

## Arabian Horse Photographers In Focus

# *Lori And Victor Ricigliano*

by ANNE STRATTON



There are plenty of professional attributes that can be assigned to Lori and Victor Ricigliano, of Marketing Mafia Productions Inc., one of the Arabian horse industry's most prolific media providers. They're talented, skilled, hardworking, and they both know horses. But the salient point in their lives—the one which provides the foundation for their success—is that they don't just love each other. They like each other.

That is critical, because with the exception of a few times when Lori has been away judging a horse show, they have been together 24/seven for 18 years, training and breeding horses or working at photography and videography. In the winter, that now means in a 36-foot mobile studio in Scottsdale, which, as Lori puts it, is so confined that "you can hear another person breathing in the next room." For some people, that would be the death of a relationship. For the Riciglianos, it has been the engine that has driven them to the top of their game.

*Lori  
Ricigliano*



## *The Making Of Soul Mates*

When Lori and Victor Ricigliano met in 1995, they knew that they shared a passion for horses, but they had no idea what that would mean—how one thing would lead to another and they would go from southern California to northern Minnesota (the nearest town that resonates with the rest of the country is Fargo, N.D.) before they would find the life they now have. The journey that took them there is as interesting in its own way as their globetrotting life now is exciting.

Growing up in the Los Angeles suburbs, Lori was the quintessential “horse crazy” kid, but with extraordinary commitment; at the age of 12, she groomed horses at a local Saddlebred barn to scrape together the \$300 price of an unregistered mare. Then she tracked down the owners of the mare’s sire and dam, secured their

signatures and assembled all the paperwork to satisfy the Arabian Horse Registry’s requirements for completing a registration. It was a task which daunted more experienced horse owners than a budding teenager, but she got it done and Ambrosia Jinn is still with her at the age of 31.

The mare, whose pedigree reflects a mix of Egyptian and domestic breeding, introduced her young owner to training. “Ambrosia became my four-wheel drive vehicle,” Lori says. “I taught her to drive, ride and trail ride, and I showed her for years.”

The young horsewoman kept working through her high school years, first for Saddlebred







trainer (now sculptor) Douwe Blumberg and then for Lois Ann Kroll, longtime Arabian horse owner and author of the popular booklet, *Arabian Costumes*. She also indulged an interest in art that she says she inherited from her father, an artist and civil engineer, and a long line of grandfathers. She was as comfortable with a pencil or charcoal in her hand as she was holding reins, and she even enjoyed a little photography. But photography in the film days could be a pricey hobby, and already into horses, she postponed taking it any further.

By the time Lori started college at California State University Northridge, she had determined to become a veterinarian, but the goal lasted only until she realized that really, she just wanted to train horses. Cutting short her academics, she launched a training career locally and at the age of 21, got her judge's card in Arabian horses (she still has it and officiates at three or four shows a year).

"My dad and mother both believed in me and whatever I wanted to do," she remembers. "They said, 'Are you sure?' I said, 'Yes, I think

there's something more.' They said, 'We know you can do it.'"

Over the next few years, she began making her name in the show ring. Then in 1995, when she was 22, she made a decision which changed her life. She moved her business to Carmel Rose Arabians, a small operation near Hesperia, Calif., owned by Joan Kelly—whose son, Victor, had just retired with an injury from the police force. In the course of redirecting his life, he was working with horses at the ranch.

Victor Ricigliano too was a native Californian. During his childhood, he and his mother lived with his grandparents after her divorce from his stepfather, Mathew Bertolini. But while the marriage may have been over, Matt's role in the boy's life was not. He remained a father figure for Victor and was living with the Riciglianos in Minnesota when he died three years ago.

"He was one of my best friends in the whole world," Victor says, and adds that it was Matt

*Victor Ricigliano*  
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who most encouraged his interest in photography. At the age of 14, glancing through magazines, he had discovered his passion: he wanted to take pictures of people. But all he had was a little Kodak Instamatic; a 35mm SLR was well out of his price range, even with all the odd jobs he was picking up to stoke his savings. It was even too much for his mother, although she supported his dream.



And then Matt came to visit. "Is this really what you want to do?" he asked. Victor replied, "Dad, it's exactly what I want to do. I want to take pictures like in these magazines."

"So we went to a camera store, and we bought a Pentax SLR 35mm with one lens," Victor says. "He had to put it on five different credit cards. It wasn't a top of the line camera at the time, but for him—for us, at the level of income we lived at—it was like going out and buying a car. He maxed out every credit card he had to buy me that camera, and when he handed it to me, he said, 'Just do the best you can. Be the best you can. I know in my heart that you will be better than the people who took these pictures you're looking at. But I want you to know I am proud of you, and if you do your best, I will always be proud of you.'"

Victor  
Ricigliano



By the time he was 16, Victor had purchased an annual pass to Disneyland, where he went several times a week, just to sit on Main Street and photograph the people walking by. “That’s where it all started,” he says.

Although he made some money, primarily photographing models at fashion and hair shows, it was not a stable income. He worked in computers for a while, and then became an Emergency Medical Technician before finally settling on law enforcement, first in San Gabriel and then east of Los Angeles in West Covina.

In police work, he found the second passion of his life, and with it came an opportunity to indulge another interest. He became a founding member of the city’s equestrian unit, in which each officer owned the horse he rode on duty. Most departments, Victor notes, use their mounted units primarily for community relations. In West Covina, the horses appeared for public relations opportunities such as parades, but also patrolled such places as malls and paseos (narrow thoroughfares between houses in a rougher part of town where cars could not go).

He chuckles when he remembers taking his horse for specialized training; he was the only person there with a purebred Arabian. The other officers laughed when he arrived, but Royal, as his grey gelding was called, was a former endurance horse who quickly rose to the top of the class. By the end of the course, he had set a record for the highest overall score, an honor he would hold for many years. On the street, the horse’s snowy color attracted the children of West Covina, and he proved an effective ambassador as well as skilled police horse.

Talk to Victor Ricigliano today and you are left in no doubt: he loved being a police officer and if he hadn’t been injured, he would not have given it up. “I like to help people,” he says. “I like to solve problems, and as an officer, you are the ultimate problem solver.”

Then, in 1995, a back injury took him off the job. He withdrew to his mother’s horse farm in Hesperia, rode Royal, and before long began helping neighbors with their trail horses. Word got around quickly that he could turn out bombproof riding companions, and he developed a growing clientele just doing what he liked to do.

Two other noteworthy events happened at that time as well. He dusted off his camera, which over the past few years had emerged only at crime scenes, and he met the young woman who was training from his mother’s barn.







## *It Takes Two*

Victor Ricigliano

The first thing that became apparent about Lori and Victor Ricigliano as horse trainers was that they complemented each other. Lori aimed at the show ring, while Victor focused his efforts on creating responsive, unflappable trail horses who could do their jobs on auto pilot if necessary (Royal could be ridden everywhere without any tack at all). It just naturally happened that he began helping her with a few horses who were discipline cases, and they got to know each other gradually.

When did it become apparent that more than friendship might be possible? Victor laughs. In those days, he arrived at the farm's office at 4 a.m. to knock out work before he left on his training rounds. Lori is not a morning person, he reports—and yet she began showing up around 4:10 with coffee (“all her make up on and fully dressed,” he marvels). “I said, ‘You really don’t have to get up this early! I’ll come back and have coffee with you!’” The rest is history. They fell in love.

Together, they wanted to try something new, and chose Colorado to start their own training

operation. “We had some good clients, and it was a fun, beautiful time in our life,” Lori recalls, adding that they worked well together; Victor “knocked the rough edges” off the horses, and she did the finish work. But they wanted to breed Arabians also, and they realized that that would mean moving. In 1998, on the internet, she located the 50-acre property they now own in Minnesota. They liked it enough not to complain (much) during the first winter, and over time, they rehabbed the farm, built a barn and an arena, and carefully connected everything so that going from one structure to another on cold days would be easier. And they found they liked the nearby town of Wolverton, where residents made them feel welcome.

It was like they had arrived—except that it laid the groundwork for a new life. Photography was on the horizon.

They had settled in nicely, made friends in the Minnesota equine community and were enjoying their horses, when the millennium ushered in the digital age of photography. Victor, who had resumed his







Other venues quickly followed, all over the United States and Canada, with significant representation in South America. It wasn't just a pleasant dream; they formed a company named Marketing Mafia Productions Inc. ("I'm Italian," Victor laughs), and in time added equine video production, as well as commercial photography, to their services.

The key to their talent? It's their approach, both say. "I talk to the owner to find out how they see their horse," Lori offers, "and I shoot for that, not just what we see. We've had people tell us, 'You seem to find a different look on these horses; you capture emotion well. You seem to feel what the horse is thinking.'"

"We were horsemen first, photographers second," she continues. "I know the standard of how we want to represent our horses in our breed, the standard to how we judge them. What I do is instinctual; it's anticipating how the horse is going to move, shooting with my gut and using natural light to create a beautiful scene. It's the energy of the horse, capturing the movement and then letting it happen naturally."

"A great photo is not one that is set, it's captured," says Victor. "You have to be there to capture the moment. You have to work with the horse's comfort level. There is no more beautiful picture than a horse being a horse." An example? "When you make a baby so comfortable that it will bounce away from its mother and play—those are great shots. If you scare it by taking it away from its mother, so that it is only concerned with getting back to her, you don't get the same thing. We both look at it as, 'How are we going to do this as the horse wants to do it? How do we make it fun for them?' It's being able to read the horses."

When both photos and videos are requested, Lori is responsible for the still shots, while Victor accounts for the videos. Otherwise, they both shoot stills, each with their different style, and their competition fuels the results.

In recognition of their success, both Riciglianos have won Arabian Horse Times Readers' Choice Awards, Victor in 2009 for his March cover photo of DA Valentino, and Lori in 2013 for her January cover shot of Da Vinci FM.

interest in shooting when he'd left the police force, was consumed. He had tried before to interest Lori, but met with little real success. "Technology scared her," he explains. "She thought a computer was a giant typewriter." Still, he knew that the combination of her artistic eye and equine experience would give her extraordinary vision as a photographer.

"Victor taught me how to get what was in my mind into the camera," Lori says of her transformation. She already knew the angle she needed and the look she wanted; all she had to learn was how to drive the family Nikons. They got started by shooting first at home, and then, casually and just for practice, at other Minnesota farms. From there, everything escalated. And it wasn't just about technical ability; looking back now, Lori notes that shooting at such operations as Midwest and Shada gave them vital experience not only in photographing Arabians, but also in creating images of top-level show horses.

Soon what had been a rewarding pastime was clearly on the road to a new business. One discernible turning point, Lori recalls, came when they received their first international booking (Brazil, Haras Vanguarda), which resulted in another turning point: one of Victor's photographs of the farm's stallion, Ryad El Jamaal, was selected for the cover of Arabian Horse Times.





## *In Real Life*

Life has come a long way since the Riciglianos moved to Minnesota (and Lori froze the zippers of her ski pants lugging buckets of water to the horses in the winter). Now they spend most of their time from December through April in Scottsdale, although trips to shoot locations in North America and internationally are booked throughout the year. The net result is that they always are grateful to get home. “Our farm is our sanctuary,” says Lori.

Their house, which was built in 1905, is four-square prairie style with an arts and crafts flavor. “It feels like you are stepping back into about 1930,” Lori says. Photographs and art, mostly equine, line the

walls and decorate the tables. About 13 horses, many their retired show partners, occupy the surrounding pastures, and in town, a gallery carries their giclee prints (high quality photos on canvas). Local friends follow their travels on Facebook. It is home.


When they are at the farm, they are usually processing their work. Victor is known as the neat and organized one (he can lay his hands on any image or video they’ve ever shot), whereas Lori’s desk is a triumph of what her husband calls “disorganized organization.” She knows where everything is, though, he concedes.

So, really, what was it all those years ago that told each of them it would be better to dance together than alone? For Victor, meeting Lori was like being on a collision course with light. “It’s kind of corny,” he shrugs, “but when you talk about true love at first sight, that’s the way it was for me with Lori. I was madly in love with her from the first second I saw her. Head over heels. They say in everybody’s life, you have a soul mate, and Lori is mine.

“That doesn’t mean we don’t argue, because we do (I’m pure Italian, she’s half Italian/half Irish, with gypsy thrown in for spice). But we know life isn’t that serious, so if we’re at home and we get in a disagreement, I’ll just get in the car and drive.” He smiles. “I’m not a quarter of a mile away before I’m picking up the cell phone just to hear her voice. Janey Morse described it best when I was at her house while Lori was judging a horse show. She came over to me and said, ‘You’re lost, aren’t you?’ And I said, ‘Janey, I’m just counting the hours till she gets back.’”





A full-page photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and jeans, sitting on the ground in a field. She is holding a professional camera with a flash. She is positioned between the legs of a white horse, looking off to the side. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with long shadows and a soft glow on the horse's coat and the woman's hair. In the background, other horses and a fence are faintly visible.

And Lori? She is more reserved, but the feelings are genuine. "Victor is the kindest, strongest individual I've ever met," she says simply. "He's my rock. He gives me the ability to be who I am; he gives me the freedom to create." She got a glimpse of his quality, she says, when she observed his patience and compassion in training his horses. "You can judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him. That's how you can tell a person's true character." ■

Victor  
Ricigliano  
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*One of Victor's favorite photos, which he shot of Lori at Oak Ridge Arabians as she waited for just the right image. "She was doing what she loves, sitting in a field with horses, creating art," he says. "That is my wife. That is Lori." (The horse is the late multi-national champion Half-Arabian, Centourian.)*