

## My Grandfather's Lipizzan

By Dr. Allan Hamilton

Some horses make us wait a lifetime before they're ready to come into this world. But this year, the spring of 2010, we had our first colt out of our Lipizzan breeding program. The events that shaped his arrival spanned three lifetimes, reaching across a century of my family's history from Vienna, Austria to Tucson, Arizona. After all that, the colt almost got me killed.



Author's grandfather as an officer in the Imperial Cavalry of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in Vienna, Austria

I fell in love with Lipizzans because of my grandfather. He helped raise me. He had been a dashing Viennese cavalry officer. He was a fabulous equestrian in his day and had the opportunity to ride in the famous Spanish Riding School before the Emperor Franz Josef. He was in the cavalry and went off to the Great War.

A year after the war started, my grandfather was riding his favorite mount, Otto, into a small skirmish when an artillery shell burst in front of him. My grandfather was wounded and knocked to the ground. He managed to crawl the ten or so yards to where Otto lay mortally wounded. Two of the horse's legs had been amputated by the blast and his belly had been ripped open by a large piece of shrapnel.

My grandfather wrapped his arms around his great horse's neck, kissed him, and then pressed his revolver against Otto's head and squeezed the trigger. The battle would rage on for two more days. Over half of my grandfather's unit was killed or wounded.

My grandfather grabbed a second horse that had lost its rider and later, that same afternoon, his second horse was shot out from underneath him. Later, my grandfather was decorated with Austria's highest military decoration for valor. It was pinned on him by the Emperor himself in the Redoutensaal in the Habsburg Imperial Palace. But he told me, at the time, he could barely stand to look at the palace anymore. He told me it was especially hard to walk past the stables across the street from the palace.

My grandfather passed on to me his great love for horses and this wonderful breed. He shared with me his perpetual grief at seeing his own horses sacrificed in war. I remember walking with him through the Museum of Military History just outside Vienna when I was a young teenager on vacation. Once we were strolling down one of the halls and he came to a stop in front of a huge oil painting. It was one of those typical immense, baroque paintings that depicted a battle with hundreds of figures, charging bravely through cannon fire. There were heroic generals at the center, bathed in light and



Author's grandfather headed to the front in the opening days of World War I



The Emperor Franz Josef

glory, exhorting men with their sabers held aloft. Brave flag bearers propping up their standards. My grandfather pointed at it.

"They never paint the horses correctly in these heroic paintings," he commented.

"What?" I asked. "There's tons of horses in this painting. They look fine!"

"Yes, live ones. All the horses they paint are alive."

"What's wrong with that?"

"They always leave out all the dead ones--the wounded and mutilated ones--when they make these paintings. It's like nothing ever happened to horses in battle." He said. "But terrible things took place. The screams of the horses were the worst of it. Worse than those of the dying men. Because we rarely had bullets to spare for all the horses that were dying. Sometimes...the men would bayonet them to finish them

off. To put them out of their misery.

But there were so

many...it was bloody, terrible work, and a man would spend himself completely just doing them in. So, mostly, the animals would cry out for hours till they finally, mercifully died."

He once told me that the sound of the horses was the most terrible, fearful sound he had ever heard. "It is the sound of hell itself," he said.



*Nearly four million horses are estimated to have died during World War I.*



*The Cross of Military Merit of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire*



*The blood-stained tunic worn by Archduke Ferdinand when he was shot by a Serbian assassin (Courtesy of Museum of Military History, Vienna, Austria).*

I also recall how hushed, almost reverential, he became in the museum when we came to the thirty-two horse-power, four cylinder 1910 Graft and Sift open car in which Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsburg dynasty and the throne of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, was



*The automobile in which the Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Habsburg Empire, was assassinated. His death would ultimately spark the outbreak of World War I (Courtesy of Museum of Military History, Vienna, Austria)*

assassinated on June 28, 1914. The bloodstained tunic worn by the Prince is on exhibit in the museum too. My grandfather and his fellow Hussars had been in the funeral procession behind their slain Prince.

"It is a great sin for men to seek to kill each other with their sabers, their bullets, and their shells. That's a matter between

## My Grandfather's Lipizzan (Continued)



*My Grandfather's cavalry saber; the black tassel was worn by all the officers in the cavalry regiments assigned to the funeral procession of the assassinated Archduke Ferdinand. The double-headed eagle of the Imperial Coat of Arms of the Habsburgs is seen below on the knuckle guard.*

men, at least," he said. "But to unleash our murderous ways on these innocents, these beautiful, peace-loving animals—to drag them into our hatreds. Our nationalistic struggles. Our ethnic grudges. Our great causes. That is a far greater wrong. For they have no wish to be a part of it nor is it of their making. We visit our sins on horses, polluting their flawless hearts with humanity's atrocities and hatred. There must be no greater sin in the eyes of God."

My grandfather passed away when I was twenty-one years old. It would be another thirty-five years before I resolved I would raise Lipizzans to honor his memory. I spent several years looking around for a foundation stallion. I was fortunate enough to find Pluto Gisella II, an intelligent, well-built stallion whose sire was Pluto III Fantasca out of Tempel Farms and Gisella out of Carousel Farms in Oregon. I spent five years making sure that he not only had looks but brains. He

was successful not only in classical dressage, but did a great job on the rocky trails in the Sonoran desert and even helping with the roping chores on our small cattle operation (not necessarily usual fare for the somewhat aristocratic breed).

I was adamant I would not raise a stallion that was a social outcast. He would be permitted to mingle with the mare herd. He would be trained to have manners and to work closely in the company of other horses, with the geldings. And then we gradually recruited two excellent broodmares.

So, after seven years of meticulous training, fertility testing, DNA tests and pedigree charts, the blessed day was here. It was one of the coldest and wettest winters on record. In Tucson, we still had snow in the mountains and the ski resort on Mt. Lemmon, twenty-five miles from my ranch, was having a record year.

In the barn, despite enough internet-linked video cameras and high tech gadgetry having been installed to not just alert as to when the blessed event might be unfolding but to probably run a respectable national space program, the foal came precipitously and arrived without the least bit of assistance. This was, in many ways, not just disparaging from an economic perspective (given the costs of the electronics) frankly disrespectful given the credit that so many of us humans felt we deserved for our support—albeit indirect—of this mating.

But the gods were feeling mischievous. Labor and delivery seemed to be in the air. My ranch manager's wife had gone into labor and was delivering their first child at a nearby hospital. In the midst of all this, a freezing rain descended from the mountain tops. Then the colt dropped into the world.

I had recently undergone spinal surgery and was in a body brace until the bones in my back were fused. But as the rain came down, I watched the small colt shivering.

We had a beautiful indoor stall, equipped with cameras, fresh straw, five-star equine rating. I thought to myself: "I'll be damned if I'm going to lose my first colt!" But there was



*Foundation stallion, Pluto Gisella II (Courtesy Rancho Bosque).*

one consenting vote I failed to obtain: the dam. She took one look at me scooping her baby in my arms and went to "DEFCON 1"—the equine equivalent of what the military describes as "maximum readiness...reserved for imminent or ongoing attack..." And that's when I saw she had launched two missiles—both hind legs aimed right at me!

As often happens to us under circumstances of impending doom, adrenaline floods our brains. Everything goes into slow motion. As I watched, I see every detail of the dam's hooves in slow motion. "Thank God," I think offhandedly, "we didn't put shoes on their hind legs." Then just as casually, I commented to myself, almost casually: "She gonna break my leg." And that's exactly what she did. I could hear

the bones break. I safely put down the colt. Then I realized she going to shoot me with her second barrel. "Oh, no! She was firing again! A second hind leg! Incoming! By now I was falling over and her right rear leg blasted past my right knee. It landed a glancing blow but I wondered if my knee was still intact. I collapsed against the wall of the foaling stall. I looked up at the camera, realizing I was grinning at no one. I was alone at the ranch.

For a moment, it occurred to me, the dam might try to kill me outright but, just as suddenly as she erupted, she now seemed perfectly tranquil. I would say even slightly embarrassed by her outburst. She was only interested in the colt. I managed to safely drag myself out of the stall and eventually get help to get myself to the hospital. My leg was broken in three places. It could have been far worse.



*Dam Santana with her new colt, "Teddy" (aka Pluto Santana I) three days after being born (Photo courtesy of Kris Spinning).*



*Author with his new 6 month-old Lipizzan colt "Teddy"—three generations in the making. "Teddy" continues to prove that Lipizzans are still among the most intelligent, willing horses in the world (Photo courtesy Rancho Bosque).*

I spent the first eight weeks of the colt's life hobbling around on crutches. I named him Teddy, in honor of Theodore Roosevelt. In a very concrete way, Teddy (aka Pluto Santana) and I have, well, gotten off on the right foot. We had to---my left was in a cast. My bones were healing. As I hobbled around the round pen, I noticed my limited mobility had helped me place more emphasis on my colt's training in close quarters. I had to be sure I stayed aware not just of the colt's responses but, in order to keep the dam at ease, I had to also work with her significant, looming presence close at hand. I learned to incorporate a little circling time in the round pen as part our daily training regimen. It gave everyone a nice start with a chance for mother and foal to run around the arena—sometimes at a full enthusiastic tilt. I was always amused

at the baby's enthusiasm when it came to these moments of exuberant exertion. He just seemed to relish the wild antics; he'd launch into huge, enthusiastic leaps into the air, often creating great, sweeping arcs with his hind limbs to one side, and then punctuating the air to the opposite side with thrusts and parries into the thin air with his forelimbs, as if he

## My Grandfather's Lipizzan (Continued)

were sparring with swift, invisible company galloping alongside him. The disability brought a heightened sense of reconnecting with both horses from the ground up.

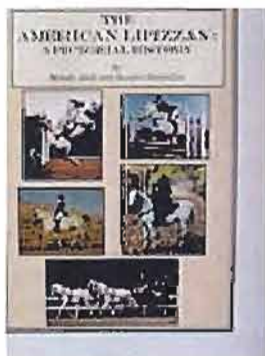
Everyday, I go out to the stable and feel that magical bond to my grandfather through these facile, whimsical horses. Half dancers and half warhorses. They bring with them such a sense of history and, yes, the touch of the unexpected adventure that had been their trademark through out the centuries with these wonderful, white horses.

*Dr. Allan Hamilton is a brain surgeon and Professor of Neurosurgery at the University of Arizona. He is also a well-known horse trainer and has held clinics around the US and Europe. He resides on a ranch in Tucson, Arizona where he raises Lipizzans. He is the author of a best-selling and award-winning book on spirituality and medicine, entitled *The Scalpel and the Soul*. (Penguin/Tarcher 2008). He has a second, forthcoming book on the spiritual bond between human beings and horses that will be published by Storey Publishing in September 2011. He also serves as a medical script consultant to Grey's Anatomy and Private Practice.*

**Editor's Note: We apologize for the delay in the publication of this magazine. Ongoing unification talks among the three organizations continue. Much progress has been made, but it was felt that any further delay in the publication of our magazine was not fair to the LANA members. Several of the ads should have run in July. Instead, we ran the ads on the LANA website and are publishing them here as well.**

## Visit The Lipizzan Store

DVDs • Books • Fine Art • Apparel & Gifts



This is the only book on the history of the Lipizzan breed in the Americas and was published by the Lipizzan Association of North America. The American Lipizzan chronicles the early importations, gives a brief overview of European breed history, and includes charts, pedigrees and over 100 photographs. This informative book documents the versatility of the Lipizzan in America.

<http://lipizzan.org/store.html>