

CH CH-EQ

# CF FIRST LIGHT Of DAWN Was The BEST PARTNER

by Leeann Mione

**W**hat makes a great partnership? If you were asked to name your best equine partner, how would you narrow that down? Would your decision be based on the number of wins you achieved together? The hurdles you overcame? The length of time you were together? Would it perhaps be something not tangible, not easily described? Would it be some otherworldly connection between you that is impossible to put into words?

CH CH-EQ CF First Light Of Dawn was a horse that had those difficult-to-adequately-describe partnerships several times in his long and successful career both in the saddle seat equitation and performance divisions.

Debbie Foley purchased him as a yearling from Leon Richardson. She brought him out as a two-year-old at Lexington in 1997 and they were third in the Two-Year-Old Fine Harness class. They went on to Louisville where First Light Of Dawn was crowned the Two-Year-Old Fine Harness Stallion/Gelding World's Champion. Their first season together concluded with the reserve in the two-year-old class at Kansas City. The following year, Foley and "Forbes" were never lower than second in every show they went to including wins at Asheville Lions Club, Rock Creek and ASHAV. They were the 1998 Three-Year-Old Fine Harness Stallion/Gelding Reserve World's Champions and would finish the year with the UPHA Fine Harness Classic Reserve Grand Championship at Kansas City.

When CF First Light Of Dawn made his debut under saddle in the junior three-gaited division, he continued to attract attention and a bounty of good ribbons with Foley in the irons.

Scott and Carol Matton, of Knollwood Farm in Wisconsin, knew he would be a star for Sarah Thordsen and they were right.

"I saw him as a yearling at Debbie Foley's," said Scott Matton. "I just loved him and tried to get the Wirtz's to buy him but I couldn't get it done." He went on to explain, "I kept my eye on him and then did get him as a four-year-old. He was so gorgeous and I convinced Ed Thordsen to buy him sight unseen for Sarah. I just knew they would make the perfect partnership.

"Forbes loved people. He would light up for peppermints and loved being the center of attention. He was so smart; like the 'Einstein' of the horse world. We had to teach Sarah to make decisions and give him instructions very quickly because if you made him stand and wait too long for your instruction, his mind was already on to something else."

Sarah and First Light Of Dawn had a successful first season together in 2000. They were the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited Reserve Champions at Milwaukee Spring and returned in the junior exhibitor stake to take the tricolor. Their season would include additional wins at Madison Classic, Midwest Charity, Lexington Junior League, Wisconsin Futurity, and Saint

Louis National Charity as well as the reserve world's championship in the 14-15 age group and the Junior Exhibitor Three-Gaited 14 and Under Reserve National Championship at Kansas City to close out the year.

Year two together brought a move to the saddle seat equitation division and Forbes, at only six years of age, proved he was just as talented with that job as he'd been in the three-gaited division. At Louisville he and Sarah were the 15-Year-Old Saddle Seat Equitation World's Champions and Senior Saddle Seat Equitation Reserve World's Champion of Champions for 2001.

After Louisville Sarah and Forbes headed to the various equitation finals and CH CH-EQ CF First Light Of Dawn would become the youngest horse ever to have championship wins in the NHS Good Hands Finals, UPHA Senior Challenge Cup Finals and USEF Saddle Seat Medal Finals to earn equitation's coveted and rare triple crown. Winning the triple crown and making history was an amazing accomplishment that came very close to not happening at all.

The National Horse Show at Madison Square Garden in 2001 was the first event that happened after the tragedy of September 11th. It would prove to be an especially poignant and memorable week for many reasons.

"The night before the class he was dead lame with what we discovered was an abscess," said Scott. "I was devastated, thinking that Sarah wasn't going to get to ride him. Nealia [McCracken] brought us Jessie's 10 and under horse to use and that was wonderful but I was heartbroken.

"The farrier saw my disappointment and asked me if I needed help. He put a poultice on his foot, wrapped it up and we left the barn around midnight. When I went back around 5 am, Forbes walked out of his stall perfectly sound, as if it had never happened.

"They were superstars on the rail and she was the first one to perform the workout. She had to drop her irons, trot around the turn and down the rail and she couldn't have done any better. He was so special and he just rose to the occasion like he knew what was at stake. If you gave him half a chance he would just carry you." He added, "He thought he was the greatest horse ever and I agreed with him."

"Forbes was wonderful," said Dr. Sarah Thordsen. "From the time we got him as a four-year-old until we sold him, he was the most enjoyable horse I've ever ridden. He was all show horse, all the time, and thought a lot of himself but he was also kind and affectionate in his stall.

"Once he learned, he was a natural when it came to equitation pattern work; he seemed to enjoy the puzzle. He almost didn't need a curb bit or to be cued; it seemed like he understood his job. He will always be my favorite."

CH CH-EQ CF First Light Of Dawn and Maya Manilow, in their final Louisville together, were the 2010 Junior Exhibitor Country Pleasure 14-17 World's Champion of Champions after winning the section two world's championship class.



After qualifier and championship wins at Milwaukee Spring and Lexington Junior League in 2002, Sarah and CH CH-EQ CF First Light Of Dawn closed out their amazing career together.

He was then teamed with Gabriella Flynn and made the transition to the walk and trot equitation division. They debuted with DeLovely Farm at Kentucky Fall Classic in the UPHA 10 and Under Walk and Trot Equitation National Championship and exited as the 2002 reserve national champions for Florida Pain Institute.

Gabriella and her sister Alexandra showed him to numerous victories throughout the 2003 and 2004 seasons and for the 2005 season he became the mount of Maya Manilow after being purchased for her by her grandfather Charles Goodman.

With the new barn name of "Danny," CH CH-EQ CF First Light Of Dawn would go on to prove yet again that he was the perfect partner, regardless of who was on his back or what they asked him to do. He and Maya debuted in the equitation division at Milwaukee Spring and won the Walk and Trot 10 and Under Equitation Championship under the direction of Dick Obenauf.

At Oshkosh Charity they were two for two as the walk and trot equitation champions and grand champions which put them in prime position to head to the 2005 World's Championship Horse Show. That show would prove to be unforgettable for the Goodman-Manilow family for many reasons including Maya's world's championship blue ribbon ride in the Nine-Year-Old Walk and Trot Equitation class. Barbara Manilow would win two world's championships with CH Marching Orders, two world's championships with CH Callaway's Sugarplum, two world's championships with CH Boo!, a world's championship and reserve world's champion of champions title with CH Lady Maya and a reserve world's champion of champions title with Lady Cinnamon. None of those titles could possibly have brought as much joy as she got from watching Maya and Danny make magic together.

After Louisville, Wisconsin Futurity would give Maya and CH CF First Light of Dawn both the blue and tricolor wins and they would go on to close their first season together as Walk and Trot Equitation 9-10 Reserve Champions at the American Royal.

That incredible debut season kicked off an eight year run for Maya and Danny that would earn them wins at shows all over the country in the equitation, three-gaited show pleasure and junior exhibitor country pleasure divisions.

In 2006, Maya began taking lessons from Donna and Kenny Smith at Skyline Stables and at Louisville Maya and Danny exited with the reserve world's championship in the Saddle Seat Equitation 10 and Under class and then took the reserve world's title in the Three-Gaited Show Pleasure 13 and Under - Sec. II class.

Their week ended with the Three-Gaited Show Pleasure 13 and Under World's Champion of Champions tricolor victory in a class of 23 entries. Their great show again led the Goodman/Manilow family to a Louisville that dreams are made of.

The next year at Louisville they were the Three-Gaited Show Pleasure 13 and Under Reserve World's Champion of Champions and they ended that year with the tricolor ribbon in the 13 and under show pleasure championship at Mane Event.

By the start of the 2008 show season, CH CF First Light Of Dawn had carried riders to numerous world's championships and reserve world's titles in several different divisions as well as the equitation Triple Crown and reserve national championship in walk and trot equitation.



Sarah Thordsen and CH CH-EQ CF First Light Of Dawn won the 2001 UPHA Senior Challenge Cup National Finals, USEF Senior Saddle Seat Medal National Finals and the NHS Good Hands Finals to win saddle seat equitation's Triple Crown.

But 2008 would prove that Danny and Maya still had much to accomplish and they put together a season that included wins at F.A.S.H., Madison Classic and Midwest before heading back to the green shavings where they would be crowned the Junior Exhibitor Country Pleasure 13 and Under World's Champions and reserve world's champion of champions. They would earn two more wins at Mane Event to close out the year on top.

The following year was another great one; they started the season at F.A.S.H. and won both the qualifier and championship in the 13 and under country pleasure division and wins in both classes at Midwest as well as a single blue ribbon appearance at ASAW Summerfun would put them in prime position to head again to Freedom Hall. They were the 13 and under country pleasure section two reserve world's champions and came back in the 15-entry, 13 and under championship to claim the reserve world's champion of champions title. For the second year in a row they closed out the year as the Mid-America Mane Event Country Pleasure Junior Exhibitor Grand Champions and 13 and under champions.

F.A.S.H. Spring was again their first show of the season in 2010 and once again they were victorious but this time in the country pleasure 14-17 ranks. Midwest would bring the blue and the reserve tricolor and ASAW Summerfun brought the single appearance, blue ribbon victory in the Junior Exhibitor Country Pleasure class. Their move up to the older age group was right on track as they prepared for Freedom Hall.

Their trip to Louisville would be their last together on the green shavings but what a trip it was. Maya and Danny won the Junior Exhibitor Country Pleasure 14-17 tricolor and blanket of roses after having earned the world's championship in the section two qualifier earlier in the week.

The pair went on to victories at Saint Louis National and Mid-America Mane Event and ended their season as the Junior Exhibitor Country Pleasure Reserve National Champions. In addition to his many world and national titles, CH CH-EQ CF First Light Of Dawn was also the 2010 ASHA National Three-Gaited Country Pleasure Junior Exhibitor Horse Of The Year.

He and Maya would also win together at IASHA Spring Warm Up, Oshkosh Charity, Saint Louis and Blue Ridge Classic to close out their outstanding career in 2013.

"Danny was a once-in-a-lifetime horse both in the show ring and at home," said Barbara Manilow. "Maya and Danny clicked from the moment she tried him and he was smart enough to match her level of horsemanship from ages 10 to 17, challenging her when she was ready for new challenges. He maintained his show horse attitude even into retirement. He was loved and will be missed by all of us lucky enough to have known him."

Maya summed up her feelings about her perfect partner by saying, "He was too special to me to really put into words, but I can say he was the best partner and the best teacher I could have asked for. He was the smartest horse and took such good care of me when I was young and learning and then challenged me when he knew I was ready for it and needed it."

"He was such a talented and kind soul and I am so thankful for the years I had with him."

CH CH-EQ CF First Light Of Dawn was laid to rest before Thanksgiving 2019 at the age of 25 after many happy years in retirement at Skyline Stables. He was loved and cherished by the Goodman/Manilow family for being the perfect partner until the very end.



Maya and Danny made their Louisville debut together and were the Walk and Trot Equitation Nine-Year-Old World's Champions for 2005.