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Youth of the Year

**Haley
Harrington**

Up Close with
Cecile Hetzel Dunn

Q & A
Working Western



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A tenacious and talented California equestrian, a heart-connected partnership with her pony, Benito Sidiago++//, and a special ride with a trainer's horse result in two unanimous Youth National Championships



Haley Harrington

RIDES TO THE ROSES

HORSES have not only captivated Haley Harrington since she was a child; her passion for them is profoundly innate and as important to her as the air that she breathes.

According to her parents, her first word was “mommy” and her second word was “horse.”

When she was 2 years old, Haley’s mother Cyndy not only bought books about horses for her daughter but also books of tickets for pony rides at a farmers’ market in Marin County, California. The 20-minute drive twice a week to be safety belted into a saddle and led around country fields became the high point of little Haley’s life. Instead of touching pictures in storybooks, her tiny fingers, face and bottom touched and felt the magic of horses in real life.

Her third birthday party included special guest appearances by two ponies that were Haley’s friends from the farmers’ market. Not long after that, the family’s relocation to Los Angeles in 1997 landed them on the Palos Verdes Peninsula inside a community named The Ranch with their home (and Haley’s bedroom window) overlooking an Arabian horse training and show facility. Daily walks down to the stables holding her mom’s hand was a dream come true for an enthusiastic future champion in the making.

“I didn’t know the depth of Haley’s passion then, but I always knew there was something very special about horses with her,” says Cyndy Harrington.

PONY CAMP & EQUITATION

Every day when 4 year old Haley visited “her” backyard stables, she asked horse trainer, Kim Arranaga, “When can I ride a horse?” When Kim explained that she had to wait until she was bigger and her legs got longer, ever-polite Haley listened then asked the same question the next day and every day after that. Persistent but patient, she awaited that special first “big



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girl ride," meanwhile devouring books about horses and drawing pictures of them. During her daily barn visits she not only called each of the 40 or so horses by name, she also correctly announced their color and, Arabian or not, their breed. Eventually her determination paid off and before the age of 5, gleeful Haley had her first ride on a pony named Susie and was soon enrolled in pony camp. Her insatiable curiosity and love of books made her so knowledgeable that during pony camp question and answer time, she knew all of the answers and was asked by Arranaga to give the other children a turn.

With a solid equitation foundation and local community horse shows under her belt, Haley was introduced to the Arabian show circuit at the age of eight at a Region II show in Santa Barbara, California. Not surprisingly, she returned home with a yellow ribbon from her first walk/trot equitation class, the first of many ribbons, awards and accolades to come.

"Haley is one of those special talented riders. She had some training, but she really rides by instinct. She didn't have her own horse for a long time, so she happily rode any horse that I had available. I knew very early on when I watched her ride that she had a gift and that the sky was the limit for her," says Arranaga.

SPORT HORSE & YOUTH

After numerous successful Arabian youth show seasons, Haley's parents rewarded her hard work and determination with the privilege of having a horse of her own. After a trial period with her first choice, an Arabian mare out of Sidi Brahim from Los Acres Arabians in Stockton, California, Haley made a painstaking, mature decision to return the mare

to the farm in search of a better partnership. This decision resulted in the 2006 purchase of a 14.1 hand Sidi Brahim grandson named Benito Sidiago++// (Dirdi Dancer x Cocoa), a Spanish Arabian/Thoroughbred/Welsh Pony cross from CH-Eireland Ranch in Clements, California.

"I wanted him because he jumped. Though I never intended to show him on the Arabian circuit, it was com-

plete happenstance that I did because he was naturally suited for sport horse competition," says Haley.

Besides finding a horse match made in heaven, Haley also discovered a life-changing mentor. Linda Lauper-Polk, an equine veterinarian and breeder of American Sport Ponies, quickly took to Haley and a special friendship was forged. Besides selling Haley a horse that was a special member of the family's show herd, Dr. Lauper-Polk and her husband, Mike Polk, opened the door to their home and ranch. Haley spent two to three weeks at a time during summers working the farm, riding horses and tagging along on veterinarian calls.

According to Dr. Lauper-Polk, "Haley is a part of the family now. It's hard for me to sell my horses because I place them like they are my kids. It was a miracle for us to place that specific horse with that specific girl. My expectations for Haley are really high, but that's because she has great potential and goes for what she wants."

When it was clear that the Sport Horse division was Haley and Benito's path, Arranaga referred Haley to Arabian trainer Ted Lange of Langeford training stables in Chino Hills, California. A two minute jog in riding boots out a backyard gate changed to a two-hour trek with trailer in tow on a traffic-clogged freeway, which Haley and her mother Cyndy drove an average of six times per month. Though they left the comfort of their neighborhood for a new world of strangers, those strangers soon became great friends and confidantes.

As Haley successfully navigated the sport horse show circuit (with 12 national titles before the 2011 Youth Nationals), she became more interested in the Arabian Horse Youth Association (AHYA) and intent on adding the 10-year young Sport Horse category to the Youth National competition roster.

PERSEVERANCE TRUMPS PAIN

Though onlookers may surmise that young Harrington has had an easy road to sweet victory with her instinctive horse sense, beauty, brains and charm and a very willing horse that is as driven as she is, stoic grace sometimes masked extreme back and knee pain. Less than one year before Youth Nationals, an orthopedic doctor diagnosed a hairline fracture in a lower vertebra of her back. Another



LEFT: Benito shows his winning working hunter form.

BELOW: Benito Sidiago++// sports his 2011 Youth Nationals Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian Sport Horse Under Saddle JTR Championship ribbons.

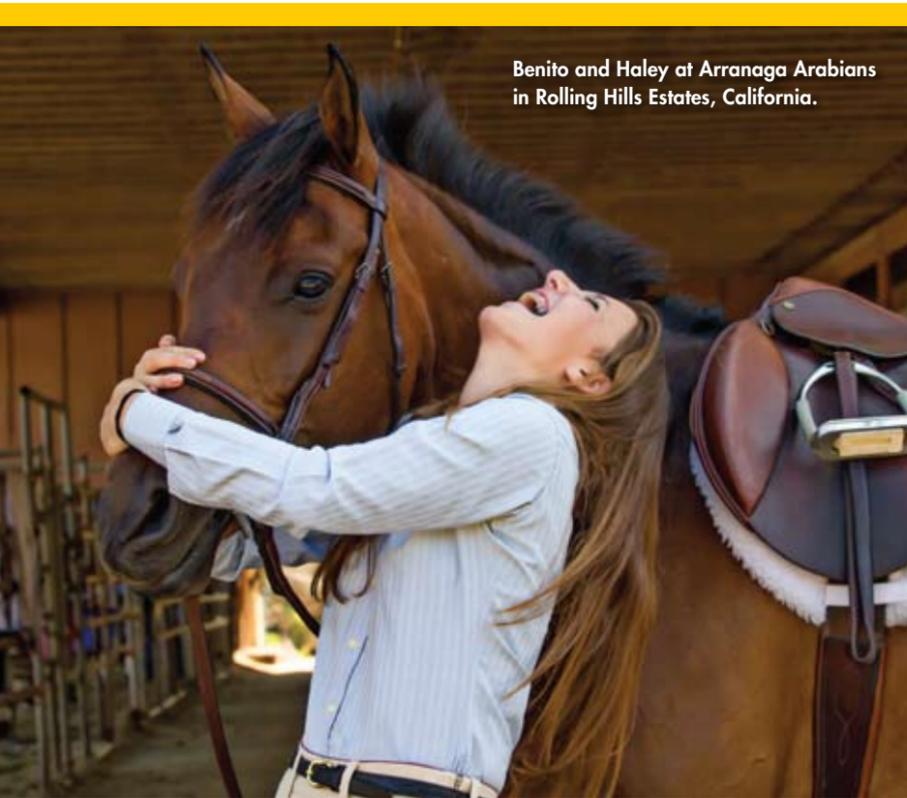


doctor ascertained that hypersensitive muscle response to a long ago injury was also causing pain. When asked how many times she fell off a horse over the years, Haley quips, "I don't know. There were so many times that I can't count."

In September 2010, 10 months before the 2011 Youth Nationals and her last chance at a Youth Nationals Championship, Haley received a devastating blow. Doctors told her that she had to stop riding horses. The news sent the typically cheerful and emotionally grounded teenager tumbling into a place of deep sadness. "When the doctor



FROM TOP: Haley and Benito; Haley at Arranaga Arabians with role model Colby Chlebowski; Haley at her first show in Santa Barbara in 2001 with Colby Chlebowski.



Benito and Haley at Arranaga Arabians in Rolling Hills Estates, California.

pick a pony! He is my friend, my partner, my everything. In the five years I have owned him, he was only in professional training for three months. I train him, and he trains me. A lot of people didn't think we would make it because he's a pony and because he doesn't look like an Arabian. We had a really hard time for a long time, but we did it. I have heard people say that you get one incredible, special horse in your lifetime and he is mine. There will be others who I am sure will be amazing in their own way, but there will never be another who is anywhere close to Benito. We grew up together!"

Her second national championship came in Arabian Sport Horse Under Saddle JTR. "When I made the Nationals cut on Resounding in Arabian Sport Horse Under Saddle it was the best ride ever on that horse! It was such a good ride that it didn't matter if we went on to win, even though we did. I fought for the Sport Horse classes to be added to the youth schedule and in fact that is the

said that I couldn't ride, I felt like someone took the most important part of me away. I was faced with the possibility of never riding again," she says.

Time passed with weeks filled with a physical therapy regime that included Pilates exercise. As she began to feel better, Haley traded sadness for determination and set her sights on riding again. By the spring of 2011, Haley not only had resumed training with Benito but also her trainer's Arabian horse Resounding +++++// (Serazim x KJ Valhala). With Youth Nationals just months away, Haley was on a mission to ride like she had never ridden before.

"Not being able to ride completely changed me because it was a part of my every day that I thought would always be there. I am now more patient and much more appreciative of just being on a horse without things having to be perfect every time." And this time, she would compete with a newly found wisdom and an unfathomable deeper connection with the horses that would help her bring rose garlands home.

"When I was unanimous national champion on Benito in Half-Arabian/Anglo-Arabian Sport Horse Under Saddle JTR, he was in the arena as if the world belonged to him and he gave me all he had to give. I am so proud of him. It was our last year and we did it! And, the judges usually don't

reason I became involved in AHYA," says Haley who is also the AHYA Vice-President.

FROM THE HEART

In addition to the demands of school and her passion for horses, Haley has a great appreciation for the importance of giving back to her community. In 7th grade, she created H.O.P.E. (Helping Other People Everywhere) to provide school supplies for disadvantaged youth. Since its start up, when school bells toll marking the end of the semester, instead of joyfully running off campus with friends, Haley and her recruits stay behind scouring trash receptacles to salvage perfectly good notebooks, backpacks, pens and other items to take to her family's home for later distribution to kids in need.

An interest in science and medicine also led Haley to shadow small animal oncologist Dr. Alice Villalobos at the veterinarian's Pawspice practice at VCA Animal Hospital in Hermosa Beach, California. While there, Haley became a student trainee for the Peter Zippi Fund for Animals, a non-profit rescue and adoption organization (primarily for cats) which was founded by Dr. Villalobos. In a very short time, Haley went from being an extra pair of

helping hands to being in charge of the feline rescue residents on Sunday mornings.

Dr. Villalobos says, "We immediately recognized that Haley has outstanding potential. It was clear to me that the information and time we spent with her would be absorbed and used as building blocks for her future."

She also found time to serve her community with Teen Court — a program for teenagers who have been found guilty of a petty crime and are sentenced by a jury of their peers. The teen jury listens and asks questions, then makes a decision about what sentence to impose, such as community service and apology letters.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY & FULL CIRCLE

Haley has excelled in school classrooms just as she has in the show ring. Under the watchful, pride-filled eyes of her parents, maintaining an excellent GPA was mandatory for her to retain her equestrian privileges. Except for competing on her high school's equestrian team, which was coached by her mother Cyndy during the past two years, Haley balanced both school and horses. If push came to shove, school and her long-term college goals took precedence.

"The really remarkable thing about Haley is that even though she had to prioritize things so she wasn't putting as much time into riding as she would have loved to, she was still able to become a National Champion and get accepted at Stanford, which has been a long time dream," says her dad, Greg Harrington.

Though Haley by nature reaches for the stars, she could never have imagined that a chance car ride from Los Angeles to Northern California to meet her beloved Benito would five years later culminate in two Youth National championships and a return to Northern California to attend Stanford University, once the site of an 8,000-acre farm with horses. Fittingly, there is an equestrian team that she will try out for in September, 2012. The horse facility is simply called "The Barn" and the school shuttle is called "Marguerite"



Benito and Haley ride through Ernie Howlett Park in Rolling Hills Estates, California.

after a favorite horse that lived on the Stanford family farm. Though she can't take her car with her during freshman year (a Mustang, of course), she plans to have Benito nearby at the ranch where they first met, and she will undoubtedly find a way to make the two-hour journey whenever she can to rest her face on her pony's neck, kiss his nose and joyfully chase the wind with him.

Dreams do come true. Ask Haley Harrington. 🐾

Writer's Message

Sometimes people come in to our lives that we forever treasure. I am blessed to have known Haley since she was 5 years old. She first caught my attention when she rivaled my niece to be in charge of that summer's pony camp. Several years later, my horse, a Sidi Brahim grandson named Bold Brahim, became a steppingstone on the path for Haley to find her way to Benito. I have proudly stood by and watched Haley grow from a horse crazed little girl to the fine young woman and remarkable equestrian she is today — one who uniquely personifies the gift of the human/equine bond in a way that only she can. Though she will be greatly missed by everyone at the stables that she grew up in, we all know that the next chapter of her life will be as deliciously rich and exciting as her life has been thus far. Godspeed, Haley.