

~~ RANCHING ~~

FOUR GENERATIONS CARRYING ON GRUNDEN RANCH MORGANS

Their prefix is one of the more prolific in our breed. Harlan, his wife Tammy and their family tend cattle, go to Morgan shows and serve our industry.



The Grundens are a four-generation ranching family living in southwest Nebraska. Harlan Grunden, son of Morgan breeders Harvey and Myrna Grunden, fell in love with Morgans

By Julia Arnold

early on due to his father's affinity for the breed. As Harlan will tell you, in this family, "tradition runs deep" and he is committed to preserving his father's vision of the premier Morgan.

Harlan was sold on Morgans with the very first one their father purchased in 1968. Harlan and his wife, Tammy, are living Harvey's legacy, both on Grunden Ranch and by serving the Morgan community at large through the American Morgan Horse Association (AMHA). Harlan willingly admits that his involvement with the Morgan horse "is a hobby that's gotten out of hand."

ABOVE: The Harlan Grunden Family: Dawson and Megan Grunden-Welch with Rudy, Tammy and Harlan with Jett and Lane Welch, Victoria Johnson and Hance Grunden. **INSETS:** RG Cafalleros Legacy; Harlan Grunden and RG Stuart's Monarch at the 2016 Grand National (photo © Howard Schatzberg).



THE HISTORY OF GRUNDEN RANCH

A portion of Grunden Ranch was purchased in 1935 by Harvey's dad, Forrest Grunden, and still remains in the family today. Since then, additional acreage has been purchased and added to the Grundens' ranching program.

Grunden Ranch's involvement in Morgans started in 1968 with Harvey Grunden, and it was with the purchase of that very

first Morgan in which a future was built. Harlan remembers, "Dad bought his first Morgan in 1968. He had a bad back and heard Morgans were a smoother ride...and he wanted something not everyone else was raising. He wanted a good disposition, good looks, and he fell in love with it." Harvey's two sons, Harlan and Harris, and his daughter, Gina, and the successive grandchildren followed suit.

ABOVE: An aerial view of Grunden Ranch, Curtis, Nebraska. **INSETS:** A Cattle Drive including Harlan and Nodaway Bobby Roberts, Tammy and RG Bo Bonanza, Megan and RG Regency Chester, and Hance and RG Tuff Act To Follow

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The 2006 Grunden foal crop; Funquest Antigo.

Harvey Grunden raised beef cattle on his ranch but also continued to buy Morgans over the years, many from Robert Travis of Sydney, Iowa, and from Stuart Hazard of Funquest Farms. Harvey based his breeding program on the bloodlines of Flyhawk and Jubilee King. These lines have gone on to be the foundation horses for breeders across the country, and in Canada. Harvey also sold foundation horses internationally. In 1979, the first Morgan to ever set foot on German soil was the stallion, Funquest Meddler.

It only came out later that a family fondness for Morgans began even earlier than Harvey originally thought. Harvey's grandfather, Russ Grunden, (who inspired Harvey's RG prefix) loved Morgans, too. Harlan recounts, "Russ's widow told Dad that 'it was always a dream of your grandpa's to have those fancy horses from Vermont.'" So, Harvey was fulfilling his grandpa's dream without even knowing it. Harlan and his wife are proud to live out that dream today.

While Harlan primarily focuses on raising beef cattle on Grunden Ranch, he admits the Morgan aspect of his life is very important. This year alone, they are expecting 20 foals. Harlan says, "my wife Tammy says some people will say they have a foal or two, but we have a new herd."

Tammy Grunden came from a ranching background similar to Harlan's but didn't experience the world of Morgans until they were married. Now, Tammy drives and rides English, Western, and hunter seat. Since 1982 she has worked at the local convenience store in a community where everyone knows everyone. As Harlan jokes, "if the password were 'your mother's maiden name,' everyone would know it!"

Harlan and Tammy's adult children, Megan and Hance, live nearby and also have the same affinity for the breed. Their daughter, Megan Welch, has three young boys, and they live just 18 miles away from the Grunden Ranch. Their son, Hance, lives on the Grunden Ranch property. He has his own semi, but Harlan notes, "when he isn't trucking, he's helping out at the ranch."

Harlan and Tammy's grandchildren are carrying on the Morgan tradition as well. Harlan says his six-year-old grandson

stole the show at Oklahoma City doing a walk-trot class. "He trotted in there with his old ranch horse [JSM Pauper Of Sandhill] and was out there having fun!" chuckles Harlan. Cameras captured the little cowboy enamored with his image on the jumbotron as his reliable partner handled all the steering.

HARLAN'S BREEDING STALLIONS

Harlan has plenty of Morgans on his ranch at any given time. He says, "Dad had gotten up to 56 horses at one point, and he thought that was way too many. Our peak was 95. It wasn't a goal," he chuckles. Harlan currently has 60 head on his farm, including some he calls "antiqued"—namely the 26-year-old and the 24-year-old. His breeding stallions reflect that strong, old-style Morgan horse his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather loved so much.

Grunden Ranch Morgans is one of the largest breeders preserving the Funquest Morgan Horse Farm lineage. The bloodlines they have concentrated on in their program are Flyhawk and Jubilee King. Harlan explains, "I have never strayed from Dad's original breeding program. I still concentrate on the Funquest, and I have a large amount of pure Funquest horses." In fact, he ventures to guess he has the largest collection of Funquest horses but notes, "if there is someone out there with similar bloodlines, I'd like to meet them, and we can trade some horses and trade some bloodlines!"

Harlan passionately preserves the Funquest Morgan line with his two pure Funquest studs: GRM Funquest King O Fancy (Funquest Antigo x Fortunes Abbey Road) and GRM Funquest Toe The Mark (Funquest Antigo x Greenback Lil Miss Marker). The two foundation stallions were Rimlo Black Prince (Rimlo Black Dandy x LOM Sally) and RG Stuart's Monarch (x Tretton Lady Midnight D). Stuart's Monarch's sire was Funquest Monarch. Harlan also has two breeding stallions sired by Stuart's Monarch: "One, GRM Monarchs Go Figure (x RG Figurena's Dream Girl), isn't quite two yet, but he should mature to 16+ hands," he says. "GRM Black Illusions (x RG Black Sentola), the other breeding stallion, is seven." These two stallions are both homozygous for black. RG Cafallero's Legacy, sired by Funquest Cafallero and Hidden Y's



ABOVE: Harlan with Mark Slabaugh at the whip of Grandsire, sons, and grandson, RG Stuart's Monarch (right wheel), GRM Black Illusions (left wheel), RG Denmark's Black Lark (right lead), and Magnificent Dash For Cash (left lead) (photo Ken Siems). **INSETS:** Harlan assisting with a reverse unicorn, RG Stuart's Monarch (wheel horse), with sons RG Denmark's Black Lark (right lead), and GRM Black Illusions (left lead) (photo Ken Siems); Harlan driving RG Kate's Beauty with foal GRM Cimarron at her side.

Special Flaire (Caduceus Renaissance x RollingVRosean) are also standing at stud.

PICKING FAVORITES: MEMORABLE MORGANS

Harlan has spent time with many special Morgans over the years, but one particularly memorable horse was RG Bo Bonanza (Rimlo Black Prince x Funquest Bellete). He explains, "that was the horse Dad [Harvey] gave to my wife when we got married, and all our kids learned to ride on Bo." Bo was a quick learner with a strong work ethic. Harlan remembers, "I took him down to Neil Werts to learn how to drive one weekend, and Neil said, 'you don't just teach a horse in a weekend!' But before the weekend was over, I was maneuvering around cones. Two weeks later, we were in a show driving. The ringmaster was amused when we first came in, but by the end, he agreed to breed his mare to one of our Morgan stallions."

Another one of Harlan's favorites was RG Stuart's Monarch

GCH, who has won two world titles in carriage driving, one in timed events (Carriage Obstacle Driving), and one in Carriage Pleasure Driving Single. "I had told myself I was going to retire him while he was still a winner...he died in July 2017. He died a winner."

Harlan's daughter's favorite horse growing up was a special Morgan gelding, RG Regency Chester GCH (Funquest Callafaro x RG Miss Beamington). "Every grandkid got one horse and Megan picked Chester." He had a strong and loving personality. Harlan remembers, "one time in a trail class, Chester was about to step out of the box and 'Megan said, 'Chester don't!' And he listened to her!'

Harlan recently tried to make another Chester for his daughter. He says, "Megan's horse, she likes him so well, I had to go out and buy his dam back, and then I had to go find a son of Funquest Cafallero [Chester's sire]; we were trying to recreate a Chester. Well, we got three fillies, but I still couldn't sell any of them—Megan won't part with them!" Clearly, Chester's lineage lives on.

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TOP ROW: Megan Grunden-Welch and RG Regency Chester; **BOTTOM ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT):** Hance Grunden and RG Regency Chester at Grand National and holding new born Lane Welch (left photos © Howard Schatzberg).

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Harlan's admiration for horses was ingrained from an early age while going to horse shows and farms with his parents. He says, "I remember Dad and Mom would go down to a horse farm with the trailer, and all three of us kids would ride in the topper. Dad would always say 'I'm not going to buy a horse, I'm not going to buy a horse.' And lo and behold we would come home with a horse. He would have Mom write the check, so he was still able say 'I didn't buy a horse!'"

Harlan's mother, Myrna, was also involved in the Morgan industry. She was the announcer for 35 plus years at the Nebraska State Fair Morgan Horse Show and the local club [the Missouri Valley Morgan Horse Club] newsletter editor for many years. Harlan is currently the president of that club, and he adds: "My dad joined in 1968, the year the club was organized, and he is the only member who is still alive and a member from that first year."

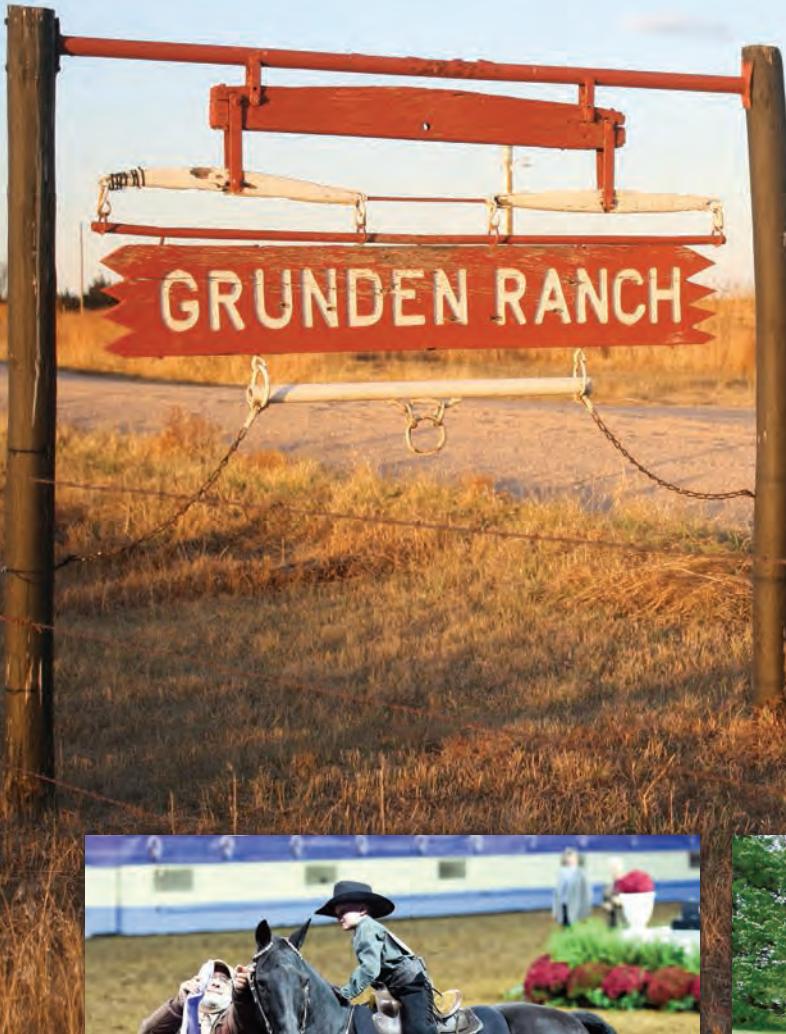
Watching his dad repeatedly choose Morgans to add to their herd, Harlan felt "wowed and in awe of the mass numbers and consistency and quality, the refined head, the movement. That

was my big introduction to the Morgans." Harlan went on to show Morgans at the Nebraska State Fair for many years. He remembers, "they had a Morgan show for 45 years or so, and I'm the only exhibitor who never missed a year. When we started showing, I was 12 years old on a Funquest stud...he was well-behaved." They also showed at the Wheat State Regional Morgan Horse show, the Wyoming State Fair, local shows, and county fairs.

WHAT GRM LOOKS FOR IN A MORGAN

When shopping for a Morgan, Harlan and Tammy try to adhere to this advice: "Stay in the middle of the road, because fads come and go." He prefers the older style, adding "they have to have a pretty head." His preference is a dark horse, but admits, "there are good horses in every color and every discipline."

Harlan believes a sound mind is equally important to solid conformation. He says, "good disposition is of the utmost importance. You need to have a kind, gentle horse to make you want to be a part of their life." This personality is enhanced even more by the special attention his horses get from imprinting and



ABOVE: Harlan and Tammy's grandsons, Jett and Lane Welch. **INSETS:** Lane Welch and JMS Pauper Of Sandhill with Harlan; A two-year-old Lane Welch and GRM Lady Of Finesse.

halter breaking at a very young age on his ranch.

Disposition is perhaps more important than ever now because Harlan has his grandchildren's safety to think about. "My grandkids go out and play all the time with the horses, and the four and six-year-old, they'll go out and catch the 'old babysitter,' Chester, and lead him around...and they take him to horse shows for showmanship, leadline, and walk-trot. So, they need something they can trust. I like to look in the eye of the horse and see that calm gentle eye."

HOW THE GRUNDENS USE MORGANS

The Grundens use Morgans to move cattle and ride pastures on

the Nebraska ranch because of their durability and athleticism. He says, "we've helped neighbors round up cattle, and they wouldn't even think about going up that hill, where our Morgans will go right up there!" They, of course, also use their Morgans for breeding and showing in just about every discipline. Harlan considers himself "strictly a carriage driver," and says his wife likes riding Western the most. His daughter Megan has been very successful in her show career doing trail classes. He says, "with Chester, she has racked up four world championships, four reserve world championships, 21 Grand National wins, and ten reserve Grand National titles. All with one Chester." Now, Harlan's youngest grandkids are using the family Morgans to participate in shows, both lead-line and walk-trot.

HARLAN BRINGS HIS UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE TO THE AMHA BOARD



TOP TO BOTTOM:
2018 AMHA Convention: The AMHA Board of Directors with Executive Director, Carrie Mortensen; Harlan and Tammy Grunden accepted the Breeder's Hall of Fame award for his father's RG Morgans.

In 2017, Harlan Grunden began serving a two-year term as an AMHA Central Region Director. He is one of three people representing the region. In 2018, he was appointed Vice President of AMHA. He says that it is of utmost importance for a board member to be open-minded. Being on the board has been a positive experience for him, and he plans to run again next February, noting “it’s interesting getting to meet the various people in the industry and getting a chance to meet the ones you’ve always heard about.” He’s also enjoyed the travel involved and seeing different forms of agriculture.

“I serve everybody in the region, and right now I’m helping with the Amish outreach because approximately 50 percent of the transactions through AMHA are Amish-based.” The association also sends representatives to horse auctions. Harlan explains, “it is necessary to have representation at these sales. On the 6th and 7th of April there was a sale with 265 head of Morgans and people like to see representation with the breed. The Amish folks are learning and asking questions about registering their horses. We’re also there selling magazine subscriptions and memberships.” Harlan views it as a busy but important role to be in.

His advice to people who may be interested in running or serving in any manner is to know “it takes a lot of time. The first year you are sitting back and absorbing and learning the ropes. It can be overwhelming, but I like a challenge. The busy people always find time.” He adds, “I encourage everybody to be open-minded...everybody has an opinion and you have to respect everyone’s opinion. There’s the backyard folks, there’s the big trainers, and everybody in between, and their voices all matter to the breed.” ■



Harlan presenting Harvey Grunden with his AMHA Breeder's Hall of Fame award.

HARVEY'S LEGACY CONTINUES

Harlan took great pleasure in introducing his son and daughter to the joy of horses. “Both our kids made their debut in lead-line at 16 months with no one walking along beside them.” He laughs, remembering a time when his son was eight years old manning their booth at the Nebraska State Fair: “some folks came around to see our big notebook with information about the pedigree and breeding, and there he is, going through the book and talking about bloodlines...and when we came back, those folks told us how impressed they were with him.” He says his kids are still involved, and that none of them are “slowing down anytime soon.”

A recent major accomplishment and living proof that the Grundens are leaving their mark in the Morgan industry is that Harvey and Myrna were inducted into the Morgan Horse Breeders Hall of Fame at the 2018 AMHA convention. Harlan says he and Tammy accepted the award on his parents’ behalf, and that afterwards, “we went to the care home and gave it to Dad, and before we left he was showing it to all the nurses and everyone who happened to walk by.”

When it comes to the future of the Morgan breed, Harlan emphasizes the importance of educating young people: “We need to put emphasis on the youth...because if they’ve really bonded with the horse, they’ll introduce their kids to the horses and so forth.” Harlan admits that owning so many Morgans may not be for everyone, adding “we are committed to the Morgan horse—or should be committed!” But he wouldn’t trade his lifestyle or experiences for a second. “The whole Morgan world is a big family. Most everybody would do anything to help you, too.” They truly embody what it means to live and breathe Morgans. ■