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PROFILE

THE GRAYS CLIMB THE PEAK OF SUCCESS WITH CAL-BREDS

DR. WILLIAM T. AND JILL GRAY

BY EMILY SHIELDS

Dr. William T. Gray is a self-proclaimed “realist,” saying, “I’ve never aspired to win the Kentucky Derby. I just want some \$25,000 to \$50,000 claiming horses that will pay the bills, and some hard-knocking mares who win 10 races so that we can breed those and get more of them.”

The strategy has worked beyond expectations. Despite their modest intentions, Dr. Gray and his wife, Jill, have been responsible for horses such as Tornado Betty, Weewinnin, and 2020 stakes

winner Indian Peak.

Gray grew up in the New Mexico horse racing business. His father, Wesley, was a trainer of both Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds. At 85, the elder Gray is still involved with raising foals but no longer trains.

William remembers partnering with his father on some yearlings in the early 1980s and racing horses until he went to vet school.

“I sold them all so I could go to school,” he said. “I didn’t start my own breeding program until 1998 or 1999.”

While Gray was just restarting his racing business,

his veterinary outfit was booming. He had a large animal practice in Cottonwood, Calif., where he did a lot of equine and cattle veterinary work.

“It didn’t take me very long to realize that everyone who has a horse has a dog,” Gray said, “and if they had cows, they could have 10 dogs. So I started doing small animal practice as well.”

At the height of his business, Gray had a large animal practice and a small animal practice with seven veterinarians working for him. In 2015 he sold the practices and semi-retired, but still does farm calls.

The Grays have 150 acres of their own in Cottonwood, branded Gray Farms on the sign out front. They have a herd of cattle, 15 broodmares, and a pair of stallions: Southern Image and Far From Over.

Southern Image was a California-based star. The son of Halo’s Image—Pleasant Dixie, by Dixieland Band, ran just eight times with six wins, a second, and a third. He earned \$1,843,750, with signature victories in the 2003 Malibu Stakes (G1), 2004 Santa Anita Handicap (G1), and 2004 Pimlico Special Handicap (G1).

Mike Machowsky trained the leggy dark bay, who was quick enough to bring \$300,000 as a juvenile at the 2002 Ocala Breeders’ Sales’ March 2-year-olds auction. The stallion’s runners include multiple graded stakes winner Calibrachoa and multiple stakes winner Winning Image.

The Grays are excited



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. WILLIAM T. AND JILL GRAY

Dr. William T. Gray and wife, Jill, center their breeding operation at their 150-acre farm in Cottonwood, California

about their newest acquisition, Far From Over. The son of Blame—Alchemist, by A.P. Indy, was a three-time winner in six starts, including the 2015 Withers Stakes (G3) at Aqueduct. He was a candidate for that year's Triple Crown trail before injury knocked him to the sidelines.

"I was looking at stallions at WinStar Farm in Kentucky," Gray said, "and I stumbled upon this horse boarding there on layup. The owners had put a price on him, and I said I would take him. I went the next day to pick him up, but they'd changed their minds. So I came home empty-handed."

A week later Gray was asked if he was still interested.

"I said I'd already bought him once!" Gray laughed.

"I'm kind of excited about him," Gray admitted. "I've been in this long enough that I know getting a stallion proven is the hardest thing there is. It's easier to get a graded stakes horse to win. But his babies sure look good."

The Grays have previous stallion experience; they were involved with Comic Strip. The \$965,474-earning son of Red Ransom has sired some of the Grays' best horses, including stakes winners Tornado Betty, Weewinnin, and Handfull, as well as stakes-placed Light One.

Tornado Betty was claimed away from the Grays in her fourth start, then went on to win the Arizona Juvenile Fillies and the Arizona Oaks at Turf Paradise, as well as the Goldfinch Stakes at Prairie Meadows. She earned \$230,015 with six wins, 10 seconds, and six thirds in 33 starts.

Weewinnin won four of 12 starts and was a three-time stakes winner, taking the \$200,000 King Glorious Stakes as a juvenile, the \$251,500 California Cup Turf Classic Stakes as a 21-1 shot as a 4-year-old, and the \$151,000 California Dreamin'



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Jill Gray, top, is the source of the couple's success according to her veterinarian husband, William, above

Stakes as a 5-year-old. He was a stakes winner at Santa Anita, Del Mar, and Betfair Hollywood Park, earning \$397,430.

Handfull, an earner of \$341,400, won the California Governor's Cup Handicap at the Sacramento fair in 2015 and took the March Madness Starter Handicap at Santa Anita twice. Multiple stakes-placed filly Light One was third in the 2015 Xpressbet California Cup Oaks in just her third lifetime start.

More recently Comic Strip is the sire of the Grays' 2020 star, Indian Peak. The 3-year-old homebred out of the Roar mare Ms. Booty is in training with Quinn Howey and won the \$151,000 Snow Chief Stakes June 20 at Santa Anita. The dark bay colt has won four of his 10 starts.

Gray credits his wife for their success.

"Jill has been my wife for 40 years," he said. "She does all the work. I wouldn't have them if it wasn't for her. She likes going to the races, but she really likes just taking care of the farm and the babies."

Having the farm also helps. "It's real handy for us," Gray said. "If the 2-year-olds have any problems, we can bring them home and give them three months. A lot of people don't have the luxury of having a farm they can use."

Outside of their own breeding operation, the biggest thrill that the Grays have had was with Collect Call. The couple owned a part of the Kentucky-bred daughter of Meadowlake when she ran third in the 2001 Kentucky Oaks (G1).

"Our neighbors and friends Rod and Lorraine Rodriguez let us share in the mare's campaign," Gray recalled. "It was a great experience."

Between their stallions and mares at the farm and Indian Peak on the track, the Grays are due for more great experiences ahead. **CTB**