

HRH PRINCESS ALIA BINT AL HUSSEIN

A ROYAL ADVOCATE FOR PURITY IN BREED & CARE OF ARABIAN HORSES

By Bridget McArdle McKinney

WE ARE HONOURED THAT HRH PRINCESS ALIA BINT AL HUSSEIN, DAUGHTER OF THE LATE KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN, HAS AGREED TO SHARE HER THOUGHTS ON HER LOVE OF HORSES, HER “GROWING TOGETHER” PROJECT, HER NEW BOOK, AND JUST WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE ARABIAN HORSE SHOW SCENE AT THE MOMENT. WITH HER MANY LEADERSHIP POSITIONS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND INTERESTS IN THE HORSE WORLD, INCLUDING ACTING AS PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL JORDANIAN EQUESTRIAN FEDERATION, DIRECTOR OF THE ROYAL JORDANIAN STUD, GOVERNOR OF THE BRITISH ARAB HORSE SOCIETY MEMBER OF THE HONORARY COMMITTEE OF THE SPANISH RIDING SCHOOL, AND PATRON OF THE BROOKE HOSPITAL FOR ANIMALS, AND ADVOCATE, OWNER, AND BREEDER OF ARABIAN HORSES, SHE ALSO FINDS TIME FOR PHILATELY, ART, AND TAE KWONDO, - AND TO SPEAK TO HT.



BACKGROUND:

Your Royal Highness, when did your love of horses begin?

It began when my father gave me a Shetland pony when I was little and I have loved horses ever since.

Although you are so very concerned with the welfare of horses, your care and concern extends beyond horses to the welfare of all God’s creatures, indeed, the motto of the Princess Alia Foundation is “Respect and Compassion toward Creation”. Please tell us about your foundation and its “Growing Together” project.

The aim of the Princess Alia

Foundation (PAF) is to promote the balance, harmony and respect of all Creation, using a holistic approach and bringing all stakeholders together to work as a united front. The Foundation approaches all projects using a holistic approach, in order to create sustainable change at the grass roots level, whilst advocating for change at the policy level. Through creating positive partnerships and mobilising resources PAF aims to reduce duplication ensuring that efforts are directed where they are most needed.

One part of the PAF, an important and exciting one, is the “Growing Together” project which offers children in need the opportunity for equine therapy. It is heart-warming

to see the achievements and hear the stories of the children aided by this project. I would truly encourage you to see the results of this project and the stories of the children on <http://princessaliafoundation.blogspot.com/>.

‘ROYAL HERITAGE’:

Your interest in Arabian breeding and purity is well-known, as an Arabian horse owner, breeder, and judge, director of the Royal Stables of Jordan for the Preservation of the Arabian Horse, founder of the annual festival of the ‘Arabian Horse at Home’ and organiser of the Middle East Championships for Purebred Horses. You add to these designations another -



‘Arabian horse historian’ - with the publication of your new book “Royal Heritage”, a history of the Arabian horse in Jordan. It’s been called ‘a story of legend, romance and war’! Can you tell us about your new book?

I have been interested in the recognition and preservation of the Arab horses in Jordan for quite some time. In 1987 we organised the first Arab horse show titled ‘The Arab Horse at Home’. I wrote the book together with Peter Upton in order to tell the story of the Arab horse in Jordan from early days to the present time. In fact, it traces the history of Jordan itself from the early 20th Century.

From the time of the Arab Revolt in

1916 which drove out the Ottomans some of those early Arab mares used in the campaigns became foundation stock for the Royal Stud of Jordan. The Stud suffered tragic events over the course of history, which are detailed in the book. Yet, the Stud survives.

I included several stories and personal memories in the book, about people, horses, and events I encountered, and Peter included detailed information regarding the history, conformation and lines of these beautiful Jordanian Arabs.

BREEDING, TRAINING, AND SHOWING ABUSE:

Your keynote address at last November’s World Arabian

Horse Organization (WAHO) conference in Qatar is a lucid and comprehensive perspective on the past, present and future of the relationship between horses and humans, particularly in the Arab horse world; the past characterised by a natural respectful interaction of need based on moral guidelines, the future pointing toward gentler methods and trust, and a present of many instances of abusive breeding, training and showing practices which you challenge. HT applauds you on your bold stance in this regard. What can be done to alter the course of these abusive practices?

As I mentioned in my keynote address, there is at last a large,





loud, and I think serious outcry about show abuse. The present outcry, if sustained, may help us to bring about change, by waking up the owners to reality of the suffering of their horses, by empowering officials, from judges to DCs to ring stewards to be far more effective, and helping push us into far more practical action and decisions.

As for the trainers, I also believe that many are as desensitised to what they are doing, as are children playing violent video games to real

war footage. I know from myself that the more I think about and really become acquainted with the feelings and senses of others, the more I become aware of HOW desensitised I WAS, often not perceiving things which are in fact truly distressing. So instead of just criticising the trainers I do think that we need to actually TRY (at least) to get them to understand what the effects are of what they do.

Some may find the comments in your WAHO speech about 'Natural Horsemanship' somewhat controversial. What is it you find harmful in some of the Natural Horsemanship methods?

I do feel this is important to understand - some of the "Natural Horsemanship" methods - most notably those involving chasing away the horse in a round pen - can be quite as damaging as physical abuse - perhaps more - as they strip the creature of its will - FAST and what is left is an apathetic shell. True there was no outward cruelty and CERTAINLY the intention is good, but it is based upon incomplete or partial truths. True, wild horses keep newcomers outside the group until they have assessed how (if at all) they will fit into the complex herd system. If accepted - both newcomer and herd having had up to three days sometimes, in which to observe and figure things out - then there is usually a smooth blending - no fighting and injury-risking, nor damage to the valuable grass around by churning it up in the process. If NOT accepted, the newcomer has the option of finding

other company - it is not hemmed in, being chased away but with nowhere to GO, and only total submission and loss of identity as the alternative. That way is a form of domination - and we all know that broken minds and wills can be far harder to heal than broken bodies.

The comments in your speech regarding the healing role of horses which you describe in almost mystical terms were very touching. Can you provide further explanation of this healing faculty?

We all know that horses are not just enchanting, a healthy pastime for teenagers, ego-boosters, work companions or facilitators, entertainers - but they are also healers. Arab tradition tells us that they bear good fortune, that they ensure Divine assistance to their owners in caring for them, that they are comets combating negative forces. I believe that they really do filter away negative energies, but they do more than that.

We thank HRH Princess Alia bint Al Hussein very much for her time and thoughtful answers, but most of all for her devotion to the cause of horse welfare in sport and in show. 🇧🇪

For the full text of HRH Princess Alia's WAHO speech, please go to: <http://www.waho.org/Images/Waho2011/HRH-Princess-Alia-WAHO2011.pdf> and for more information about the Princess Alia Foundation, go to: <http://sites.google.com/site/princessaliafoundation/>