

Scott Trees images are instantly recognisable due to their diversity and range – the way they capture the Arabian horse is nothing short of an art form. Samantha Mattocks managed to catch up with Scott just before the 2010 show season began and what follows is more about the man behind the camera as Scott talks about emotional responses to photographs, the digital revolution and surviving cancer.



The Royal Mirage Entrance, Dubai



*Above : Fashion shot in the desert.
Left: Gokart*



BEHIND THE IMAGE CAPTURING THE MAN

SCOTT TREES

How did you get involved with horses?

There has never been a moment in my life when horses weren't a presence in one fashion or another. I was born into a horse family; my mother had World Champion Saddlebreds and my brother World Champion Quarter horses, so horses were always just – there.

My first horse was a pony and his name was Tiny Timber. He was a typical pony in that he could be a real brat when he wanted to, but he could also be very sweet. I used to bring him into the kitchen to eat cheerios with me for breakfast. In the winter, I wore a Davy Crocket hat, complete with raccoon tail, and he would come up behind me and grab it off my head. And yet, he would also kick the stuffing out of me sometimes.

I learned how to ride on a Saddlebred gelding named Brother Tom, a full brother to Lady Carrigan, herself a very famous Saddlebred five-gaited mare. He had a very sensitive mouth and I was allowed to only ride with a string in his mouth. I can remember asking when I was going to get to use a bit! But I do believe that gave me a great set of hands with a horse.

So the show horses were always a presence in my life. I got involved with the Arabian horse as a teenager when my mother and step-father started breeding them in the early 1960s. We travelled throughout the country to horse shows. In those days, the Arab shows were small and one horse went into a variety of classes. I had a stallion named Sir Iko, a Serneyn son, and he taught me a lot. I rode him western, English, costume, trail and so on; it's just what you did then. I showed him through my high school years. I also did some catch-riding and showing and from that, I showed the National Champion Gelding in 1967. He was a Fadjur son named Fadalan.

When did you get involved with photography?

I grew up wanting to be a doctor, but the mind and body correlation was not considered important at that time in medicine, which was important to me. In keeping with my desire to be a healer, I thought about being a vet. Then I realised I could put a person to sleep easier than I could a dog, so I changed my major to psychology.

I picked up a camera when I was in college. The bug bit me instantly and it wasn't long before I got a job in a camera store. I started a business taking pictures for fraternity and sorority parties and it turned out to be a great business that helped pay for a most of my schooling. Aside from the party picture business, I did a lot of things on campus, sports, people, events – anything that I could photograph. But I knew after I started taking pictures that being a photographer was something I wanted to do with my life.

When did you know you could make it a business?

After graduating from college in 1972, I wanted to continue on with my photography. The party picture business allowed me to purchase a small studio from a fellow that was retiring. It was a contract studio for a company that sold portrait albums to families that got two free sittings a year from a participating studio. The studio then made money by up-selling the client. I didn't want to do things in a studio environment, so I took the children outside, which was rather innovative, and did well. But portrait studios



make most of their money in the fall season and I had to eat the rest of the time.

My mum had asked me to take some pictures of her horses and I had a knack for it, so I started doing some local work with friends' horses. One day I got a telephone call from Polly Knoll and she referred me a horse show. That moved me in the direction of

horses on a steadier basis for a few years. But I really didn't like the horse shows as it was boring for me, so I continued doing other types of photography which led to the point of stopping the shows. For a while, I did very little with the horse end of my business and spent more time in the commercial and portrait side of the business.

During this period of time, I purchased a postcard distributorship from an estate in Asheville NC.

To make a long story short, over the next few years, I rebuilt the business and sold it for a significant profit. It was the first time in my life that I had enough money to think about what I wanted to do. Since my passion was photography, I knew that was the direction in which I wanted to go.

While I was rebuilding the other business, I did not give up my horse work completely and had, in fact, been hired on a freelance basis by a film company in Dallas to shoot a 16mm film of horses. During this time frame, I sold my other business.

The company I was shooting for also did advertising and was contacted by Lancer Arabians to do their dispersal sales catalogue. I was hired to do the photography for the pre-sale promotional catalogue. Once I got to the location, which was just beautiful, I wanted to turn the horses loose. In that era of the industry, liberty shots were not done very often as it was mostly body shots and headshots. I knew the horses would act differently

when not tethered to a human and I could get more expression. It worked. The catalogue was a great success and I started getting other calls for photography sessions.

It was also about that time the Arabian horse industry in the US boomed. Soon I had more business than I could handle. I also started a video production company and ended up doing most

of the major farm and stallions of the early 1980s in addition to commercial videos. I had a large facility and staff and had the largest independent production and post-production facility in Western North Carolina. So the 1980s were a pretty amazing time for me in business!

It was during this time that I started trying different sorts of locations and unusual shots with the horses. Anything I could think of shooting, somebody would do. It was amazing really as there was so much money in the industry during that time.



Entrance to the Shangrila Hotel, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Promo Shots for 'It's All About Me Jewelry'



Are horses your passion?

Truthfully, I have had a love-hate relationship with horses! I mentioned

growing up with them and never really had much of a choice – horse always had some sort of influence in my daily life. My teenage years were a bit tumultuous and horses were a refuge. However, it always seemed like the ones I became attached to emotionally either died or got sold. So I built up this emotional

CAPTURING THE MAN BEHIND THE IMAGE



Above: White Mares from Ajman Stud.



The stallion, Starajj



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*Head Study in black
and white.*



Triple Tandem.

CAPTURING THE MAN BEHIND THE IMAGE



Detail shot from an Endurance ride.

Friesian Eye.



barrier when it came to relating to horses.

My ex-wife and I had Arabians in North Carolina as a continuation of my mum's breeding programme. One day, she gave me the gift of a horse named Lucky Dollar. He was part-Belgian, part-travelling salesman and was a real character. I re-opened my emotional self up to him and then lost him in a freak accident. As a result of this traumatic experience, I also lost a part of myself in terms of not wanting to own another horse.

It has been said that out of all bad comes good, and in my case Lucky's untimely death fostered my style of shooting. It was as though the emotional pain of his death opened me up again to what it was I felt for horses and that emotion started showing my work. Now I get to see the best horses that the world has to offer, photograph them in great situations and at the end of the day I walk away. I don't intend to bury any more horses.

Horses aren't a passion per se, they just happen to be a species that I respect and understand well and enjoy photographing. I think

it would be safer to say that I am passionate about photography.

Have there been any lows?

Of course! Remember, my degree is in psychology so I had no real business experience and I have never had a class in photography or video production. I jump in, learn how to swim – fast! I have made a lot of mistakes in my time and many of them were quite costly.

In 1987 when the tax laws changed in the US, my business took a huge downturn. A divorce followed in 1988. The change of the tax laws combined with the divorce wiped me out financially and emotionally.

I was just starting to get back on track when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1994. I was 44 years old at the time and less than 2% of the male population under the age of 50 gets prostate cancer. Under the age of 45 it is very rare and usually fatal. My prognosis was not all that encouraging. Cancer is a life-changing experience and I was no exception to that fact. It was a very challenging time for my new wife and myself and, as she always has been, she was exceptionally supportive during this difficult time.

But I was determined that cancer wasn't going to take me. Thus began an experience that changed my life forever and here I am 15 years later! I have to say in all honesty that because of the lessons I learned as a result of the experience, cancer is probably the best thing that ever happened to me.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Staying fresh with the subject. The challenge with horses is finding the different shot. I have put horses in a lot of unusual situations, probably more so than most equine photographers, so finding that new idea is difficult. In part, that is why I shoot other things besides horses because it helps keep me stimulated with ideas. Living out of a suitcase can be a bit wearing and being away from my family is not easy. I am gone most of the time, so that is hard on everyone. But they have always been supportive.

Your reputation in the industry is as an artistic photographer with emotional images. How did that happen?

As I said earlier, the emotion for horses started coming through after I lost Lucky. I can't explain how I see the world, as it is not a conscious formula type process, it is just the way I see things! Light is the photographer's paintbrush and I do have a unique ability to see and use unusual light in my photographs. This ability, combined with an innate sense of composition and an



understanding of horses, eventually evolved into a style. I think it is fair to say that my style is one of tactile, dramatic, expressive imagery. I am a reactive shooter and by that, I mean come into an area, see what I have to work with, what the light is and figure out where to shoot. My desire to try and get something different in an image has enabled me to put horses in unusual situations. Certainly there is an element of risk, but it is calculated risk. Horses are usually going to not do something stupid if you take your time. Having said that, the only predictable thing about a horse is its unpredictability! As a result, my sessions build a sort of energy as I allow them to develop and evolve. I take my time to get a feel for the situation and the horse. I also believe that if people get stressed the horses get stressed. I am having a good time and want people and horse alike to enjoy the experience! I mentioned earlier that I am looking for expression in a photograph. So when I photograph horses, I watch their eyes, ears and their overall body language.

Are there any particularly memorable photo shoots?

Wow, that is difficult to answer because I have had so many unique opportunities to photograph great horses in some incredible locations. One that comes to mind that was definitely a career-making shot was of a horse named Gokart. He is white and so we took him in to a photography studio with a white backdrop and did a white on white session. He turned around to look at the tease horse and I



took a picture from over his back that had tremendous impact. Many photographers have tried that angle since, but this shot was the definitive shot of its type. It certainly had a huge impact on my career. More recently, the shot I did of Escape Ibn Navarrone-D in the desert became another of those moments. He is an incredible horse to photograph. We were in a desert location and I waited for the light to take on the look I wanted. When we brought up the tease horse, he really bowed up to challenge him and that's when I got the shot. It was definitely an "oh wow" kind of moment and the photograph is definitely one of the best I have ever taken.

Left: 100 years old - Portrait Study, Tersk, Russia.

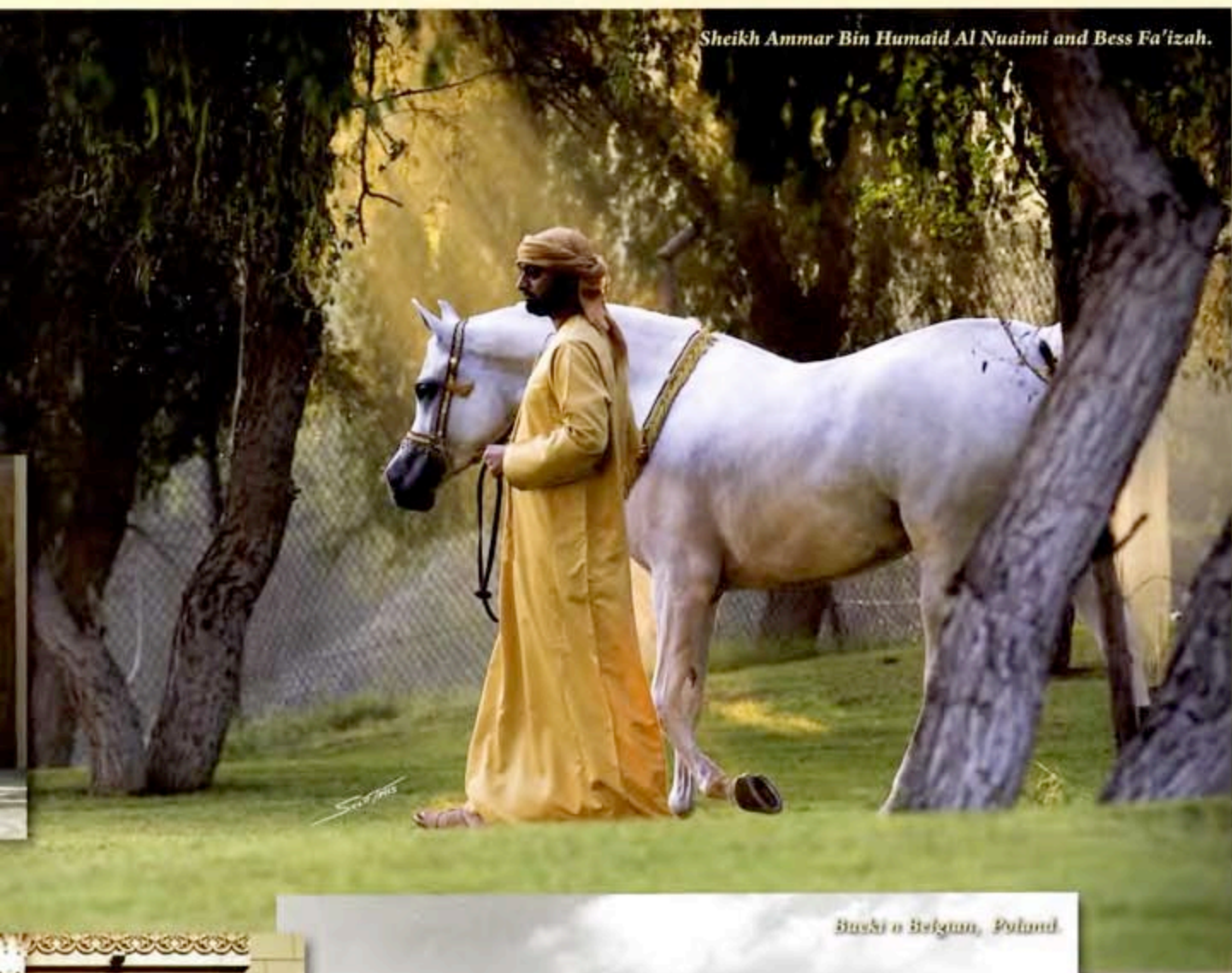


Horse swimming in water.

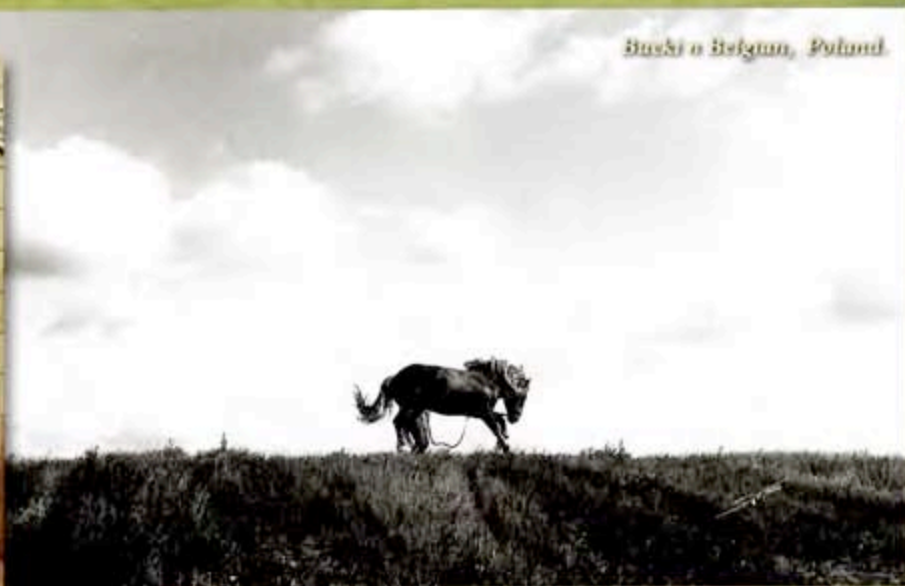


Mare in Mosque.

Sheikh Ammar Bin Humaid Al Nuaimi and Bess Fa'izah.



Bucsi o Belgian, Poland.



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It is not just the horses that provide such moments. In my travels throughout the world, I have had great opportunity to see, meet and photograph people and places of different cultures. Poland definitely was a part of the world that moved me. One afternoon, I was shooting in a village and took a picture of a man outside his barn. He didn't speak my language, but invited me into his house. We had tea in a dirt-floored kitchen with a wooden cook stove and no electricity. Sitting with this man and his wife, in this most basic of surroundings, reminded me what an incredibly fortunate life I have lived. Indeed, I have experienced many situations that remind me of that fact.

A young girl in Cairo leading a water buffalo is another such situation. It was late in the day and as we drove by this girl I was struck by the poverty of the area. Her simple clothing and shoes were probably the best she had.

What do you think about the Arabian horse today?

Certainly the industry has changed since my first involvement in the early 1960s. For many, owning

people want to have a good time with their horse. It does seem that, for many people, it is a little less fun.

The shows aren't all that different, really. Certainly the calibre of the horses has evolved and changed. And the showing style in halter

Shot from a fashion series.



Winter Stables.

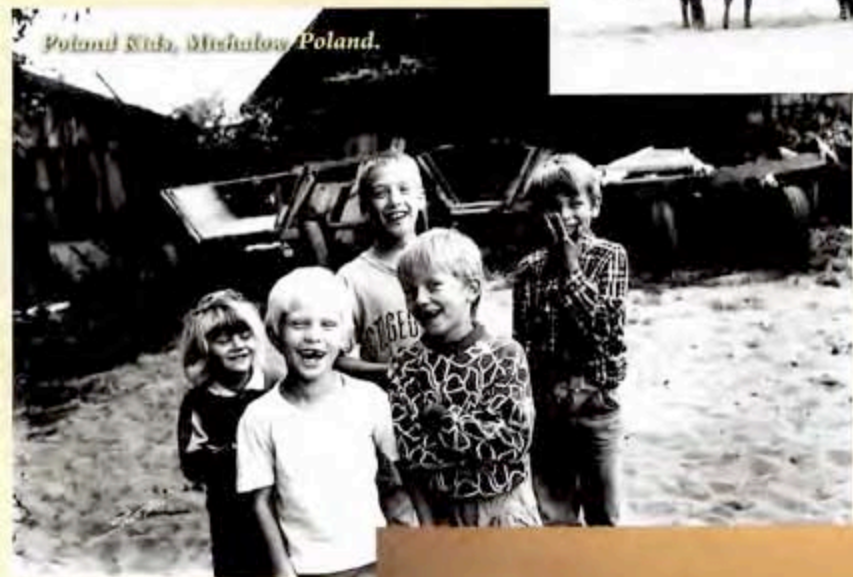


and performance is very different! However, many of the complaints that I hear today in terms of judging and so on aren't unlike what I heard growing up.

I do think one of the biggest problems, at least

in the States, is that the industry has lost sight of the Arabian horse. At an individual level, of course, everyone loves his or her horses. But as an industry, we have done a very inadequate job of educating the public what amazing horses Arabians are. The public perception of the Arabian horse is that they are pretty, expensive and that you can't do anything with them. There

Poland Kids, Michalow Poland.



Dune Mare.



horses is more of a business now when it was more of a hobby in the 1960s. You will seldom hear me say the "Arabian horse business". Instead, I say "industry". Very few people actually make money with their horses. For those that own them, it is what they choose to do with their discretionary income: horses are their entertainment. They choose horses for fun rather than cars, trips or boats. However, it is a business for those of us that service the industry. As such, I think we need to keep in mind that

Stallions in Water



is so much more to this breed than the fact they can stand up in the centre of a ring and stretch their neck!

What do you think about photography today?

The digital revolution has changed a lot of things. There are many more people now that want to be professional photographers because the cost of buying equipment and actually taking the

Shy.



CAPTURING THE MAN BEHIND THE IMAGE

Veiled eyes.



shots has fallen dramatically. That has been a good thing for many people that had the talent to take pictures, but were prevented due to the expense.

I do think that many people are surprised to find out just how difficult horses are to photograph, as they are very difficult subjects! It takes a combination of technical, creative and behavioural skills to get a good picture of a horse. Today's cameras make the technical elements of photography easier. I can give a five year old a digital camera and they are going to get a technically-correct

exposure. With rapid drives, the chances are improved to hit the timing, but there is more to creating a memorable photograph than holding down a shutter release and hoping!

One thing that I don't like about the digital age is the ease of conformational manipulation via photoshop. I don't think it is right to change conformation and it is done way too often. Open



Promo Shot for Al Saheel.



I think I am being rediscovered for about the fourth time in my career! I have always been a photographer that the owners are more prone to hire as opposed to trainers. I think this is because I get a lot of emotion in my shots and don't shoot just the typical body shot.

The worldwide ratio of women to men in the horse industry is a 75/25 mix. So I take my pictures to appeal to women, as they are more prone to respond to an emotional photograph. Trainers want to see that body shot to show off the horse. I think all horses need at least one good body shot, but again, if you are going to advertise it is the different shot that is going to get the attention. The one shot that stops the viewer in that initial search of skimming the magazine to see what is new.

a closed eye, flip an ear forward or fix a background is fine. When the actual conformation is altered – that is just wrong. It is also false advertising. Unfortunately, I don't think it is going to stop. While we have a lot of great photographers, the fact that people can take their own pictures has seen an increase of poorer images in my opinion. People want to save money and take their own photographs and many of the resulting images should not be in the magazines. Especially in view of the fact they are competing against images shot by skilled professionals.

In my thinking as a professional, when photographing horses the challenge is to get the best shot I can of the subject in front of the camera. It doesn't matter who owns it, how the horse is bred or how much it cost. My job is to make the horse that comes in front of my camera look good. It is not just about accentuating beauty, but also hiding faults. From my commercial advertising photography, I have learned that if you are going to use an image in advertising, it has to get attention. That is one of the reasons I started doing the kinds of artistic and location shots I am known for in an effort to get something different to stand apart from the other photographs in a magazine.

I do believe that the Arabian horse industry has had the good fortune of having some of the more talented photographers gravitate to the breed. Arabian horses are truly the high-fashion models of the business. As such, a lot of great and artistic images have been produced by a lot of talented photographers.



My career has evolved and changed as I have evolved and changed as a person. All elements of life have ebbs and flows and art is no different. I turned out a tremendous body of work from 1984 to 1994. After cancer in 1994, it took me a few years to get mind, body and spirit all firing on the same cylinders. As I said earlier, cancer was a life-changing experience and my approach to life changed, as did my approach to my photography.

I was given a gift in terms of my ability to photograph horses. It has never been that difficult and I just sort of took it for granted. But after cancer, I found myself wanting more from my life and

What is your career like today?



my art. It took me a long time to acknowledge my talent to myself, because it was easy and I figured everyone could do it. It also took some time to acknowledge my talents could go beyond just horses. But cancer changed that and I started expanding my subjects to people, architecture and fashion. As a result, I am doing a lot of work in all those areas.

Today, I want to use my talents to tell more of a story and towards that end, have several book projects in mind.



sessions that resulted in memorable images. As a result, I have done still and video work for most of the key farms in the region: Ajman Stud, Albidayer Stud, Dubai Stud, Al Aryam, Al Shahania, Al Shaqab and others.

I am also doing commercial shoots and it is nice for me because it is all in a central location, which means it is not quite so much travel.

What is next for you?

That is hard to answer as there is so much that I still want to do! Of course, you can't be in this as long as I have and not want to get a book or two out there. I have a non-horse piece of work in production on the Royal Palace of Sharjah and will also be doing one for Ajman Stud. I was the featured artist in Kentucky Horse Parks Museum of the Horse Gallery this spring, which was a great honour. The title of the show was *Because of Horses* and it was well received and attended during its three-month duration. The show contains a selection of horse and non-horse photographs from my travels around the world. I am working on making that into a book now.

Why so much time in the Middle East?

I first came to the Middle East in 1992 and was fascinated by the culture. Then cancer came into my life and I didn't get back until 2001 when I went to Doha, Qatar, for Arabian Horse World. A good friend, Eileen Verdick, was doing work in Dubai and she helped introduce me to a lot of people in that area. There was also commercial work to be had doing architecture, resort and fashion and I was able to open some doors with the help of friends and get business in those areas.

I felt the region could benefit from the consistency of an equine photographer and videographer in the region. Being here would allow me to scout the locations and take the time to produce

You have had a great career; do you have to pinch yourself every now and then to realise that this is what you do?

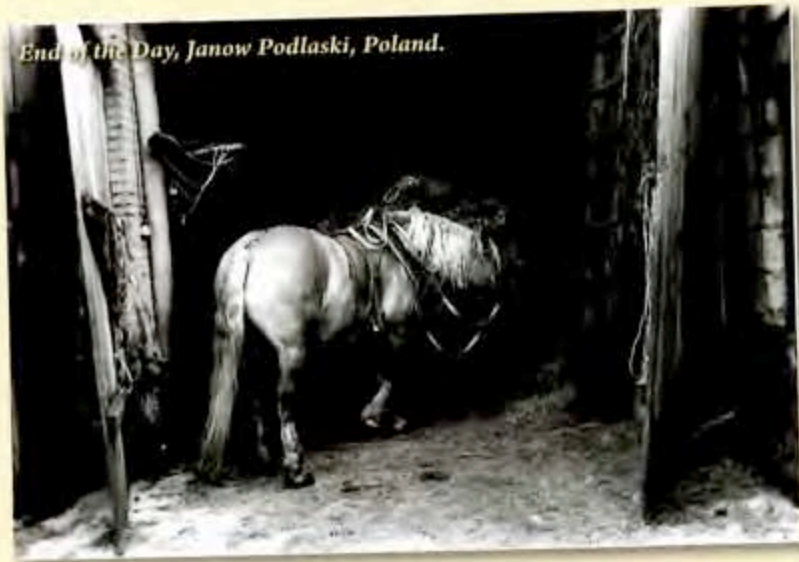
Of course! I have had the tremendous good fortune of doing something I love for my entire working career. This is a gift. I've travelled the world, photographed great horses and met interesting people.

Throughout my journey in life, I have learned many things: take nothing for granted; be grateful for every day above ground; be aware that life is short and try to live it with passion. Like everyone, I achieve living those lessons some days better than others. I try and take nothing for granted, accept the consequences of my choices and hope I never stop learning. I look forward to every day and there is still so much I want to do.

I hope I never take my best shot, that I am always capable of improving and bettering myself as a person and an artist. I have the good fortune to have a family that has supported my travels and journeys through life. I have cheated death on more than one occasion, but you will know that I am dead when you wave a camera under my nose and I don't quiver!

I am a very lucky person indeed. ❖

End of the Day, Janow Podlaski, Poland.



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