

Shirleys Folly

Surprise Success

After a less than well-timed entry into the world and without a show-pen win to flaunt, Shirleys Folly may be having the last laugh as offspring earn her national fame.

By Heather Loveridge

In late April of 1989, reining horse breeders Tom and Noma Fidago were going on vacation and needed someone to watch their farm in Bellefontaine, Ohio. Fortunately, Noma's good friend, Shirley Thomas, agreed to stay for the week to feed and water their horses.

A bona fide city girl, Thomas didn't know a thing about horses, dogs or anything farm-related. But she volunteered anyway, most likely anticipating that feeding and watering a few head of livestock would be banal at best.

Thomas received the shock of her life, however, a few mornings into her horse-sitting stint. As she was feeding, she looked in one of the stalls and instantly panicked. A foal, still wet from birth, was lying next to its mother. Thomas ran to call the vet. Between the two of them, they got the foal up and performed routine newborn care.

The dam, MS Enterprise, was not due to foal for another month and had never been early before, so the Fidagos had not thought twice about leaving. When they returned, Noma started pondering names for the foal. Usually she'd include some part of the sire's name, in this case Great Pine. But all she could think of was her friend and her unexpected induction into farm life. She dubbed the filly Shirleys Folly.

Other than scaring a city girl half to death, Shirleys Folly's claim to fame has been her winning offspring. In 2006, she became the National Reining Horse Association's sixth all-time leading producer. The now 19-year-old mare was named the number-one NRHA producer in 2003 when her son, The Great Whiz, put her name in lights upon winning the NRHA Futurity. All told, Shirleys Folly has 16 registered foals, with her five performing offspring garnering \$293,925 in NRHA earnings.

Small beginnings

Little did the Fidagos know that their small breeding program would produce a mare that would gain national fame through her offspring. In the early 1980s, they were a typical family with two small children living the city life. But when a friend gave their children a horse to use in 4-H, it triggered a series of events that led them into reining. At the time, Tom, a civil engineer, worked with another engineer who had horses, NRHA member Tom Daley. Daley became a trusted mentor as the Fidagos entered the horse business. In 1983, they moved to a farm in Bellefontaine, about 10 miles from Daley.

Two years later they acquired two broodmares, Poco Sweet Chex and MS Enterprise, a 1981 sorrel by NRHA Hall of Fame member and Mil-



Shirleys Folly became a broodmare in 1994 after a show career that saw her make the finals of every prestigious show she entered—although she never won a class.

lion Dollar Sire Be Aech Enterprise and out of the Hollywood Smoke mare Gunners Miss Gale.

"We bought her [MS Enterprise] from Bill Horn," Noma says. "He was going to show her as a 3-year-old, and one day, I guess while they were practicing, she just broke a pastern bone or something. She never was shown, but she had all that potential. So we just kept her as a broodmare. We never showed her, we never rode her, but she was just the



COWBOY PUBLISHING FILE PHOTO

Great Pine, Shirleys Folly's sire, is an NRHA Hall of Fame stallion.

nicest horse and just beautiful.”

Reining great Larry Rose lived nearby and stood NRHA Hall of Fame stallion Great Pine, by Poco Bright Star and out of Crier's Betty. The Fidagos were impressed with the stallion and his get. They bred “Lukey,” as they called MS Enterprise, to the stallion each year until he passed away in 1991. Shirleys Folly was the third full sibling by the great stallion and out of MS Enterprise.

“She was a beautiful colt, just beautiful. All of Lukey's babies were that color with just a few white markings,” Noma recalls. “MS Enterprise had a Hollywood Smoke mother, so all of the colts had some white on them. They usually had like a star or a stripe down their nose and one or two white socks. Like all the colts out of Lukey, they just had such even personalities ... they just were easy.”

Tom broke the young Shirleys Folly to ride as a 2-year-old and then sold her. The farm was operated as a business, so every colt was marketed, sometimes to Noma's chagrin.

“Unlike me, who just enjoyed it as a sport and had fun and loved having babies, my husband wanted to do it for the money and those colts put both of our children through college,” she says. “We didn't ever keep any of them; we sold all of them. Unfortunately, there was a couple I really wanted to keep. But we were able to send our kids to the schools they wanted to go to and the horses made that possible.”

From the show ring to the breeding barn

Tom sent Shirleys Folly through the NRHA Futurity sale in 1991, where Hermon Aycoth, a reiner from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, bought her.

SHIRLEYS FOLLY 1989 CHESTNUT MARE

	Poco Pine	Poco Bueno
		Pretty Rosalie
	Poco Bright Star	Peppy's Pride P
	Charlotte Ann	Miss Charlotte
Great Pine		Bill Cody
	Town Crier	Watt's Niki
	Crier's Betty	Billy Van
	Dandy Van	Lady Van 1
		Squaw King
	Squaw Leo	Veronica's Joy
	Be Aech Enterprise	Poco Enterprise
	Enterprise Lady	Seco Lady
MS Enterprise		Mr Gun Smoke
	Hollywood Smoke	Pistol's Holly
	Gunners Miss Gale	Huckleberry Houn
	Huck's Kitten	Hank's Maid

“The way I come about getting her – I stayed about a month with Larry Rose, up in Ohio,” Aycoth recalls. “And this guy Tom Daley, he came over to ride one day, and he was riding a sister to Shirley which would have been a year older than her. And I seen her and I really liked her, and he told me that Tom Fidago had a 2-year-old that he was going to sell, [at] the 2-year-old sale in Oklahoma. And that's sorta the way I come about buying her out there.”

Aycoth took the mare home to North Carolina and began training her. She had a good foundation and in fact, at that point, was one of the best horses Aycoth had ever ridden.

“Shirley, she was a little broke when I got her, but then I got her to spin and turn around. You turn her around a little bit and she says, ‘Well, if that's what you want, I'll show you how to turn around!’” Aycoth says with a laugh. “She could fly around. She was just one of the best that I'd ever owned. The most willing horse. She was low-headed, which is really a good trait to have in a reining horse. And of course she was a super athletic horse. Her and her colts have all really been good-leaded horses and big stoppers. Never been no trouble there.”

Aycoth showed Shirleys Folly briefly as a 3-year-old and then, as a 4-year-old, made the rounds of the Dixie Reining Horse Association and Carolina Classic shows. She placed in the finals at each show in the

PERFORMANCE LINES

non-pro, limited non-pro or intermediate non-pro divisions, but never won a class.

Aycoth retired Shirleys Folly to the broodmare pasture and in 1994 bred her to Francois Gauthier's Boggies Flashy Jac. That stallion, by NRHA champion Hollywood Jac 86 and out of the 1979 NRHA World Champion Amateur Horse Boggies Last, was a leading NRHA sire. The cross produced Shirleys Boogie Jac in 1995.

Aycoth trained the dun filly himself and showed her a few times at local shows before traveling to the 1998 All American Quarter Horse Congress, where he made the non-pro futurity finals. The mare had \$1,768 in NRHA earnings and had been retired as a broodmare by the time he sold her in 2006.

Turning folly into luck

Aycoth bred Shirleys Folly to Lucky Little Lena in 1995. That cross produced Lucky Bay Lena, a bay stallion that became Shirleys' second-highest money-earning offspring.

Lucky Bay Lena was sold to Philip Joyner of Selma, North Carolina, as a 2-year-old in 1998. Trainer Brian Bell rode the colt as a 3-year-old, putting a little more than \$7,000 in earnings on him. Unfortunately, the stallion sustained a hock injury before the 1999 NRHA Futurity that prevented him from performing well. He scored decently but racked up penalties in his circles, due to a break in gait. Even with that, he managed to plus his spins and stops. The following year, after recuperating from surgery shortly after his Futurity experience, Joyner showed him in non-pro classes.

During his show career, Lucky Bay Lena tallied up the wins, becoming the Missouri Autumn Slide open and intermediate open futurity



In 2003, The Great Whiz, ridden by Duane Latimer, became the first gelding since 1983 to win the NRHA Futurity and the only horse to win both go-rounds and the finals.

champion in 1999, an NRHA intermediate non-pro top ten and the Dixie Reining Horse Association Southern Classic non-pro champion in 2000. He earned a total of \$17,154.

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In 2002, another civil engineer living nearby, Daniel Blackburn, purchased the stallion from Joyner.

"I knew him (Lucky Bay Lena) very well. I knew he was good," Blackburn says. "Wasn't any question about what I was getting. He's very athletic, good temperament, a good-looking horse, just everything about him was good."

Blackburn showed him some the next year in the non-pro and limited non-pro divisions before retiring the stallion to the breeding shed.

"I was really just a rookie; he was really too much horse for me," Blackburn recalls. "So I got him and learned a lot from him and breeding him to my mares. I haven't had much opportunity to show him since. I've been riding and showing his babies, which was a new experience for me. He probably could have earned a lot more if he'd had more opportunities."

Moving on

Aycoth bred four foals out of Shirleys Folly before Canadian Lance Griffin bought her at a sale in 1997. At that time, Aycoth had retired and discovered he had too many horses for one person to handle.

"They was just working me too hard," he remembers. "I just had more to do than I wanted to do. So I had decided to sell some, and of course your best horses are the ones that are going to sell first. I really didn't want to sell her, but I needed to."

"After [Griffin] had bought her he come over to the stall, and he told me he was from Canada up where it's really cold – he told me where he was from, and I said, 'Oh Lord, she's going to a cold climate!'" Aycoth says, laughing. "But at the same time he told me he bought some property in Oklahoma right close to Bob Loomis in Marietta, and that's where she was going to stay."

When Griffin saw the daughter of Great Pine come through the NRHA Breeders Showcase sale, he bought Shirleys Folly on the spot. According to his daughter Samantha, the farm's breeding manager, he paid \$16,200 for the 12-year-old mare, then in foal to Boggies Flashy Jac for a 1998 colt.

Because Griffin's Oklahoma ranch was not completed at the time of her purchase, Shirleys Folly took up residence at the nearby Loomis Ranch. The following year, she was bred to Loomis's NRHA Five Million Dollar Sire, Topsail Whiz. That cross would produce the foal of a lifetime, not only for the mare, but for Griffin as well.

Making NRHA history

On February 9, 2000, Shirleys Folly foaled a chestnut stud colt. The Griffin's registered him as The Great Whiz, but nicknamed him "Hermon," after Aycoth. During the next two years the ranch staff prepared him to be sent to trainer Duane Latimer, who was working for Loomis at the time. When Latimer received The Great Whiz early in the summer of his 2-year-old year, it was apparent the trainer had his work cut out for him.

"He wasn't real easy in the beginning," Latimer remembers. "He certainly had all the talent, but he wasn't a super easy horse to train. I had a lot of experience with the Whiz's and a lot of experience period, so it wasn't anything I couldn't handle. He wasn't easy at first, but you could feel all that physical raw ability there. He always did everything ... he maybe tried to do things too hard and too fast, you know, all that kind of stuff."

The more Latimer worked with the stallion, the more he realized The Great Whiz would make a great gelding. Although the horse was



COWBOY PUBLISHING FILE PHOTO

The Great Whiz was a raw talent when Latimer began training him as a young stallion, and that talent often manifested itself in a defiant attitude. The decision to geld The Great Whiz brought about a friendlier disposition in the horse and kicked off his winning career. He's shown here with Latimer's niece, Dani Rae.

not bad as some stallions can be, his attitude was causing him to be less trainable. The Griffins came to the same conclusion the following April after hauling The Great Whiz to the National Reining Breeders Classic – he spent the entire ride kicking and trying to tear the trailer apart.

"Duane had always said this is a really nice horse, this horse needs to stay a stud if he can," Griffin says. "And then we got a call in July (2003) from Duane one morning, and he said he just spent 30 minutes trying to get him to stop chasing another horse while he was on his back ... it was time to geld him. We said that if we geld him now, he'll probably win the futurity."

The Griffins laughed about it at the time, never perceiving what a premonition they had made. They had the stallion gelded soon after, and Latimer began preparing him for the NRHA Futurity. The duo entered the Canadian Reining Breeders Classic, where they won the open division and \$10,000. Then it was time to get serious.

"He was decent but he was just a work in progress at that time. And I don't try to run that hard at an earlier show like that [the CRBC]," Latimer says. "But he was still good, scored a decent score. And I just

got him ready after that for the futurity.”

Two months later, the Griffins, Latimer and The Great Whiz headed to the NRHA Futurity in Oklahoma City. According to Latimer, everything came together right before the event and Hermon was showing his prowess.

After winning both open preliminary rounds, the big money loomed in the finals. Latimer drew late in the open draw - 30 out of 31 tough reining horses.

“We were nervous, of course we were freaking out,” Griffin recalls. “When he walked in the pen – the horse had a very unique way of walking, he has a very long neck and a pretty head but kind of a long head, and he would walk with it almost on the ground. So he got his head really, really low and all the noise and the crowd goes nuts, and he never even wiggles an ear, he just walks to center and did his thing.”

From the moment The Great Whiz loped off, Griffin thought it could possibly be “the run.” The gelding circled flawlessly to the left, then effortlessly turned a plus one and a half to the left. He repeated it to the right, then plussed his figure eights and stops.

“I mean it was fun to watch...I lost my voice from cheering so much,” Griffin laughs. “We were jumping up and down. It was exciting for us because not only was he our horse, but we raised him from a baby.”

That night, The Great Whiz became the first gelding since 1983 to win the event, and the only horse to win both go-rounds and the finals. The event also made Latimer the fourth NRHA Million Dollar Rider.

“He kinda had a funky little lead departure, and he almost did a trot, but then after that he was basically really good,” Latimer says. “There were a lot of people missing their stops that night, and my brother told me where they were missing so I got some advice there – where to run

and stop – and he drug his butt and rolled back really good every time. It was great – he was great that night.

“You spend your whole career dreaming about that win. When it happens it’s pretty special, you know. That could be a once-in-a-lifetime deal. That [win] made a lot of trainers happy – there been a lot more geldings since then [competing in the NRHA].”

The Griffins took The Great Whiz home, pulled his shoes and turned him out for a well-deserved sabbatical. The next year, Latimer tuned him up again, tying for second at the National Reining Breeders Classic and winning a little more than \$38,000. He then made the finals at the NRHA Derby, but the great gelding had severely pulled a muscle in his shoulder during the first go-round and had to be laid off.

After a long recuperation, Latimer brought the horse back again, but The Great Whiz only showed a handful of times before the Griffins decided to retire him permanently. His Equi-Stat earnings total \$273,969.

“We knew that he was special from the beginning. We didn’t know that he would go on to do what he did,” Griffin says. “He always had that attitude where you know he was better than everybody else and was going to go prove it to everybody and do his job. I kinda knew that he could step up and be that because he was an aggressive horse. You never hit a bottom; he’d always try for you.”

Continuing the legacy

In the nine years the Griffins owned Shirleys Folly, she had 11 foals, many with the assistance of recipient mares through embryo transfer. Griffin bred her back to Topsail Whiz and also Smart Chic Olena, Hollywood Dun It, Whiz N Tag Chex and Reminic N Dunit.



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DAN SIMONEK

Wagonhound Land & Livestock bought Shirleys Folly in 2006 in an effort to bring the best reining dams available into their broodmare band.

“Most of the babies she had we still own,” Griffin says. “The 2-year-old Whiz N Tag [Chex] stud colt that I have is legitimately the nicest horse I’ve ever had at the same age. He’s very fancy to look at, he’s very talented, golden minded – he’s a very nice horse so we’re really excited about him. The Dun It filly is also very talented. We’re planning on keeping her in the broodmare band. Every one we’ve ridden is a very big turner.”

In 2006, Wagonhound Land & Livestock Company, LLC, in Douglas, Wyoming, decided to start breeding reiners. They already had an established broodmare band of cutters, working cow and ranch horses, but wanted the best reining mares available. They heard about Shirleys Folly and approached the Griffins, hoping to buy her.

“I was kind of reluctant to sell her because she produced for us, but she’s also very fertile,” Griffin recalls. “She gave me an embryo almost every flush. She had four babies one year, three the next – it was very easy to get babies out of that mare. So from my perspective I was a little bit reluctant to sell her. It was kinda like the cash cow. You just throw semen at her and she’s going to have an embryo, where some of these mares can just be a total headache. But she was not that way – she was really, really sweet to get along with. But they came; they wanted to buy

her. They bought her, the baby that was on her side and the yearling full sister to The Great Whiz, all in the same day.”

In April of 2006, Shirleys Folly moved to her new home at Wagonhound. The following year she had a colt by Custom Crome and plans for 2008 include breeding her to Wimpys Little Step, and possibly Big Chex To Cash and Einsteins Revolution.

“I’m glad Shirley went to a nice facility and people that have a lot of money, and they’re going to look after her – that’s a big part of it for me,” Griffin says. “We wouldn’t have sold her if she would have gone somewhere where she wasn’t going to be looked after. She’s been good to us and there’s no reason for us not to be good to her.”

Belying her name, Shirleys Folly was good to each one of her owners, producing champions and all-around solid reining horses. She endowed each with her athletic ability and desire to work.

As Aycoth fondly recalls, every colt he had was extremely willing.

“They’d come out of the barn ready to go to work, practically saying, ‘Show me what you want done, and I’ll do it.’ They got that from their mother. She was just a super horse, probably one of the most willing horses that I ever rode,” he says. “She was just one of the best that I’d ever owned.” 🐾