning Pacific Slope Champion Mare among others. Dr. Hammer purchased her for \$150,000 at a Lasma sale."*



*Top right: QF Laila (Quilchena Parada x Martje Mar) was acquired by the Robinsons in 1982 from Quilchena Farms in Canada. Remembers Charlene: "When our son Joel went to feed in the morning, he came to the house all excited and said, 'What is the matter with that new horse? Her head is caved in!' So we knew we really got a great one, and great she still is."*



*"She always complements the stallion to whom she's been bred," says Charlene. "Among her contributions are great beauty, long necks with wonderful shape in the poll, correct legs, level croups, good tail carriage, and wonderful temperament. But mainly she's given us the gift of breeding beautiful Arabian horses."*

really put us in the business. A full sister was chosen for the \*Bask Classic the following year, but had to be withdrawn from the sale because of an injury."

"About 1982, we decided we were going on a hunt for a beautifully headed mare to bred to Baskfibia," Ken remembers. "At Quilchena Farms in Canada, we found QF Laila (Quilchena Parada x Martje Mar by The Real McCoy), a ten-month-old filly in a group of about 20." Ken liked the filly, and Charlene felt more strongly than that about her. "Ken wanted to go home and think about her for a while, was not going to buy her just like that. I was having a cow! I was so upset and could not believe that he did not buy her then and there. On the way home, I told Ken, dead serious and almost in tears, that if I died right then he would promise me he would buy her and breed her to Baskfibia. Well, we did buy her, paying \$17,000 and a breeding to Baskfibia. We brought her home, and she was put in a stall for the night. When our son Joel went to feed in the morning, he came to the house all excited and said, 'What is the matter with that new horse? Her head is caved in!' So we knew we really got a great one, and great she still is." QF Laila produced a filly by DWD Tabasco, who was sold; a gorgeous black bay colt. Michael Byatt came to see him, was impressed, and sold him for the Robinsons for \$45,000. At Scottsdale Laila's colt (SH Dream Weaver) placed near the top in a class of some 90 colts. Another colt, SH Hallmark, placed third out of, as Charlene says, another monstrous class, then went on to wins in Region 7 and other

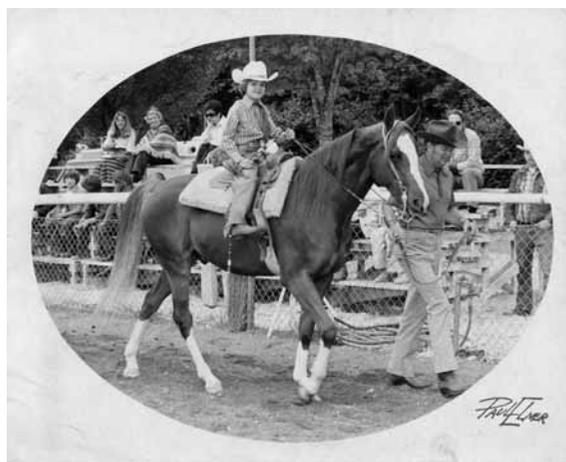
*Bottom: SH Phantom Echo (Echo Magnifico x QF Laila) was 1996 U.S. National Champion Futurity Colt, and two-time National Champion. He is currently owned by Jeff Curry of Olympia, Washington.*

*Top left: The Robinsons' oldest son Mark on Ali Naji (Swain x Basedi), the Robinson's first purebred, at the Kitsap Saddle Club State Show in the late 1970s.*

*Top right: Ken riding SH Hallmark (DWD Tabasco x QF Laila).*

*Bottom left: Youngest son Tim riding three-quarter Arabian Four High at Kitsap saddle Club State show in the late 1970s, with Ken Robinson leading.*

*Bottom right: Charlene and grandsons Luke and Logan.*



shows. SH Hallmark's halter career ended when it was discovered that he had only one testicle. Ken and Charlene decided not to geld him and to use him for breeding. He is credited with 22 foals. The black bay SH Dream Weaver was a rising star at Sweet Home in the late 1980s and was being prepared to show in halter at Scottsdale in 1989. "Michael Byatt said everyone who saw him thought all he had to do was walk in and he would win Scottsdale," Charlene says. During preparation for that show, the almost two-year-old Dream Weaver shattered a front leg and had to be put down.

The Robinsons bought one of his daughters, Cinderella WC (SH Hallmark x WC Delekata by JF Avanti) from her breeders, who went on to be Scottsdale Reserve Champion Five-Year-Old Mare. "Acclaim for Cinderella's beauty came from far and wide," says Charlene. "We still own her beautiful Echo Magnificoo daughter SH Glass Slipper, and she gave us a beautiful filly this year, sired by our black stallion Ferrer. SH Glass Slipper is in foal to \*Marwan Al Shaqab for June 2008."

Charlene and Ken enjoy the positive feelings of family interest in the horses. Mark was the most involved, showing in halter, western pleasure, and pleasure driving, then going into a horse-related business, that of horse transport. "People loved him because he has such a wonderful way with the horses, as well as the people," says Charlene. Brad (deceased) liked the horses and was especially close to the stallion Eagle NA (\*Elkin x Elzunia by Witraz), who was purchased from Mike Nichols in 1981, and was his best friend. Joel loved the horses too and was a dedicated student and sportsman, but loved to be at Sweet Home during foaling season. He now owns his own physical therapy clinic. Tim, the youngest, liked the horses and was a

good rider. All four sons have children who appreciate the horses and the farm life and come to ride SH Prince Chrming (by WN Ultimate Star) or to help "Grammy" clean stalls.

QF Laila is now 26, lives in Virginia, still producing foals, and still one of the leading living dams of champions. She's had several beautiful fillies by \*Marwan Al Shaqab and Psymadre, Charlene relates.

As any Arabian horse breeder, the Robinsons have had their share of "downers." While their SH Cover Girl competed at Canadian Nationals, at home their Polish mare FTL Eleana died from stomach ulcers that perforated her stomach. Cover Girl added another downer in those few days. Jerry Schall took her to Canada



*A picture-perfect setting: Sweet Home Arabians farm is adjacent to a part of the Puget Sound called Eld Inlet.*

*Bottom left: The Robinsons' son Joel with his youngest son Logan visits 2007 filly SH Heavenly (Justify x SH Beautymark).*

*Bottom right: The Robinsons' late son Brad with his daughter Amanda riding SH Hallmark (DWD Tabasco x QF Laila). "Amanda loved horses from the time she was young," Charlene says. "I can understand that — I was born with a passion for horses and never got over it! Amanda is such a gift to us after having lost Brad."*



and called Ken and Charlene to say that she was a star and seemed destined to go Canadian National Champion Futurity Filly. Then, on the day of the finals, call-up speakers were not working properly, and Jerry and Cover Girl missed the class. "By the time Jerry got the word that the class was going in — he'd been ready for more than an hour — he ran full bore for the in-gate. He was in sight of the gatekeepers when they shut the gate and wouldn't let him in. The malfunction of the speakers was not a factor, he learned," Charlene remembers. "One of the hardest defeats we have known. Cover Girl could have been our first National winner."

Baskfibia had a major misfortune when he broke the femur in a hind leg. "Not only was he a favorite, he was our livelihood because we had so many mares waiting to be bred to him," says Ken. "Our vet said he could not set the bone, but if Baskfibia would tolerate it, he could be put in a sling to heal." Charlene and Ken monitored Baskfibia day and night as he slowly healed. Post-sling, he got around, even though stiff-legged, but when he lay down, Ken and Charlene had to help him up. Sadly the Robinsons felt they had to put him down.

The insurance money bought the Robinsons another \*Bask-related stallion, DWD Tabasco (Traditio x Bask Vienna by \*Bask). "The colt, then two, had just won a junior championship, and we instantly knew he was the one we were looking for," Charlene recounts. "He was very athletic and pretty with a great disposition, and linebred \*Bask. He was like having another \*Bask son. Tabasco was very well received when we brought him home, and mares that had been booked to Baskfibia came to Tabasco. His first foal crop of 21 convinced us: 17 were shown and 17 were champions. The foals were beautiful, and athletic and had



*Top left: SH Cover Girl (Baskfibia x Desdama), was a dashed hope as the Robinsons' first national winner when she and Ken missed the call-up announcement for their finals class at the 1985 Canadian Nationals.*

*Top right: Ken and Charlene were partners in breeding the Half-Arabian Son Of A Bay (DWD Tabasco x Rosanna Santana) with the Masons of Rainbet Arabians. They bought out the Robinsons' half for their daughter Tina Mason (pictured). He won numerous National Championships in Half-Arabian English Pleasure with Joey Canda and Tina. Son Of A Bay was "one of those extra-special athletes we all dream of breeding someday," Charlene says.*



wonderful minds. We took three yearlings to Scottsdale for the Get of Sire Class at Star World. We won \$15,000 for that effort, and Tabasco received even more kudos as a sire."

Ken and Charlene bred SH Cover Girl to Tabasco to produce SH Centrefold, who was sold. With trainer Joey Canda, Centrefold showed the show world all about versatility and style. "When Joey and Centrefold hit the in-gate, it was brilliance to behold. The crowd went wild," says Charlene. Centrefold and Joey won several national championships in native costume. A bit later, the Robinsons, with partners, bred two Saddlebred mares to Tabasco to produce a filly and a colt. "There was something unique about that colt and the way he flung those long, long legs around," says Charlene. "We named him Son Of A Bay." The partners, who bought out the Robinsons' interest sent Son Of A Bay

to Joey Canda where the horse became a superstar. "One of those extra-special athletes we all dream of breeding someday," Charlene continues. "The two won everything from Day One."

In 2003, the Robinsons and their associates in "Justify Partners" flew to Minnesota for their first look at a three-week-old colt from an embryo purchased the year before. Every day, Bob Boggs (at whose stables the recipient mare was kept) told the partners that this was a terrific foal. "I was ecstatic because this was a chestnut with a flaxen mane and tail," Charlene says. "This is the closest I will get to a Palomino, I thought. (I was still in love with Trigger.) Justify, now owned by David and Tammy Corning of DST Arabians, Olympia, Washington, is my dream horse; always will be." The Robinsons have a Justify daughter, SH Just Heavenly, foaled in 2007, and SH Crystal Lady (Blackstone

Bey x QF Laila), her daughter, will foal to Justify early in 2008.

Charlene and Ken's latest acquisition is a true black colt named Ferrer (Enzo x Regal Fada JP by Laddin BA), sired by a U.S. National Champion Stallion and out of a Brazilian National Champion Mare. "We had no business buying a colt at our age," Charlene relates, "but he was too good to pass by. Ferrer has a wonderful disposition, and we can honestly say he is one of the best overall horses we have ever had anything to do with. We bought him as an investment, for resale, and can imagine him going to an overseas breeder."

So the "horse-crazy girl" and the "man who didn't know he liked horses" have been breeding (about 160 foals), raising, showing, buying, and selling Arabians for 33 years. They're still on the farm they started with and planned for their retirement home: 11 acres of

*Top right The Robinsons' latest acquisition: Ferrer (Enzo x Regal Fada JP by Laddin BA) was sired by a U.S. National Champion Stallion and out of a Brazilian National Champion Mare. Ferrer was 2008 Scottsdale Unanimous Champion Four-Year-Old Stallion, 2005 Scottsdale Top Ten Yearling Colt, and Region 5 Reserve Champion One-Year-Old Breeders Sweepstakes Colt. He was purchased this year at Scottsdale by John and Mindy Peters of El Capitan Ranch, Santa Barbara, California.*



*Top left: The next generation, Ken with 2007 colt SH Shivago by \*Gazal Al Shaqab out of SH Crystal Lady (Blackstone Bey x QF Laila).*



horse country just five miles from Olympia, Washington, seven miles from I-5, and 90 minutes from Seattle/Tacoma Airport, and with a gorgeous view of the Black Hills, and part of the Puget Sound called Eld Inlet. Charlene and Ken now own seven horses and have two foals coming this year, a contrast to the years of 45 Robinson horses plus 50 mares in for breeding and the around-the-clock breeding sessions. "Ken and I do all the work, so it keeps us young and in shape," says Charlene. "Ken just celebrated his 80th birthday, but he is young for his age, and we both still have our passion for the horses.

"We can honestly say we have been richly blessed by the horses, not just by the commercial aspects of Arabians, but by having the adventures and the love of those magnificent horses. We have so many treasured memories through the years as well as the thrills and the hardships that we learned by. We would never have had this wonderful life had it not been for our many friends and others who believed in our horses, bought them, and bred to our stallions. It's like gaining a family when people become connected through the Arabians."



*Middle: Charlene and her llama, Cria. The Robinsons bred llamas in the late 1980s through the '90s before they sold the whole herd to a breeder from Ohio. their stud llama "Count Shasta" was both a champion and sire of champions. The Robinsons did well with the llamas — one of Count Shasta's offspring brought \$60,000.*



*Bottom: Ken has another passion in addition to horses: old cars. Here he poses with a classic Mustang convertible.*