

The Magic Horse

A golden palomino in Citra, Fla., touches lives outside the horse industry.

By Cindy McCauley

He lowered his head to acknowledge my presence, and I knew. He reached out his right front leg, pawing a greeting, and I knew. He followed his human out of the stall, halterless, and stood motionless in the aisle, awaiting a cue, and I knew. He began the Spanish walk because he had a spectator, and I knew. The power that one horse could have to engage young and old alike in the magic of horses – this I knew the moment I met Ivory Pal and his best friend, Rafael Valle, of Citra, Fla.

Valle, who says he has been horse-crazy his entire life, grew up riding on his uncle's farm in Nicaragua each summer. Back then, from when he was 9 to 15 years old, he rode through rice fields and worked cattle on Andalusian stallions. He knew nothing of gaited horses, and he had never heard of the Tennessee Walking Horse breed.

But six years ago, Valle and his wife, Stefanie, had begun the process of looking for a nice trail riding horse when a palomino stallion caught their eyes.

"We knew he was different the moment we saw him. I'll never forget that moment," Stefanie says.

The golden stallion, who also happened to be a Tennessee Walking Horse, quietly ate hay in his stall when the two entered the barn that day. Valle and his wife discovered the horse was the personal mount of the owner and was not for sale. But the beautiful stallion's image would not leave their minds, and they revisited the farm to see if his owner would consider selling him. Eventually, the owner agreed, and the Valles purchased the golden palomino to be their family pleasure horse.

"I am grateful that the owner put Ivory Pal in our path," says Valle, who works in Gainesville as the Supervisory Examiner at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

Ivory Pal, a Tennessee Walking Horse owned and ridden by Rafael Valle, waves to the crowd.





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THE CONNECTION

After two years of trail riding and training, Valle decided to take the stallion on the show circuit, where they won title after title. Later, Valle began to share his stallion with others, and the duo performs for audiences throughout the Southeast.

"I realized the impact he had on people and the fact that Ivory Pal loves to be in front of a crowd," Valle says. "He is a natural entertainer and comes to life in front of a crowd; he brings people to tears. I guess it is like living and performing with Elvis. Plus, he just responds so well to training that he kept exceeding all my expectations. I also wanted to prove the versatility of the Tennessee Walking Horse by doing things that they aren't 'supposed' to do such as the Spanish Walk, levade, pirouettes, piaffe, etc."

Today, Valle can ride the stallion without a bridle and saddle. Sometimes, they play kickball in the round pen. They tag each other when in the field, engaged in a playful give and take. It's a symbiotic relationship, for sure.

"As soon as he gets home from work, he changes clothes and goes out to be with Ivory Pal," Stefanie says. "You should see the two of them! It's fine with me. That's who Rafael is." **HCD**

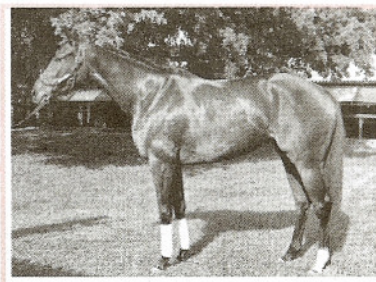
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