

# LUCHO GUIMARÃES: PURSUING DESTINY

BY ELLEN MEDLEY WRIGHT

**I**n his famed novel "The Alchemist," Brazilian author Paulo Coelho describes the story of a young man, a shepherd, who travels far and wide to pursue his "personal legend," his destiny. The young man is told by a mysterious king that the universe wishes for each person to accomplish his or her personal legend, and as he makes the journey, he encounters many other characters who help him meet his destiny in ways he never expected. Throughout, he seems to be in just the right circumstance to meet just the right person at just the right time. It's a beautiful story about how people are interconnected, about listening to one's inner self for direction, and ultimately following the path that has been laid out for you from the beginning.

Like the young man in the story, Lucho Guimarães has sought his personal legend, traveling the world in a quest that has led him from one opportunity to the next. And all paths lead to the same thing: the Arabian horse. In the little over six months it has been in business, Lucho Guimarães Arabians has experienced the profound success that only happens when one is following the journey that has been meant for them all along.

## IN THE BEGINNING

Lucho was born in São Paulo, Brazil, and raised in the south of Brazil with his two brothers. They were not a horse family in the beginning, but one of Lucho's brothers was incredibly shy. They took him to doctors and experts, who suggested that horses may bring the young boy out of his shell.

The family often went for weekend drives in the countryside, and one day, they came across a horse boarding facility. They walked onto the property and made friends with the owner, who agreed to help them find a horse. He took them to a farm that had Criollo, a native breed of horse known for their endurance. There, Lucho and his brothers spotted a mare and foal in the pasture, dying.

"The mare was actually laying down, skin and bones, and couldn't get up," recalls Lucho. "She already had a bunch of sores on one of her sides from laying down and trying to get up. The baby was around her, probably a week old and about to die, too, probably hadn't been nursing for days. Me and my brothers started crying and said, 'That is what I want.' My dad said 'Well you can't ride that. We want a horse for you guys to ride.'"



*Lucho Guimarães*



▲ Lucho Guimarães and Tajj Al Amir at National Breeder Finals in 2016



▲ Lucho Guimarães and Olyne LM in Brazil

The boys didn't care. They wanted to save the black mare and her baby, so their father bought her, and they transported her and her foal to the boarding facility. "At that point, we knew nothing about horses. It was our first horse," explains Lucho plainly. However, they nursed the mare and foal back to health. Knowing nothing about horse care, they used instinct, says Lucho, and put themselves in the horses' situation. Their empathy and love for the horses guided them to provide what the horses needed. "That beginning for

me, I think, was very important because it made me a better horseman," says Lucho, who, though he has gained much more knowledge since, continues to use empathy and horse sense to excel at his job. He also continues to rely on his own resources to learn what he needs to learn in order to grow.

Within a short period of time, the Guimarães family owned six or seven horses. They took lessons and went on trail rides. They had family barbecues and rode together. Their life revolved around the horses, but

Lucho soon became interested in competition. He tried jumping first, taking lessons at a local jumping club. Most of the horses he rode were Arabians, but his family had not yet gotten involved in the breed. His riding improved, but the jumping club environment didn't quite suit him. He had an independent spirit, even at 12. All on his own, he sold his English tack to buy roping equipment, including a traditional gaucho saddle, which is smaller than a Western saddle and covered with a layer of sheepskin.

Lucho moved the black mare—the same one he had saved—to a nearby cattle ranch, which had calf-roping competitions twice a week. He trained his mare to rope by helping work cattle on the farm. The property spanned thousands of acres, and the cattle hands had to drive the cattle across a river to get from the farm where the cattle normally grazed to the roping arena on the other side.

In 1996, when Lucho was 13, his parents bought their first purebred Arabian at an auction at a regional show near where they lived. The mare's name was C Cartaya. "We really got into the breed after this mare," says Lucho. "We watched the whole regional show and the auction, and we fell in love with it, the atmosphere and the industry itself."

The family started studying the breed. Lucho's dad, a civil engineer, had copies of "The Arabian Horse Times" and "Arabian Horse World" sent to Brazil. He wanted to be a breeder, and he needed a stallion and more mares. "I went back to the jumping school because they had several stallions, and I found a white stallion for my dad," recalls Lucho. "My mom, my brothers and I bought him as a gift to my dad." Several mares soon followed.

By 1998, the family had their very first foal. "At that time, I did all the work on the farm, grooming the horses, training the horses and getting them ready," says Lucho. He was the son most involved in the running of the farm on a daily basis. Lucho's dad asked him to show the foal in a Foal at Side class. Lucho led the mare into the arena with the foal trotting along beside her, and they came out Reserve Champions. Lucho had never schooled a horse before. "When we went to the show with that foal and the mare, the only contact that I had with the horse show world was through magazines," he says. "I never had been to a horse show." He prepared for the show by paying attention to how the handlers in the magazines stood up the horses, and how the horses were clipped. In doing so, he had an idea of what they were supposed to look like. This was all he had to go on at the time.

## A DREAM REALIZED

A lot of 14-year-old boys approaching their 15th birthdays are daydreaming about cars or video games. Lucho, however, was dreaming of horses. As his birthday neared, he told his parents that his birthday wish was to meet Ali Jamaal. Ali Jamaal's owner was the famed breeder Lenita Perroy of Haras Meia Lua, but that did not stop Lucho, who

wanted so badly to meet the great stallion. “[My parents] never really took it seriously, so I picked up the phone one day, and I called Lenita myself,” he says.

Lucho explained to Lenita that his birthday wish was to see Ali Jamaal, and she agreed to let him come to the farm. Lucho informed his parents that he had made the arrangements, and after the initial shock wore off, the family began to plan the trip. On his birthday, they drove 15 hours to make the visit. The family looked at horses all afternoon, and at the end of the day, Lenita told them she had horses in training with Chiquinho Rego and suggested they visit his farm, too. It was late, and Chiquinho was another two hours away, but Lenita gave him a call, and he agreed to host the family. “Looking back, Chiquinho was really nice because if some 15-year-old wanted to come at nine o’clock at night just to look at horses, I would tell him nope!” laughs Lucho.

Chiquinho showed Lucho’s family two National Champion fillies by BF Renaissance and out of Ali Jamaal daughters, as well as a Bey Shah+ son named Red Bear. Lucho told Chiquinho how passionate he was about horses. “Chiquinho looked at me and said, ‘Do you want to be a trainer?’ and I said, ‘Yeah. I want to be a trainer,’” recalls Lucho. “So Chiquinho said, ‘I’m going to give you your first whip.’ I have that whip still.”

It was a transformative trip, and it solidified Lucho’s desire to be a part of the Arabian show world. While at Lenita’s, he watched video tapes of Ali Jamaal. Upon his return home, he started having VHS recordings of Scottsdale and U.S. Nationals sent to him. “I used to watch the tapes of the American handlers...I used to study what the handlers did, and I would grab [Chiquinho’s] whip and would go to my room in front of a mirror and try to mimic the moves of those handlers because I wanted to learn,” he says.

Lucho knew there must be a technique to halter, just as there was with riding. “[In riding] there is a reaction to every action, and to me, halter had to be the same,” he explains. “So, when I was watching those tapes, I was looking for cues and looking for techniques that they used to get those horses to do what they were doing.”

Lucho admired all the top American trainers, but he always felt a special affinity for Greg Gallún. “I could probably see myself in him and wanted to be that,” says Lucho. “But I think there was a special connection because of Ali Jamaal...I always loved Ali Jamaal for some reason. He was probably one of the biggest—if not the biggest—sire to ever step in Brazil, and he had a big impact on the breed in Brazil. So, I think it was for love of that horse and the connection Greg had to that horse, showing him in the ring.”

The year 1999 marked Lucho’s first Brazilian Nationals, and his first National Championship when he won the Mare JTH. “I had no clue what I was doing, looking back now,” he says. “I thought I did.” He carried Chiquinho’s whip in the class but decided to never show with it again, so he could keep it forever. After his first National Championship, Lucho worked for a time at Haras CRH, a breeding farm in Brazil, and he grew in knowledge and experience. Even now, the foaling and raising of babies is one of his favorite things about his job. He also showed horses for the farm with the help of Rodolfo Guzzo and Dejour Silvestre—wearing a tomato red jacket, no less.



Lucho Guimarães and Brazilian Reserve National Champion Yearling Filly Bellissima El Ryad AK ▲



Lucho Guimarães and After Sunset W at the 2017 Scottsdale Arabian show ▲

While working on the breeding farm, Lucho continued to consider what Chiquinho had asked him. He went back to his father and told him he wanted to open a training center. “This is what I wanted for my life,” says Lucho. Lucho’s father allowed his son to lease stalls from him. Lucho paid for the stalls and had his own clients and horses.

At the time, Lucho was primarily competing in Liberty competitions with a stallion bred by Polé Levy named Tovar HCF, but in 2002, he acquired a filly who would change the course of his business. He had driven a stallion in his little two-horse trailer to a nearby show, and while on the grounds, he saw a yearling filly that took his breath away. Her name was Olyne LM, and he had to have her. Though he couldn’t afford her, the stars aligned in his favor. The breeder of the filly had horses in training with Chiquinho, and Lucho’s connection to Chiquinho allowed him to make an arrangement. He paid a sum outright, which was sourced from a

commission he had saved from his very first horse sale—the sale of Tovar HCF—and paid the rest in pieces, bringing the filly back in the remaining stall on his trailer. Lucho prepared the filly at home, then took her to a big regional show, where she was Champion Yearling Filly. It was Lucho’s first Open Championship at a regional-level competition. “That was really my first competitive halter horse that I had,” he says of Olyne.

## DUE NORTH

A few years later, fate would come knocking at Lucho’s door once again. Laura Friesen of Wunderbar Arabians was visiting Paulo Levy’s farm, Haras Capim Fino, around the time of the 2003 Brazilian Nationals. “Polé,” as Paulo is known, had partnered with none other than Chiquinho Rego, and Laura, impressed by the Brazilian handler, hired



▲ Lucho Guimarães leads Angellinah WLF on his new farm's property

Chiquinho to show her horses. However, Chiquinho could not leave Brazil, so Laura needed someone at her farm's home base in Canada to condition the horses. Chiquinho suggested Lucho.

"I didn't speak English at all. Zero. I couldn't say 'hi,'" says Lucho. But, he said yes. He figured he could learn English just as he had learned everything else. It was an opportunity he could not pass up.

Lucho went home and told his parents that he had been offered a job in Canada. At the time, he had just been accepted into vet school, and so he approached his parents with trepidation, knowing exactly where his heart lay. He knew he could delay his entry into school for three months, so he presented to his parents that he could work in Canada during that time, gain experience and come back to start school. Lucho's dad pulled him aside because he suspected that Lucho had already committed to the job, knowing Lucho's personality and the way he goes after what he wants. He said to Lucho, "If I know you, you have everything set up already." Lucho confirmed this; they were already working on his visa.

Lucho's first show in North America was Region 17, where he showed two horses for the Friesens. He showed Bejeweled WA to a Top Five spot in the Yearling Filly. He was also Top Five Mare with Brooklyn Bey, the dam of the Friesens' Mariachi WA. After the show, the Friesens invited Lucho to stay at Wunderbar, so he

called his parents in Brazil to inform them that he would be remaining in Canada. Though they were sad, they were again not surprised, and they were supportive of Lucho pursuing his dream.

The following February, Lucho accompanied the Friesens and their horses to Scottsdale for the Scottsdale Arabian Horse Show. It was his first time ever in the United States. The Friesens leased stalls at the very property where Lucho Guimarães Arabians now resides. At the time, it was Michelle Pfeifer's Shellbird, Inc. Little did Lucho know that he would return to the farm more than 10 years later in a very different capacity.

Lucho soaked up everything the Friesens taught him. They were a family who had been breeding and showing their own horses for generations, and they had much wisdom to offer. He also had the opportunity to work with many of the North American trainers he had admired in the videos he watched when he was just starting, such as Robin Hopkinson, Steve Heathcott, Greg Hazelwood, Sandro Pinha, Rodolfo Guzzo and others. Eventually, though, Brazil called him back home. He returned there and worked for Chiquinho and Polé for a couple years.

Lucho made another journey back to the U.S. around 2007, this time to work for Keith Krichke. When visa problems sent him back to Brazil, Lucho decided it was time to strike out on his own. He opened his first independent training facility at Polé's farm in Brazil and



João and José Guimarães ▲

spent the bulk of 2009 preparing horses at home and getting them qualified at regional shows.

## EXPANDING HIS REACH

In that very first year, Lucho earned a Brazilian Reserve National Championship with Bellissima El Ryad AK. The victory unlocked the market for him in South America. He began traveling to other countries to show horses. "I started getting called to travel to Chile, to Ecuador, to Argentina, to Uruguay, all those South American countries, to show there," says Lucho. "So that win kind of opened up room for me."

By 2012 and 2013, Lucho's success was cemented. He showed at both the Ecuadorean and Chilean Nationals both years and won many titles, including a Chilean Reserve National Championship with a mare named HP Polaca, owned by the Bulnes family, and an Ecuadorean National Championship with MD Hibat Allah, who was owned by breeder Manuel Durini at the time. The mare has gone on to numerous titles in the U.S., but she got her start with Lucho.

Unfortunately, the Brazilian economy took a turn for the worse in 2013, and the horse industry suffered. Lucho closed his training center. He was hired shortly thereafter by Milad Equine



▲ Brynlee Hart



Lucho Guimarães and Tajj Al Amir ▲

Center in Saudi Arabia, so he moved to the Middle East to see where the opportunity would take him. "It was an amazing experience," he says. "I got to travel a lot there...the farm was beautiful. It was a neat project because I saw the beginning, from the building of the stalls, the arena, the swimming pool, the whole facility. I saw it start from the beginning, and I was part of the development of that."

Lucho trained not just the horses but the staff, and being in the position of passing on his knowledge and expertise was thrilling. Lucho prepared the likes of Eden C and Delight's Diva for the show ring. He earned first place in Senior Mares at Saudi Nationals with the beautiful grey Martina Van Ryad.

In 2014, Lucho left Saudi Arabia to work for Arabians International of Cave Creek, Arizona, as an assistant trainer. He showed a little bit in this position, but he primarily prepared horses for trainer Sandro Pinha to show. That year, he earned his first U.S. National Top Ten in the Yearling Geldings with Tru, a horse owned by Lisa Markley. Another opportunity arose a little over a year later when Lucho was hired by Gemini Acres Equine as the head trainer. He started the position just before the 2015 National Breeder Finals, and at the show he won the Yearling Fillies with SH Julia. "After that win is when Gemini considered me as not just the head trainer but the head handler as well," says Lucho.

Lucho showed for Gemini at Scottsdale the following year and did quite well. Then, he went to

the Las Vegas Arabian Breeders World Cup. There, he showed Satin Doll GA, a mare by JJ Bellagio and out of Goddess Of Da Vinci, to a Reserve Champion 3-Year-Old Mare title. More and more people began to recognize the talented young trainer.

## A NEW CHAPTER

While Lucho was working for Arabians International, there was another important milestone, this one in his personal life. Lucho met Ashley Hart at an open house at Regency Cove. It was a Sunday, and Sandro had asked him to take a horse he had in training, Forever Mi Dream, a full sister to Pitonisa AS, to showcase at the open house. Ashley was also working the open house as well. "That is how I first really talked to her and really got to know her," says Lucho. "She was there helping out, and I offered to help. I was there with one mare already, so I said, 'Well, I can help you out through the open house with the other horses.'" Shortly after, they started dating. They later got engaged and were married when Lucho moved to Gemini.

Family is just as important to Lucho as the horses. He has two sons who live in Brazil, João Eduardo and José Henrique. He gets to see them during their school vacations, and he talks to them frequently on the phone and Skype. His older son, João, is 8 and loves horses. "He lives horses like I do, 24/7," says Lucho. João requests horse toys for gifts and plays horse video

games, and he asks his dad about his horses each time they talk on the phone. José is only 4, but he also likes horses, and Lucho trail rides with both boys when he visits them in Brazil.

A daughter came into Lucho's life when he married Ashley. Ashley's daughter, Brynlee, is also horse crazy. After school, she spends her days at the barn and wants to be a part of the new training center. She has a true passion for horses, just like her mother and stepfather. Ashley and Lucho just recently welcomed the newest addition to their family, their son, Lucca, who was born April 3rd. The whole family plans to take a trip to Brazil this summer, and it will be the first time they are there all together.

The encouragement and love of Ashley and the rest of his family gave Lucho the courage to open Lucho Guimarães Arabians on August 1, 2016. Ashley's support and knowledge of horses made her not only a great life partner, but an ideal professional partner as well. She has been a crucial part of the business from the start. She manages the office work, and she and Lucho personally coordinate the farm's social media and marketing. Even when she was on bed rest at the end of her pregnancy, Ashley was completing Vegas entries and drawing up sale contracts.

Many people warned Lucho against striking out on his own so soon in a market



▲ Lucca Guimarães

as saturated as Scottsdale, where the streets are seemingly lined with world-renowned Arabian training establishments. However, Lucho felt a pull that he could not ignore, and if there is one thing he has learned over the years, it is to follow where his heart leads him. It hasn't steered him wrong yet. In just the short time since opening, clients have clamored to put their horses in training with him.

What gives Lucho an edge in one of the toughest Arabian markets in the world? "I think my honesty, to speak what I truly believe, and my true passion—not just about the show ring, but truly caring for the horses—are what differentiate me, things that make me succeed," he explains. "I'm also an easy person to deal with. Even though English is not my first language, it's really easy for me to communicate with people."

Communicating and understanding clients' needs are very important, both to Lucho and to any horse owner. Once the horses are in the barn, Lucho's clients appreciate the high level of care they are given. Yes, they are prepared to be competitive in the show ring, but they also receive careful attention and are respected each day. "The clients can walk in here any time, any day...I have nothing to hide," says Lucho. "My barn is always open."

Lucho has a system that is followed at his farm. There are no tricks "behind the curtains," he says. Therefore, his clients feel secure in knowing their horses are receiving the best care. Lucho is a gentle horseman and ever attentive, catching the smallest details in the barn, and he holds his employees to the same standards. He makes a weekly plan for every horse. Each of his employees has a group of horses

that they care for, but he continues to oversee the work. "I'm in the barn every day," he says. "I can't not be in the barn."

Lucho has built up a wonderful team that makes the day-to-day running of the facility seamless. In addition to his wife, Ashley, Lucho has three other important team members. Martin Borjorquez and Oscar Rodriguez have been with the farm the longest. Toward the end of 2016, as Scottsdale preparations were underway, Lucho knew he needed more assistance. The barn was growing faster than he could have imagined, and the number of horses he had in training required more manpower, so he hired Martin and Oscar. "I wouldn't change these guys for nobody," says Lucho proudly. "You could offer me anybody right now; pick a name, and I wouldn't trade for any of them. These two guys are amazing. They're a big part of the team."

Lucho then felt the need to bring someone on board specifically for the Scottsdale show. Denise van Gils was selected to fill that role. She came all the way from the Netherlands and will stay for the year as part of an exchange program, in which she will gain experience as she helps out at the farm. "She is a great worker, as far as grooming the horses, preparing and conditioning the horses and managing the barn along with the guys...It's important to have a bit of a woman's touch in the barn, too," says Lucho.

"I always say I am very proud of my team, proud of my horses and proud of my clients," Lucho continues. "And we are truly proud, regardless of who the clients are." Lucho and Ashley are delighted to have the amount of business they have in such a short time and to compete at such a high level. The rapid rate at which the training center grew was a surprise, and it is a point of pride for both of them. It's hard to think of any other trainer who has had the number and quality of horses that Lucho has gained within six months of opening. The horses are the focus of everything in the business, so having such quality, special horses in the barn—horses that could be with any number of trainers—is an honor. Having been chosen to care for these horses makes Lucho very proud.

After a successful first Scottsdale under his own banner, Lucho is ready to focus on regional shows and Breeder Finals, which is perhaps his favorite show. He is also very excited to start selecting babies for next year's Scottsdale, traveling the country to find the next "superstar babies." This is what he lives for.

Each part of Lucho's story is connected to the others. As each chapter draws to a close, Lucho steps into the next opened page. Learning from a variety of trainers over the years gave him a great foundation to build his own style and technique, and he now has contacts around the world who broaden his opportunities at home. At the heart of it all, Lucho has spent his life pursuing his passion. He followed the opportunities that came his way, but also took an active role in seeking his destiny and making his dream of becoming a renowned trainer and handler a reality. **HT**