**Mishy Harman:** It’s five in the morning. The muazzin is already singing. I’m waiting for Clara and Michael to go up north. Oh, here they are. Hey guys, good morning.

**Michael Vivier:** Hey, good morning!

**Clara Fuhg:** Morning!

**Mishy Harman:** How you doing?

**Clara Fuhg:** Good.

**Michael Vivier:** Hanging in there.

**Clara Fuhg:** It’s early.

**Michael Vivier:** Very early.

**Mishy Harman:** Did you bring your coffee?

**Clara Fuhg:** Brought enough for everyone.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** On one of the very first days after the second lockdown ended, I drove up north with Clara Fuhg and Michael Vivier, our production interns. Our destination was Vered HaGalil, a small farm perched on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee. On the way, we covered some very crucial topics.

**Mishy Harman:** Wait so you can watch Borat II from Israel? I thought it wasn’t available here.

**Michael Vivier:** I use the VPN.

**Clara Fuhg:** I think it’s available on Amazon Prime. It’s an Amazon Prime exclusive, I think.

**Mishy Harman:** Can you get that here?

**Clara Fuhg:** Yeah, I have an account.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Three hours later, we arrived.

**Mishy Harman:** OK, so here we are. Michael, do you want to call Danielle?

**Michael Vivier:** Yeah, yeah yeah. Sure.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Vered HaGalil was established in 1961 by Yona and Yehuda Avni. It was meant to be a kind of local version of a dude ranch, where cowboys and cowgirls would go horseback riding and pretend they were in Montana.

**Michael Vivier:** She’s not answering so she might be out riding.

**Mishy Harman:** OK, so should we go find the… find the stables?

**Michael Vivier:** Yeah. Yeah, let’s go up there.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Today it has lovely lodgings, a famous meat restaurant and - of course - a large horse-riding center. We were there to meet up with Danielle, the head trainer. And, fittingly, we found her in the arena, galloping on her gorgeous black mare, Shadow.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Hi, my name is Danielle Deknuydt, I’m twenty-seven years old. I’m the main trainer in Vered HaGalil stable.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Oded, Danielle’s boyfriend, was standing off to the side, holding up his phone.

**Oded Locker:** Yeah, my name is Oded Locker. I am from Israel, of course, from Kibbutz Gevim originally.

**Mishy Harman:** And what is your role here now?

**Oded Locker:** I’m just doing what Danielle says. Yeah, I think I said it right.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** *[In Hebrew]* Oded, we are ready.

**Mishy Harman:** OK.

**Oded Locker:** OK.

**Mishy Harman:** So, you’re up, you need to film now.

**Oded Locker:** Yeah, right now I’m gonna film the…

**Mishy Harman:** OK. So can we stand next to you when you film?

**Oded Locker:** Yeah sure, no problem.

**Mishy Harman:** OK.

**Oded Locker:** *[In Hebrew]* Should I stand in the same spot?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** *[In Hebrew]* Yes!

**Oded Locker:** *[In Hebrew]* OK.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And why, you might ask, was Oded filming Danielle as she and Shadow completed a crazily intricate obstacle course which included jumping and balancing and turning sideways and walking backwards and all kinds of other maneuvers? Well…

**Danielle Deknuydt:** So in Israel we have virtual competition now because we cannot everybody come with their horses and their people to one place because the corona. So we do virtual show.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Each rider films him or herself completing the exact same obstacle course, but in different arenas and stables and farms around the country. Then they all submit their home videos to a judge, who determines the winner. That morning Oded was shooting Danielle’s submission for the 2020 Israel Championship.

**Mishy Harman:** And you were just filming on your iPhone, right?

**Oded Locker:** Yeah. Some people can have like a better…

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Camera.

**Oded Locker:** Cameras.

**Mishy Harman:** So is there a lot of pressure to film this correctly? Are you afraid that Danielle would yell at you…

**Oded Locker:** Exactly.

**Mishy Harman:** If you screw it up?

**Oded Locker:** Yeah, yeah, exactly. You should know how sad it is if she have the perfect one and then I was like, “I’m so sorry, my finger was on the camera.” *[Oded laughs]*.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Honestly, Oded is smart to be afraid. You see, the sport is called “Extreme Cowboy.” And Danielle reigns supreme.

**Oded Locker:** The last three years she got Israeli champion. What’s really special about Danielle in this sport that she just started it four years ago as a non-pro rider, like for a hobby. And she got really good in it, so she wanted to take it like level up and get more professional.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Last year she even flew to Texas, to the world championship.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** I was compete in the world show in the international that it’s against all people from the other world. Britanie, Australian, France, Belgia. Everybody come to there.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Danielle finished third.

**Mishy Harman:** And Danielle, I see that you’ve really embraced the cowgirl look *[Danielle laughs]*. What… Like what are you wearing exactly?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** I have boots with spurs, and jeans. I have buttoned down shirt. I have... *[in Hebrew]* how do you say belt?

**Mishy Harman:** Belt.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** A belt with a buckle that I win in the EXEA Shavuot Show in Israel, and hat. *[Danielle laughs].*

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Danielle wouldn’t say so, but she’s definitely eyeing another championship buckle.

**Mishy Harman:** Do you think you’re gonna win this year’s ‘Extreme’ competition?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** I hope, but we cannot know.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Oded was a bit more bullish.

**Oded Locker:** I’m not the right person to ask, because if you ask me, she’s always gonna win.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** But they both know her chances are pretty good. After all, Danielle has a secret advantage - Shadow.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** This is Shadow.

**Mishy Harman:** She’s so soft, ha?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Yeah, we did her shampoo and conditioner once a week. And she eat good, and I brush her everyday, and shower everyday, so she’s very good health.

**Mishy Harman:** Do horses get corona, by the way?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** No.

**Mishy Harman:** No?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** They’re OK.

**Mishy Harman:** She’s an Israeli horse? She was born here?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Yes. She born here. She’s like the really Israeli horse. *[Danielle laughs]*.

**Mishy Harman:** What makes her a really Israeli horse?

**Oded Locker:** She combines different breeds in her, and this is kind of like the Israeli person, you know? Like, no one here is like one hundred percent American or one hundred percent Morrocan or something like that, like.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** And she with me like twelve years. And we have very special connection.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Shadow’s ears perked up when we were talking about her. So Danielle went over, gave her a big hug and a giant treat.

# 

**Mishy Harman:** What was she eating?

**Oded Locker:** A carrot. After-training treat.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey, I’m Mishy Harman, and this is Israel Story. Our episode today? **Horsing Around.** Over the next couple of episodes we’re going to tell the stories of two people whose lives barely intersect, or overlap. In many ways they couldn’t be more different - one’s a man, the other a woman; one’s a Jew, the other a Muslim; one’s an Israeli settler and the other is Palestinian. They don’t know each other, and if they did, they might well think of the other as an enemy. But they both have at least one thing in common. And that one thing is their love of horses.

Like Danielle in Vered HaGalil,Abdel Naser Musleh of Kfar ‘Aqab dreams big.

# 

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Every breeder, when he breeds his mare, he imagines like a world champion.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** He’s twenty-two years old, still lives at home and has a trim black beard and a boyish smile.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** I’m looking for always... for the real Arabian horse. Wide forehead, big eyes, smooth nostrils. Pretty face. People criticize me, they say ‘we can’t put a saddle on a pretty face.’ I don’t care, you know, I like to see a good face.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Abdel Naser is a horse breeder. And he spends most of his time talking, dreaming and breathing colts, fillies, mares and stallions.

Kfar ‘Aqab - where Abdel Naser and his family live - is a Palestinian neighborhood just south of Ramallah. Even though it’s cut off from the rest of Jerusalem by a wall and a checkpoint, it’s considered part of the city. Because of that, Kafr ‘Aqab is sort of a strange no-man’s land. On the one hand, it’s part of Jerusalem, so it’s supposedly serviced by the municipality. But on the other hand, it’s on the Palestinian side of the separation barrier, so it really isn’t. And the result is a lot of garbage everywhere, poor sanitation, overcrowding, and a lack of regulation. So when Abdel Naser and his father Khader decided to build stables on their property, no one told them they couldn’t.

# 

# **Nuha Musleh:** Abdel Naser!

**Mishy Harman (narration):** That’s Abdel Naser’s mother, Nuha.

# **Nuha Musleh:** As soon as Abdel Naser was mature enough to interact, talk, share, love in a visible way, his fascination with animal became visible as well.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Mainly I spend my time with my horses. More than my friends.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** When Abdel Naser first started raising horses, his parents were actually worried.

# 

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** At the first they said “this is bullshit, this doesn't make sense, you know? You're paying three thousand shekels for a horse for a month. We didn't pay that for you for school, you know. We’re paying them now for the horses?”

# 

**Mishy Harman (narration):** They didn’t believe their son’s expensive new hobby would ever break even.

# 

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** I said “wait, just wait, I'm going to have a good money from these horses.” They said, “OK, we're waiting, we're waiting, we're waiting.”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And for years, they all waited. But from those modest stables, Abdel Naser is now reaching for a not-so-modest dream.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** I would love to be the best Arabian horse breeder in the world.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Joel Shupack and Elise Coker, a filmmaker who made a beautiful documentary about Abdel Naser, bring us the story of **Abdel Naser’s Colts**.

*\*\*\*\*\**

**Elise Coker (narration):** For centuries,Arabian horses were bred for their stamina and strength. They were central to Arab and Beduoin life, and used for transportation, sports and in warfare.

# **Nuha Musleh:** Horsemanship is a sport that is held in high esteem by Arabs in general. It has been mentioned in the Koran.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** But today they’re mainly raised for a very different purpose.

**Elise Coker (narration):** They’re show horses. Abdel Naser’s entire life is centered around showing his horses at competitions, where they’re judged on how closely they resemble the “ideal Arabian horse” of the past.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** He’s done pretty well at these shows over the years. He’s even won some trophies here and there. But so far all the horses he’s shown have been female, either young fillies or adult mares. And to be considered a serious breeder, Abdel Naser is going to need something else.

**Elise Coker (narration):** A male breeding horse - a stallion - of his own.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** In March 2018, he made a crucial first step towards his dream when one of his mares gave birth to a baby colt.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** This is Kamel El-Awsaf.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** Kamel El-Awsaf. Or Kamel for short.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Kamel El-Awsaf means perfect. A thing or a creature that has it all. That has everything.

**Elise Coker (narration):** It’s also the title of a song by a famous Egyptian singer.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** We love giving our horses the names of Abdel Halim Hafez songs.

**Elise Coker (narration):** To Abdel Naser, Kamel *was* perfect: Russet brown with a pretty face and a white stripe down his forehead.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And most importantly, he was his first colt. His first chance to raise a champion stallion.

Two months later, on the very same day Elise began filming her documentary, Abdel Naser’s future got even brighter. His other mare *also* gave birth. Another colt.

**Elise Coker (narration):** The second colt was born in the afternoon, in the middle of the month of Ramadan.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** He was born really small, he’s premature.

**Elise Coker (narration):** He was dark brown, with a single splash of white just between the eyes. The size of a dog with long, wobbly legs.

**Joel Shupack (narration):** And if Abdel Naser thought Kamel, his first colt, was perfect, well as soon as this new one…

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** When I saw the face I said “OK, this is my favorite horse ever, you know.” I couldn’t believe my eyes. He’s really beautiful.

### 

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** His second colt was even *more* perfect. But right away, Abdel Naser sensed that something was wrong.

# 

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** He was moving in a strange manner and the colt didn’t breastfeed, you know. So that was a very bad sign.

**Elise Coker (narration):** It was colic, which - without intervention - is often fatal. And in the West Bank, veterinary care is harder to come by, especially during the month of Ramadan.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** So Abdel Naser called Dr. Barak Amram, an Israeli vet from Ben Shemen.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Doctor, it looks like the colt has constipation.

# **Barak Amram:** If it has constipation, you have to take it to the hospital, it’s better.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** The best animal hospitals in the region are within Israel, on the other side of the checkpoint. Given Kafr ‘Aqab’s strange status of being technically part of Jerusalem, Abdel Naser can - unlike most Palestinians - freely cross back and forth.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Buthe could have easily been stuck at the checkpoint for hours in a long line of idling cars.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** It would have been crazy.

# It’s a very stressing atmosphere for a sick young colt.

# **Nuha Musleh:** I have heard about a story where a horse died at the checkpoint.

# **Barak Amram:** If you want me to come I can come, but I think you should take him to the hospital.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Can you come, doctor?

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** The doctor didn’t hesitate. The only problem?

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** He’s not allowed to be here.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Even though they’ve done this before, it’s dangerous.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** He would risk his life to help us and he doesn't think about anything else.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Dr. Barak loads up his white van with medical gear and heads to the West Bank.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** It’s dark when the doctor arrives. Abdel Naser and Nuha wait in their car on the Palestinian side of the checkpoint.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Hi doctor. Yeah, yes doctor, where are you exactly? You’re outside?

**Nuha Musleh:** *[In Arabic] When hu’ya? When?*

**Elise Coker (narration):** “Where is he?” Nuha asks.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** *[In Arabic]* He’s outside*.*

**Elise Coker (narration):** Abdel Naser explains thatthe doctor’s on the other side of the checkpoint.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** Can you come inside?

**Elise Coker (narration):** Abdel Naser and Nuha escort the doctor in, making sure he’s safe.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Yeah yeah yeah, I’m coming with you, I’ll come with you.

# **Nuha Musleh:** Elise, put the camera down, we don’t want the doctor in any way to be upset.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Twenty minutes later, safely back at Abdel Naser’s home, I begin filming again. Dr. Barak puts on latex gloves and unloads a mobile IV unit and some syringes.

# **Barak Amram:** Now slowly, put him down on the cloth. Yeah, yeah. Go ahead. Go ahead. *[Abdel Naser Musleh sighs].* Go ahead. You OK, Abdel Naser?

**Elise Coker (narration):** Doctor Barak does whatever he can to treat the colic, and gives the horse some fluids and medicine.

**Barak Amram:** He’s like weak, but he wants to live.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Then, he delivers a clear prognosis:

**Barak Amram:** This is how it goes - if he doesn’t take milk, he’ll die.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Yes yes, he’ll die, yeah.

**Barak Amram:** If he takes milk, he lives.

**Elise Coker (narration):** If this horse doesn’t start nursing soon, he says, it’s all over. But there’s still hope.

**Barak Amram:** OK, let’s… Let’s go out, let’s leave them. The mother will manage.

**Elise Coker (narration):** The Muslehs invite Dr. Barak upstairs for some coffee. They sit together around a wooden dining table with an embroidered tablecloth. Nuha prepares a platter of Arabic sweets.

**Khader Musleh:** From Syria.

**Barak Amram:** Oh, thank you.

**Khader Musleh:** From Syria.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Soon the doctor will go back home, to his side of the wall. But for now they are all here, sitting around the kitchen table. Here it’s just small cups of Turkish coffee, a call to prayer from a nearby mosque, a Jewish doctor, a Muslim family and a baby horse who is weak, but wants to live.

**Elise Coker (narration):** The next morning, Abdel Naser, in a loose blue t-shirt and beach sandals, goes to check on the newborn. His mother joins him.

**Nuha Musleh:** He’s hungry.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Hungry perhaps, but - thankfully - alive.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** He’s a little bit in pain still, but much better than yesterday.

**Elise Coker (narration):** The family hasalready chosen a name.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** Mawal El-Nahar.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Mawal El-Nahar. It means “prayer of the day.” He’s *also* named for an Abdel Halim Hafez song.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Dr. Barak’s late night house call saved Mawal’s life.

# 

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** With his two colts now healthy, Abdel Naser can start thinking about the upcoming annual show.

### 

### Mawal, the baby, is obviously too young to compete, but Abdel Naser is planning on showing Kamel, his first colt.

### 

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** It’s the main event of the year. It's the Egyptian event.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Kamel is a special breed; he’s what’s called a ‘Straight Egyptian,’ descended from the finest Bedouin horses that were taken to Egypt back when the Ottomans controlled the region.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** It’s where the best Egyptian horses compete.

**Elise Coker (narration):** This will be Abdel Naser’s first chance to show off one of his new colts, and the stakes are *high*.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** A colt is a different thing. It’s a bigger responsibility. Everyone’s looking for colts to breed their mares to. So you never want to lose with your colt. Fillies you can lose. So if she loses, she takes fifth or sixth, OK it’s fine, she goes back home and you breed her. If a colt loses, he’s never going to breed, he’s never going to breed, trust me.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** The difference between a colt that wins and a colt that comes in, say, third, is huge. A winner is likely to become a valuable breeding stallion.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** If I want to breed to a good stallion, I would pay $5000. If you have a good stallion it’s like you have a company.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** A loser, on the other hand, is… just a horse. But it’s not all about the money. It goes much deeper.

# **Nuha Musleh:** A horse is a symbol of honor in our Islamic culture, in our Arabic culture.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** This is our horse, this is an Arabian horse, the horse came from here.

# **Nuha Musleh:** Horses have retrieved for the Palestinian breeders, the beauty of their culture and old civilization. The nobility that they have lost over the years.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** It’s art mixed with history, you know. The Arabian horses are our history, you know. They… They created our history.

**Elise Coker (narration):** So for Abdel Naser, a lot’s riding on his two young colts. Whenever Abdel Naser isn’t with his horses, he’s helping out at the family business in nearby Ramallah.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** I’m working at my family's shop.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Theysell traditional rugs and lamps, jewelry, embroidered dresses, hand-painted ceramic bowls.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** It's a beautiful shop.

**Elise Coker (narration):** But even here, in between customers, the talk is *all* about horses.

**Nuha Musleh:** When, when is the next show?

**Joel Shupack (narration):** The show is two months away. Kamel is growing nicely and Nuha? Well, she seems just about ready to pin the medal on him herself.

**Nuha Musleh:** He’s champion. He deserves gold.

**Elise Coker (narration):** But *Abdel Naser* knows there’s still a lot of work to do.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** This baby horse knows nothing about being handled, you know.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Abdel Naser doesn’t have the space or the expertise to properly train and condition Kamel himself, so he sends him to a professional horse trainer in Israel.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** The trainer will make him get used to the basic things for a young baby, you know. We are concerned about fear, you know, for the colt, you know. Just to be afraid from the ring, you know, from the noises and from everything. We build muscle, we work on the neck, we work on the body, everything, the concentration of the horse.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** So in late July, Abdel Naser loads Kamel onto a trailer. He drives him across the checkpoint to a training center in Matsli'ah, a moshav near Rehovot. This kind of cross-border journey — it’s actually pretty common.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Most of my friends that I met through horses are outside of the checkpoint. They are Jewish and Israelis.

### **Elise Coker (narration):** The divisions you often see between Jews and Arabs? They aren’t as present in the horse world.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** We don't feel the conflict, we don't feel the political situation.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** We heard this from a lot of other breeders too, like Tzviah Idan - a Jewish breeder from Moshav HaYogev, in the north of Israel.

# **Tzviah Idan:** We know what peace is like because we coexist.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Part of it is the nature of horse breeding itself. Many breeders, like Abdel Naser, keep their horses *on* their property, basically living together with them.

**Elise Coker (narration):** So when they want to see each other’s *horses*, they have to visit each other’s *homes*.

# **Tzviah Idan:** We’re in and out of each other’s houses, people drop in here all the time. Suddenly I’ll get a phone call, “I’m at your gate” *[Tzviah laughs]*.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** That intimacy creates lasting connections.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh**: We buy breedings from each other. We train our horses together. Through the horses, we’re living together.

**Elise Coker (narration):** And indeed, at horse shows you’ll see...

# **Tzviah Idan:** The Arabs and the Jewish Israelis hugging each other, kissing each other, arms around each other. Owning horses together, breeding horses together.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** People just forget about the conflicts and forget about the politics and get together for this passion.

# **Nuha Musleh:** Horses have transcended all barriers between Israelis and Palestinians.

**Announcer:** Egyptian horses in Israel, as I mentioned before, is very special horses. Is a source of world champions.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** It’s September now. Kamel is six months old and the much-anticipated “Egyptian Event” has finally arrived.

# 

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** This show is really important. It’s like the show that I always want to prove myself in.

**Elise Coker (narration):** The show takes placejust south of Nazareth, in a clearing at the end of a long dirt road.

Picture a dusty derby ring with bleachers and big white tents that serve as makeshift stables. The horse owners - both Israelis and Palestinians - sit at shaded tables nearby and debate the intricate rules.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** There arefive standards that we judge the horse on. First of all, how Arabian does this horse look? Second of all the head and the neck…

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Abdel Naser probably wouldn’t like this description, but it’s basically an equine beauty pageant.

### 

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** And the fifth and the final thing is the legs.

### 

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** And as for his own horse, Kamel, he’s optimistic.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** The head looks amazing, the neck looks perfect, his color is a very good advantage.

**Elise Coker (narration):** There are two rounds - a preliminary group round, and then a final championship round. The horses are brought in one after the other, and are paraded around the ring to the sound of a cheering crowd. They are then presented to a panel of three international judges - this year they’re German - and awarded a score for the five characteristics - type, head and neck, body, movement and legs. Twenty points in each category is a perfect score.

Finally it’s Kamel’s turn.

**Announcer:** Colt number ten, Kamel El-Awsaf *[Cheering].*

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Abdel Naser is clearly nervous. This is the big stage. Kamel is brought in and gallops around the ring. The judges take notes, confer and then his scores are announced.

**Announcer:** Type - 18.5, 19, 18.5. Head and neck - 19, 19.5, 19.

**Elise Coker (narration):** He’s getting good marks, especially for his face which, to Abdel Naser, is the most important thing.

**Announcer:** 88.83 in total *[clapping]*.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** 88.83 out of 100. Not great,but good enough for second place in his preliminary group. Still, the final championship round - where the top colts from each group are judged against each other - *that’s* what matters.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** Anything can happen. A horse that got second can be a gold champion.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** There's still a chance Abdel Naser's colt could leap from his second place group finish to an overall gold medal. But the opposite could happen too. A horse that got second in its group can leave the show with nothing at all.

# **Announcer:** Here we go...

**Elise Coker (narration):** The top horses from each group are paraded in. The judges once again take notes and deliberate. And then… the moment of truth arrives.

**Announcer:** *[In Hebrew]* Pay attention who the gold winner is… The gold… Kainz El-Baydan.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Kamel’s name isn’t mentioned.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** He got second place in his group and he didn't win in the championship anything.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Abdel Naser goes home empty-handed.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** We’ll be right back.

*\*\*\*\*\**

**Mishy Harman (narration):** And now back to Abdel Naser Musleh, who’s older colt, Kamel El-Awsaf, just returned home empty-handed from the annual horse show.

This was obviously a blow for Abdel Naser. After all, it was the first time he had shown a male horse at the competition, and the pressure was on. It’s the wrong metaphor, I know, but a winning colt can be a real cash cow.

Still, Abdel Naser had many reasons to chin up. There would always be next year, and then he’d have not one, but two, colts to bring to the show. OK, back to Joel and Elise.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Followingthe excitement of the competition, it was now back to the grind; the slow and often tedious work of feeding and caring for his horses.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Since he was still a very young horse, Kamel would have another chance to prove himself next year. And by then, with any luck, Mawal, now four months old, would also be ready for the ring.

### But a few months after Abdel Naser returned from the show, everything changed.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** I just come to the room and he's not eating, going in circles in the room. You know, horses eat the whole time, so if they just are not eating, you know that they have something wrong.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Once again, just like when he was born, Mawal El-Nahar was sick.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** It was an infection in the stomach and we had to take him to the hospital. I took him myself.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** That day,Abdel Naser was supposed to be working at the family store. Instead, he loaded up Mawal, waited at the checkpoint, drove towards Tel Aviv, and left his colt at the veterinary hospital. He then turned around and headed back to the West Bank.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** You know, I went back to the shop and they called me and they told me he couldn't make it. And

# he died there. *[Sigh].* This horse is like one of your children. Mawal El-Nahar was a very special colt to us. And he still lives inside us. He was a great one, really. And I just I couldn't wait to show him but he didn't make it.

**Elise Coker (narration):** There’s *a lot* of waiting in the life of a horse breeder. To begin with, when you breed your mare, there’s a long pregnancy - almost a full year - before you can even *see* the new horse.

# 

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** When you look at the baby, you know, and when you look at the horse you made, oh wow, this is my idea, you know? This is what I wanted, this is what I imagined.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Then, you have to wait until they’re old enough to be shown.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** There is not much to do with young horses, you know. Feed them good, that’s all.

**Elise Coker (narration):** And then, of course, there are long stretches of time *between* shows.

### 

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** With Mawal’s death, all of Abdel Naser’s hopes now rested on Kamel. He had ten long months to wait till the next Egyptian Event, enough time for doubts to creep in.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Many people are breeding horses and they just don't get anything in shows, you know? Or don't get the opportunity to sell the horses that they bought for a lot of money or they invested in.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** During some of the harder moments, he could even imagine abandoning his ambitions altogether, and getting a “normal” job.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** If I think about like getting a job now in Jerusalem or in Ramallah, OK I might go and spend six days a week.

**Elise Coker (narration):** But those ten months were also enough time to remember why he *doesn’t* do that. Why, instead, he spends so much time and money on his horses.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** When I live here, when I live in Palestine, when I have my Arabian horse, this makes me feel that I’m sticking to identity as an Arab and as a Palestinian. I give all of my effort now to my horses, you know? It’s the thing that make me successful as a person. This is what makes me special so I have to… to give everything to this passion and this hobby and this business and those creatures.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** That conviction getsAbdel Naser through a long winter, a warm spring and a dry hot summer. And then, once again, it’s time for the annual show. For another chance to bring his colt into the ring. To prove that, one day, he *could* become the best Arabian horse breeder in the region.

**Elise Coker (narration):** But for any of *that* to happen, first he needs to win.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Winning in a show like gives you a big push. Gives you like ‘this is your destiny, this is what you're meant to do this.’

**Announcer:** Attention please.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** The 2019 Egyptian Horse Event is about to begin.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Kamel El-Awsaf is a year older. His body has filled out and he’s grown into a stunning horse.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** His coat is lighter now - almost a light ginger with dark patches around his eyes and muzzle. A proud and anxious Abdel Naser stands beside Kamel.

**Abdel Naser**: Yeah, I'm really nervous now.

**Elise Coker (narration):** His whole family is here. Nuha, his mother, looks like she’s dressed for the Kentucky Derby. She’s wearing an enormous wide-brimmed floppy hat and a flowing dress, both the color of an orange creamsicle.

# **Nuha Musleh:** This is a passion, this is a hobby, that transcends just having a beautiful thing. It’s more, it becomes part of your life. It’s a tough tough tough mission, but the returns are majestic.

**Abdel Naser Musleh:** Now… Kamel is going in. Now he’s going in.

# **Announcer:** The next scores goes to colt number thirty-three, Kamel El-Awsaf.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** After the parading, the conferring, and the judging, the announcer reads off the scores for the preliminary group round.

**Announcer:** Type - 20, 19.5, 19.5. Head and neck - 20, 19.5, 20!

**Elise Coker (narration):** He’s getting amazing scores.

**Announcer:** The total score 91.17.

**Elise Coker (narration):** This year, he’s the clear winner of his group.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** But again, winning your group doesn’t mean all that much.

**Elise Coker (narration):** In the championship round, Kamel will face off against all the top colts in the show.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** And they pick one gold champion. Let’s wait and see.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Abdel Naser patiently waits through more preliminary rounds. There are young fillies, old stallions, elegant mares — the pride of stables from all corners of Israel and the West Bank.

# **Nuha Musleh:** Horses they represent integrity, strength.

**Elise Coker (narration):** They’re chestnut brown, shimmering black or majestic white, snorting and galloping around the ring.

# **Nuha Musleh:** Beauty, gracefulness, sensitivity.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** Their curved faces, big eyes and powerful bodies are a connection to an ancient past. The owners sit around folding tables with cigarettes, black coffee and high hopes. Abdel Naser is quiet, focused.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** It’s five minutes before the championship.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Kamel El-Awsaf has a higher score than any of the colts he’ll be facing in the championship round. But Abdel Naser isn’t calm.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** Yeah, of course, because anything can happen, you know.

**Elise Coker (narration):** The colts are brought in and the judges make their decisions. This is it. The announcer takes his mic and starts with the bronze medal.

**Announcer:** Matil! Matil!

**Elise Coker (narration):** Then the silver.

**Announcer:** The silver… Diram Zamani!

**Elise Coker (narration):** And then…

**Announcer:** The gold champion colt.

**Elise Coker (narration):** He starts playing a song. A song by Abdel Halim Hafez.

**Announcer:** *[In Hebrew]* Can you hear what the name is?

**Elise Coker (narration):** “Can you hear what the name is?” He asks the crowd.

**Announcer:** Kamel El-Awsaf!

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** The years of monotonous hardwork, of countless expenses and of sheer luck in breeding this horse to that horse have led to this moment.

### Abdel Naser’s colt is a champion.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** It was the best day in my life, my whole life. So after the show, I got a lot of offers, like a lot of offers, maybe fifteen offers, trust me, for this colt, offers for sale and breeding. Most of them were local but I'm getting now offers from Kuwait, Qatar, Belgium. You know that's the next stage in my breeding career, that’s never happened before. Look, when your stallion has daughters and sons all over the world, this is when you know you're a great breeder. When you feel like everyone needs your horses, wants to breed from your horses and wants to buy from your fillies or mares, this is when you know you're the best breeder in the world.

### **Joel Shupack (narration):** He’s not there yet, of course. Kamel isn’t even ready to breed. But Abdel Naser and his prize colt are already links in a chain. A chain that goes back thousands of years to when horses and humans first learned how to live together. A chain that binds countless women and men, Arabs and Jews, Bedouins and Egyptians and others all around the world who have worked to create and preserve this ancient breed.

### 

### But Abdel Naser isn’t actually thinking about the past. Right now, all he cares about is the future. See, his champion colt, Kamel? Well, he has a new brother.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** This one we…we still didn't name him. We're thinking about names now because he's a special one so we should be careful with the name.

**Elise Coker (narration):** Meanwhile this nameless colt trots around the small sand ring in the backyard of the Muslehs’ family home in Kafr ‘Aqab.

# **Abdel Naser Musleh:** I think he’s… he’s even prettier than his brother, actually.

**Elise Coker (narration):** And as Abdel Naser watches on, he’s already dreaming of tomorrow.

*\*\*\*\*\**

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Joel Shupack and Elise Coker. We used clips from Elise’ gorgeous film, *Stallions of Palestine,* from Topic Films. You can watch the full documentary on YouTube, and we’ll also link to it on our site, israelstory.org.

**Mishy Harman:** Hello, hello, hello. OK.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** *[In Hebrew]* Hello?

**Mishy Harman:** Hey Danielle, it’s Mishy.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Hey, how are you?

**Mishy Harman:** Good, how are you doing?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Good, good.

**Mishy Harman:** Danielle, so I’m calling to ask what… what happened? What were the results?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Eh… the results was… this time we don’t win.

**Mishy Harman:** Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** What?

**Mishy Harman:** I’m sorry to hear that.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Ah, it’s OK. In the sport sometimes you win, and sometimes you… not win. *[Mishy laughs]*. Lose. *[Danielle laughs].*

**Mishy Harman:** And how are you feeling? Are you… are you disappointed?

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Ehhh, I’m not disappointed. I think we need to work harder and don’t feel that we can do everything, and be in the top all the time. But we have our way, and hopefully, next year it will be our year! *[Danielle and Mishy laugh].*

**Mishy Harman:** Amen! *[Danielle and Mishy laugh].*

**Danielle Deknuydt:** Thank you very much.

**Mishy Harman:** *[In Hebrew]* Alright. Thank you thank you, Danielle.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** *[In Hebrew]* Thank you.

**Mishy Harman:** *[In Hebrew]* Alright. Bye. Good night.

**Danielle Deknuydt:** *[In Hebrew]* Bye. Good night.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Joel Shupack scored this episode with music by William Ryan Fritch and Blue Dot Sessions. As always, Sela Waisblum mixed it all up. Thanks to Esther Werdiger who creates the beautiful artwork for our episodes, to Wayne Hoffman, Sheila Lambert, Erica Frederick, Jeff Feig and Joy Levitt.

If you are one of the many *new* Israel Story listeners, first of all welcome, and secondly, we hope you go back and listen to all our previous episodes. You can also follow us on social media - Instagram, Twitter, Facebook - all under Israel Story. And while you’re at it, don’t forget to sign up for our newsletter. All you have to do is go to israelstory.org/newsletter.

Israel Story is produced in partnership with Tablet Magazine. Our staff is Yochai Maital, Zev Levi, Joel Shupack, Yoshi Fields, Skyer Inman, Sharon Rapaport and Rotem Zin. Jeff Umbro, from The Podglomerate, is our marketing director. Marie Röder, Clara Fuhg, Michael Vivier and Alicia Vergara are our wonderful production interns.

I’m Mishy Harman, and we will be back next time with a very different kind of horse-related tale.

**Hodaya:** And he’s suddenly like, “you? You don’t think as a Christian at all. You think like a Jew!”

**Mishy Harman (narration):** Till then, stay safe, *shalom shalom* and *yalla bye*.

--- END ---