

## Witez II: The Preservation of the Polish Arabian

by Elizabeth K Wal



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### **Ancestry:**

My great grandpa was the first person in his family to be born in the U.S. when his family immigrated here from Poland. My grandfather was raised eating traditional Polish foods and was heavily

exposed to Polish culture through his family. He passed all of his knowledge of Polish customs onto my dad and two aunts, who continued

to celebrate their heritage with their own families. This is apparent through the traditions my family celebrates annually. Every Christmas, my entire family breaks Oplatki before we eat dinner. Every few years, my family gets together at my grandpa's house to make our own kielbasa. We use an antique meat grinder and feed the kielbasa into the casings ourselves. Then we smoke some of the kielbasa we make in my grandpa's smokehouse.

Besides celebrating my Polish ancestry within my own family, I am heavily involved with Polish Fest on the Milwaukee lakefront every year. My aunt is one of the chairwomen of the festival, so every year my sister and I help her set up exhibits before the festival begins. After the fest is open to the public, I help my aunt with her pierogi and paczki cooking demonstrations. In the past I have set up a Polish combat history exhibit, a Polish book tent, and a Baltic Sea amber exhibit. I have always really enjoyed my time volunteering at Polish Fest because it has taught me so much about my culture. Setting up the exhibits and teaching others how to make traditional Polish foods has taught me about Poland's history and its legacy.

### **Career Plans:**

My lifelong academic dream has been to pursue a career in veterinary medicine. I have always wanted to be a large animal veterinarian, due to my passion for horses. I have loved horses since I was old enough to know what they were, and I have always wanted to pursue a career that revolved around helping them and other animals. In order to achieve this dream, I will be attending UW-River Falls in the autumn to major in animal science with an emphasis on equines. UW-River Falls is the foremost UW System school when it comes to Agricultural and Animal Sciences, so I wanted to go there for that reason. My plan after graduating from there is to go on to UW-Madison for veterinary school. After graduation, my goal is to become a reputable and reliable veterinarian, and maybe even one day run my own practice. I like to set big goals for myself, and though achieving these goals will be difficult and time consuming, I am ready for any challenge set in front of me and will try to overcome them to the best of my ability.

## Witez II: The Preservation of the Polish Arabian

World War II had a devastating impact on Poland and its people, meaning animals and their well-being were often an afterthought. However, when Poland was invaded by Germany in 1939, one stud farm director, Andrzej Kristalovich, was thinking of the prize Arabian horses in his care before anything else. Kristalovich was the director of the Janów Podlaski stud farm, located in a town of the same name in Eastern Poland, near the border shared with Belarus. The most valued horse in Kristalovich's possession at the time was a young colt named Witez II, who was captured by the Nazi's and then later recovered by American troops. Witez II went on to become a prized American stud horse who fathered some of the world's most formidable and sought after Arabian horses.<sup>1</sup>

Janów Podlaski stud farm was first established in 1817. It was a state-owned and run farm, and was overseen by multiple Polish breeders. It quickly garnered a reputation as a prime stud farm for both purebred Arabian horses and Anglo-Arabian horses (horses that are half Arabian). Janów Podlaski remained a strong and prosperous farm until the beginning of World War I, when all of the horses were evacuated to Russia and the farm's stables were destroyed. After the war ended, the stables were rebuilt and any remaining horses from the war that were considered good enough to breed were brought to Janów Podlaski, and Poland began producing its world renowned Arabian horses once again.<sup>2</sup> It was during this time right before the beginning of World War II that Witez II was born there and Andrzej Kristalovich was the active director of the farm.

Witez II was born on April 1, 1938. The name "Witez" is derived from an old Polish word that means "prince," or "chieftain." He lived a normal life at Janów Podlaski until September 1, 1939, when the Germans invaded Poland.<sup>3</sup> Andrzej Kristalovich wanted to move the horses away from Janów Podlaski so that they would be safe from the Nazis, so Kristalovich and the rest of the stud farm staff began evacuating south towards the Romanian border. This was done on foot or by horseback, with Witez II and other young horses in tow. Kristalovich and the rest of the staff made it to the Polish border before they were held up by German troops and forced to turn back towards the farm. Unbeknownst to Kristalovich, the Germans and Soviets had signed the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact that basically divided Poland in half, with one half for each Axis Power to control. Janów Podlaski was on the German side of the division.<sup>4</sup> Upon Kristalovich's return to Janów, most of his Arabians were taken by the Soviet troops crossing over into their side of Poland. A handful of young horses, including Witez II, remained at Janów under German supervision.<sup>5</sup>

During his time under Nazi supervision, Witez II was hand-selected by the Germans as a prize stud horse, and was moved to another breeding farm in the town of Hostoun in modern day Czech Republic. Here, Witez II was in company with other Arabians, along with valuable Thoroughbred and

Lipizzan horses. A few years later, in 1945, Hostoun was liberated by American troops. After interrogating some German officers, the Americans found the stud farm and removed most of the horses, including Witez II. Because of his fine features and pedigree, Witez II was chosen to go to the U.S., and at the end of the war was sent on a ship to America. Upon arriving, Witez II was driven cross-country to California, where he was auctioned off and purchased by Earle Hurlbutt, who had a ranch there. Witez II lived the rest of his life on this ranch, where he was used for breeding and shown periodically. He died peacefully in his sleep when he was 27 years old in 1965.<sup>6</sup> Witez II and the welfare of the Polish Arabians in the midst of World War II might not be the most renowned or common event in history books, but his legacy was that of a horse who survived the horrors of war and helped to preserve the prestigious Polish Arabian bloodline for generations to come.

Witez II and his story was of interest to me because it revolves around horses and their role in history. I had never heard of Witez II and the plight of the Polish Arabians before happening to come across a book about the subject. I was fascinated by the topic because it tied into World War II, a major historical event, and it was about horses! My favorite subject in school is history, and I consider myself to be pretty knowledgeable about general world history and the history surrounding horses. So when I first read about Witez II and Janów Podlaski, I was intrigued because it was something that I had not heard of before. I felt more personally connected to the topic and more motivated to research it because of my love of horses, and of course, because of the Polish significance. Horses have had a huge impact on human civilization, warfare, and recreation throughout history, which I think makes them all the more interesting, and is a contributing factor as to why they are my favorite animals. I thoroughly enjoyed researching this topic, and my personal love for horses and history made it something that I will not forget.

1 Lidia, & Pawlowski, W. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.janow.arabians.pl/en/history/stud.php>

2 Ibid.

3 Berkery Kristin, K. (2019, August 30). A Real-Life War Horse: \*Witez II's Journey Into History. Retrieved from <https://ilovehorses.net/history-2/a-real-life-war-horse-witez-iis-journey-into-history/>

4 Letts , E. (2019). The Perfect Horse: The Daring Rescue of Horses Kidnapped During World War II. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

5 Berkery Kristin, K. (2019, August 30). A Real-Life War Horse: \*Witez II's Journey Into History. Retrieved from <https://ilovehorses.net/history-2/a-real-life-war-horse-witez-iis-journey-into-history/>

6 Ibid.

August 13-16, Janów Podlaski, Poland

## The 2021 Pride of Poland Arabian Horse Auction

brought in EUR 1.59 million for 14 horses. An 11-year-old stallion named Equator (bought by a Saudi Arabian buyer), and a 9-year-old mare Emandorissa (Qatar), both bred at Michałów in Poland, sold for the highest price of EUR 450,000 each. Another high bid was EUR 250,000 for the mare Brodnica from Janów Podlaski (YAH-noff pod-LAH-skee).

**CATALOG: Pictures and descriptions of the horses:**

<http://prideofpoland.com/en/pride-of-poland-en/catalog-pop-2021/>

**FILM: 40th Pride of Poland Sale**

[//www.facebook.com/ArabianHorseWorld/videos/1020249805733](http://www.facebook.com/ArabianHorseWorld/videos/1020249805733)

**Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts** and his wife, owners of the Halsdon Arabians farm in Devon, sw England, were frequent visitor to the renowned Janów Podlaski stud farm.

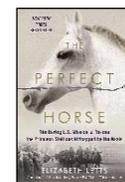
## “Centaurus boasts Europe’s largest horse shelter”

The POLISH AMERICAN JOURNAL July Aug 2021 issue reported that Poland’s horse population “has dropped from 329,000 In 2002 to an estimated 180,000 at present. Trucks and tractors have largely replaced the draft horses of yesteryear, and racing thoroughbreds also become useless if they break a leg, or simply get old and decrepit.”



Centaurus works to arrange adoptions with horse lovers, and for other animals. Its main center is located 70km from Wroclaw, near Legnica. In July 2020 donations dropped due to COVID-19. “All our activities are financing by private individuals and institutions from all over the world.”

## The perfect horse: the daring U.S. mission to rescue the priceless stallions kidnapped by the Nazis



by Elizabeth Letts, 369 pages, 2016

"In the chaotic last days of World War II, a small troop of American soldiers captures a German spy and learns that on a secret farm behind enemy lines, Hitler has stockpiled the world's finest purebred horses in order to breed the perfect military machine--an equine master race."

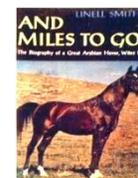
24 copies in library, downloadable, on Libby, young people version

## A Real-Life War Horse: \*Witez II's Journey Into

History posted by Kristin Berkery | Last updated Jun 8, 2021 |

History, Horses & People, On Film <https://ilovehorses.net/history-2/a-real-life-war-horse-witez-iis-journey-into-history/>

## And Miles To Go: The Biography Of A



Great Arabian Horse, Witez II

by Linell Nash Smith, 1967

out of print, hard to find at most libraries, one epub copy at Open Library