

AND IN THE BEGINNING... (the history of the CFHA)

By Anita Unrau



Anita and Orville today have 11 Fjords: stallion, Anvil's Lyn, from Leidjo and a Rudaren daughter, which they always considered their best breeding program, five mares, two 2014 foals and three geldings.

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I was lying on my back in labour when I said to the nurse attending me that my husband had arrived. "What?" she said, "Are you psychic?" I responded with "Can't you smell him?" She went out to the hall and in a few moments was back saying yes my husband had finally arrived and would be in as soon as the paperwork was completed. It was one o'clock in the morning.

At that time Orville and I were making our living buying and selling horses, mostly at the auction markets around Alberta. To help offset costs, Orville was hauling for the local Calgary meat buyer, LW Perry, as LW was in his eighties and had lost his license. They worked out a deal where he would pay Orville's way and if Orville saw a horse he liked, he would nudge LW in the ribs as a signal to bid on that horse. If LW bought a meat horse and Orville thought the horse would suit him, Orville would give LW \$5 for the ticket and pay the auction market for the horse. Orville also had to haul the meat horses back to Calgary for LW which explains why he took so long to get to the hospital.

On April 1, 1973 we would be taking over the Happy Valley Dude Stable west of Calgary and Orville was looking for good dude horses. Happy Valley was a theme park (now all subdivision) and we would be

paying the park a commission for all our guided trail rides going from 8 am till dark all summer until the park closed down in September. With this in mind, Orville was going to all the early spring horse sales.

The Ponoka sale was on and Orville needed a lot more horses so he had dropped me off with my old roommate in Calgary and left for Ponoka. Several times I called the Auction Market to give Orville the message that I was in labour, but every time he returned the call the pains had quit, so I told him to stay there. Little did we know this on again, off again, all day labour would change our lives.

Orville managed to stay for the entire sale before I finally went into serious labour. Orville's brother was visiting and he took me to the Calgary General hospital about 10 pm. He ran through all the red lights and said it would be the only time in his life that if a cop stopped him he had a good excuse. Funny the things you remember after 42 years.

The reason I could smell Orville before I saw him was the corrals and alleyways at the Auction Market were all spring mud and manure, and he was soaked to the knees. He had come directly to the hospital.

I asked how the sale went and did he find any horses we could use? He said there were a few, but he did buy this one really neat horse. Orville said it was a cross between a Jersey cow and a horse- big brown eyes, oatmeal nose, brown body and black points just like a Jersey, funny coloured mane and tail like a skunk with a black stripe down the middle and white on each side. I honestly thought he was making this up to distract me.

He proceeded to tell me how LW had bought this 14.2 hands three-year-old gelding as a meat horse. Since he was untrained, Orville was not interested in him but those big brown eyes kept haunting him

all through the sale. Finally Orville went out back, put a halter on the gelding and lead him out to the alley, jumped on his back, and nudged him in the ribs to move on. The horse walked down the alley and finally after Orville pulled and pulled on the lead rope, he turned around. No way, he thought, not broke, didn't need an unbroken horse.

Still the brown eyes haunted him. Much later he went back out to the pens and haltered the young gelding once again, jumped on him and this time the horse remembered and moved out with a nudge and turned when the lead rope was tugged. Wow! Maybe we could use him.

Orville decided on the spot to name him Gorgeous George. Back in the sales barn and told RW he would give him \$5 for the ticket and went and paid for the other horses he had decided on, along with Gorgeous George's \$52.50 price tag. Shortly after telling me this amazing tale, our first child, Corey, was born.

Orville moved all our belongings, tack, horses, etc. to the property at Happy Valley and I went there directly from the hospital and finally got to see this Gorgeous George he had talked about. He really was part Jersey cow!

Orville started George riding and driving and within three months George was pulling the stone boat to clean the barn with the reins hanging on the hames and Orville using verbal commands to guide him to move along the alleyway in the barn and to take the load out into the field where Orville would spread the manure while George walked around the field and then back to the barn. Back in the barn he was unhooked and saddled up for the day's trail rides.

The smallest kids were always put on George because he looked after them. If he had a rotten adult or older kid that jerked on his mouth, he would take a short cut on the corners and let the branches hit them. They soon learnt to leave him alone to do his job.

He was quite a horse. He could help clean the barn and be ridden all day by anyone.

A couple of weeks later a friend pulled into the yard with his one-ton truck with racks on the back, and there behind the cab was a twin to George. Our friend said he'd bought this one at another sale and someone had told him this was a breed.

A light bulb went off and I remembered reading an article in an All Breeds issue of *Western Horseman*. Sure enough when I went through my collection of *Western Horseman* and found I think it was the October 1966 issue, there was an article about the Norse Dun. There were pictures of horses in Norway that looked just like our George. And now we had a pair, as Harvey joined our growing herd. He was different in personality and conformation from George but still had the work ethic we liked. We decided to sell our big team of Belgians that ate a bale, each and every day, and go with these easy keepers that enjoyed working and being around us.

George and Harvey were the start of our journey of many miles and years to track down all the Fjords we could find. From 1974 to 1977 we attended parades, draft shows and any other horse events we could, telling everyone we met that we would buy all the Fjords available.

Someone told us about Betty Ellis and her sister-in-law Margaret Montgomery near Blackie, Alberta. Margaret's deceased husband had bought some Fjords from a man who imported Charolaise Cattle from France, and on a buying trip had met Bob Purdy, owner of the Purdy Ranch in Wyoming I believe it was. Bob talked him into buying some of these funny horses as well. If I remember right the cattle were quarantined in the US and shipped by railroad to Calgary. A stallion, Buck, and an unrelated mare, Thora, from the Purdy Ranch were shipped with the cattle. The new owner then contacted Anne Cabot from

the US, who had a farm in Quebec. He bought three mares, full sisters, Karen, Freya and Brynhild, sired by Gjestar NY 1560 and out of the mare Stjerna NY 12099. Some years later we bought Krista, from Nova Scotia, who was another full sister to these three original mares. Somewhere a story was told about the original breeder saying the Fjords bred like rabbits and that's why he sold George and the others.

Through Betty Ellis and Margaret Montgomery, we found Russell Douglas who now owned the wonderful stallion "Buck". Orville was smitten by a filly Margaret had at her farm and wanted to buy her but Margaret said she was not for sale. However, a year later Margaret called and we drove down to bring Foehn home. Orville still feels she was the best Fjord mare he's ever seen.

Margaret, or maybe it was Betty, lead us to Fay and Anna Middleton of Neilburg, Saskatoon who were raising Fjords with the three original sisters and the stallion Prince. Another breeder, Anne Bronson of Entrance, Alberta was another find. Some years earlier, Anne had imported the stallion Stolmann NY 1588 and some mares from Denmark.

Another source of information was Storrs Bishop of Ennis, Montana. I can not remember how we came across his name, and also David Parker, who had imported Ask from Norway. Storrs was a wealth of information about the Purdy horses and about the North American Norwegian Fjord Horse Registry. We hadn't known there was a registry in the US and we contacted them and exchanged more information on breeding, bloodlines, etc over the next several years. Storrs told me about the personalities and conformation of the two stallions, Sanko and Solvfast. From this we pieced together whose offspring belonged to which stallion and were able to fill in more blanks on the pedigrees of the original

Fjords in Canada. Anne Bronson had her horses registered with Livestock Records in Ottawa so those pedigrees were all known and in order.

By 1977 we decided that Canada had about 75 Fjords and maybe 1000 in the US. We had left the dude business the fall of '74 unable to accept people mishandling our horses. The last straw was a good older ranch gelding that was as honest as could be, who refused to leave the barn on his third day with us. That did it. We sold our half the ranch to Orville's brother and took our favorite horses with us to Sundre, Alberta.

That first year we spent on a small acreage. Then we heard about an older lady who needed someone to move onto her trailer pad and keep an eye on her. Gladys Bowman had a quarter section and had been an Arab breeder all her life. She still had two Arabs when we moved onto her place with all our horses. She fell in love with George and when Norski came up for sale from Margaret, I think it was, Gladys bought her as we were short of money at the time. We used Norski in our four in hand at parades and wherever else we showed.

When George crawled through two barb wire fences to get into Gladys's side of the pasture to be with Norski, this taught us the close bond that Fjord siblings have. Over the years we learned that the different Fjords we bought would bond with their siblings on their dam's side, even though they had never seen each other before. When Thora came to us via Gladys, Harvey stayed with her when turned out. Shorty and Charlie also stuck with Thora. This confirmed what we had pieced together about their pedigrees.

Conformation, disposition and maternal bonding all played a part in fitting the jigsaw pieces together those first few years. We gathered whatever information we could by talking to people all over the western US and Canada and by mail when

further from home. It was a great time of discovery and learning about the breed.

By 1977 we knew enough people to contact to see if they would like to start a registry of our own here in Canada. We all met in Sundre and Gladys became our first Secretary/Treasurer and Orville was President. That year the Calgary Stampede started their horse breeds display and we proudly participated in Horse Heaven '77 with our Canadian Norwegian Fjords. We had a four in hand for the parade, a 10x10 information booth and demos each day. This was our first official event on behalf of the Canadian Fjord Horse Association. 🐎

Editor's note: The Unraus have been pivotal to the history of Fjords in Canada.

Besides their importance to the Fjord world, Orville represented Canada at the inaugural Single Horse combined Driving event in Ebbs, Austria in 1998 with their Hanoverian Gelding, Strausser (they traded a Fjord Filly for Strausser) and competed in 1999 and 2000. In 2001, Orville went to work in the Oil patch as a Mud Man or Drilling Fluids Technician with a wonderful company called NewPark Drilling Fluids. In 2005 they sold the bottom half of their large property with the irrigated land and the big house. In Anita's words, "We sold all the work, and moved up to the top 320 acres into a 400 square foot cabin that is self sufficient in power and water. I have stayed at home looking after chores and keeping the home fires burning, literally as no furnace."

Anita will continue with the story of the CFHA history from 1977 onwards in our next issue.