



# LEFEVER TRAINING CENTRE: Embracing Gratitude, Gifts & Giving

by CATHERINE COLE FERANDELLI

Don LeFever has a daily prayer of, “Giving thanks to family, friends, ADHF and the community for our good fortune.”

Life has a way of throwing curve balls when least expected. For the LeFever, Don’s sudden illness, resulting in a liver and a kidney transplant, served up a literal life and death challenge. A challenge resulting in appreciation of “the good of humanity.”

Located in Western Wisconsin, LeFever Training Centre (LTC) has created an idyllic, successful lesson and training program, no matter what the experience level of the client. Owners Don and Teresa LeFever, along with their son Jordan, pride themselves on welcoming folks to their lesson program with only one prerequisite: their desire to join the LeFever community of riding, caring and loving Arabian horses.

Don LeFever’s passion for Arabian horses took root during his childhood years living in Syracuse, NY; leading him to take on a “summer job” at Midwest Centre at age 16 that lasted for 12 years! Working with the Arabian horse industry’s top-level horses and humans gave Don invaluable experience in starting his own training center. However, Don sought to create a lesson and training center that beacons to “new” horse lovers seeking a fun, yet safe learning experience—horse owner or not.

Today, LeFever Training Centre gives more than 80 lessons per week, offering full-time horse training, competes within a busy show schedule, and puts on sold-out summer horse camps and birthday parties. In other words, most anything that involves horses and horse lovers.

LeFever Training Centre is truly a labor of love, an equine gift to a community that offers little else to its citizens in way of leisure activity.

Life was good. And then in 2018 everything changed.



Don’s health spiraled downward, with a serious illness that couldn’t be diagnosed despite seeking top medical specialists. Teresa describes watching her husband fade. “Don continued to worsen, we were taking him from specialist to specialist and no one could figure it out. Finally, a physician at University of Minnesota diagnosed liver failure; thus, Don needed a liver transplant.” For five months Don was hospitalized awaiting a donor, growing weaker and weaker. “At one point, my 5’7” husband weighed 90 pounds,” Teresa remembers.

Don hung on. Teresa, Jordan, friends and family visited daily. Don admits, “Sometimes I would only sense a visitor was sitting with me, I was that weak. Recently, many friends have admitted they were certain their visit was the last time they’d ever see me.”

During this stressful time, Teresa and Jordan continued to operate LeFever Training Centre full time.

Five harrowing months passed before a liver became available. His donor was 19-year-old Alex McFarland, who tragically passed from an asthma attack. Deemed a “high risk” liver, Don’s survival chances were less than 20%, but dismal odds were better than no odds at all, so Don chose the surgery. Additionally, his health was so fragile, he had also been suffering from kidney failure and was attending dialysis three days a week. “Fortunately,” Teresa explains, “Don’s liver transplant put him at the top of the list for a kidney, and six months later, on December 28th, we got the call, and he received a new one.” The roller coaster ride continued, but slowly Don began to improve.



The medical staff, in awe of Don's dedicated family and friends, allowed him to go home about a week after surgery. Aware of all his blessings, Don praises his supporters. "Mary Trowbridge and AHDF was our lifeline, and donations from a GoFundMe were astounding. Ken and Lisa Steffes of Dahl's Pharmacy donated all the medical equipment and supplies needed for Teresa to take care of me at home, and there were countless others in the Arabian horse community who helped us financially and simply by checking in and asking how I was and how they could help."

Then there's the donor family. Contrary to usual procedure, the McFarland family inquired about Don's progress (and eventually learned) that the LeFever's owned a horse training business. In time, with the assistance of Life Source, due to the complex policies involved in direct communication, the LeFever's learned more about the donor family and their teenage daughter, Shyla. Meetings were arranged, and after an emotional get together with all families, Shyla began taking weekly riding lessons, quickly gaining expertise both in the saddle and in everyday horse care. Soon, she was showing LeFever lesson horses locally with success, and today, owns and shows her very own Arabian horse, the 10-year-old bay gelding *Vhicktter WHG*. The family also enjoys camping and other activities with the LTC crew.

The LeFever family's incredible turn of events illustrate how tenacity, loyalty and empathy re-write ones' destiny. Don's description of life today is one of many blessings. "The McFarland family will forever be an integral part of our lives, and we are truly grateful to the Arabian horse community and so many individuals for their care and concern. My health is flourishing thanks to a lifestyle of healthy food and exercise, and our son, Jordan, is dedicated to becoming the second generation of LeFever's running our training center. Yes, all is good." ■



*Shyla McFarland aboard Vhicktter WHG.*

