

Steege praises Lafitte De Muze following the Hunter Spectacular in Wellington  
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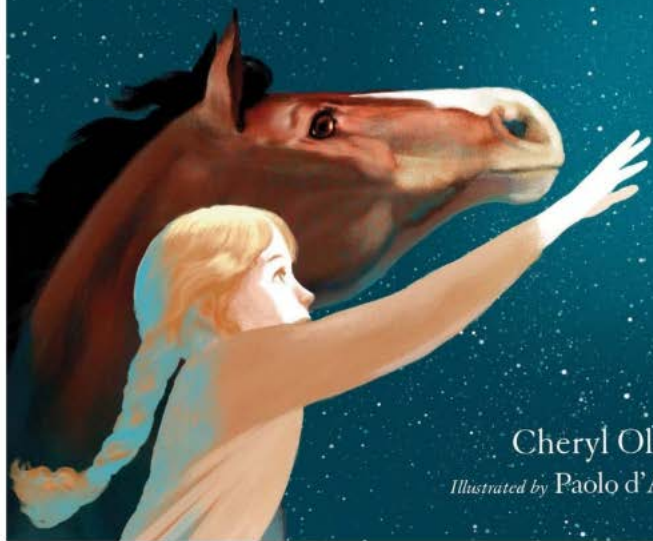
## The Storybook Life of Lafitte De Muze

By Elaine Wessel, Phelps Media Group

Olsten's new book drew inspiration from Lafitte De Muzo  
Image courtesy of Cheryl Olsten



# Big Wishes *for* Little Feat



Cheryl Olsten

Illustrated by Paolo d'Altan

Similar to Olsten, Steege has formed a unique bond with Lafitte De Muzo  
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While many horses are immortalized in photos, shadow boxes and even figurines, few can claim to be storybook characters. For Lafitte De Muzo, his effortless way of going and scopey jump have catapulted him to stardom as one of the winningest hunter and derby horses in recent years with rider Amanda Steege aboard, but it is his special bond with his owner, Cheryl Olsten, that has prompted his newest literary endeavors. Equipped with a background in publishing behind her, Olsten drew from her relationship with "Lafitte" to write a whimsical children's book, called "Big Wishes for Little Feat," that is sure to inspire horse lovers both young and old. Bearing markings that resemble the real-life horse behind the pages, the main equine character of Little Feat parallels his inspiration in that he can jump the moon, shares his loving penchant to spend time with his favorite people and is living a life fit for a fairytale.

"Everything came together at the right time," said Olsten. "A one-page Q&A for the EQUUS Foundation back in early 2018 about Lafitte prompted me to really think about why I thought he was such a unique horse. My answer: Every once in a while, something special crosses your path, and with that, an opportunity presents itself. And so it is with Lafitte De Muzo. Lafitte, by his very nature, is an inspiration."

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Set to be widely released in October 2020, Olsten's book is a magical tale about facing the challenges life throws your way. In a year that has been fraught with strife for so many, it could not come at a more fitting time. A horse named Lafitte De Muze, nicknamed Little Feat, and a young girl named Ella, who live on opposite sides of the world, are eventually brought together by a bit of fate, Ella's quirky aunt and a shooting star. It is a story about true friendship, facing and overcoming obstacles and, most importantly, always believing. With exquisitely beautiful illustrations

by talented artist Paolo d'Altan on every page, the book is as much a piece of art as it is a children's read.

"When I first saw Lafitte, I thought 'He's a little guy!' He's really not, but all the horses I have owned, for the most part, stand taller than Lafitte. Hence the title of the story, 'Big Wishes for Little Feat,' remarked Olsten. "In the story, one of the messages is that it doesn't matter what your stature or what others think, but what matters is what's inside. In this case, that's

the determination Little Feat has to do what he loves most."

Similar to the characters in Olsten's picture book, the stars aligned for the team of Olsten, Steege and Lafitte De Muze. "Impressed enough by video footage of Lafitte jumping in Europe, Steege and Olsten worked together to send Steege on her first European horse shopping trip, a tribute to the young horse's uniqueness that pulled the decorated hunter competitor and trainer to visit him for herself.

Martin Sylvestre rode Lafitte De Muze at the 2016 World Breeding Jumping Championships for Young Horses in Lanaken  
Photo ©Sportfot



"It was definitely love at first sight, and first ride! I had seen a few videos of him, which prompted me to ask Cheryl to send me to Germany so that I could ride him and see him in person. That was my first visit to Europe to try horses," remembered Steege. "It was the fall of 2017 and it was cold and rainy in Germany that day. I already loved his look, his eyes and his personality, but once I got on it was his impressive jumping style that won me over. We felt like an instant match."

Prior to his hunter transition, Lafitte was campaigned in jumper contests in Europe by the two Frenchmen Martin Sylvestre and David Frédéric. The 2011 bay Belgian Warmblood successfully competed over courses up to the 1.25m height during his time across the pond, and even participated in the FEI World Breeding Jumping Championships for Young Horses in Lanaken as a 5-year-old. Bred by Joris De Brabander and the Bruggeman family, Lafitte is by Darco out of Everlychin de la Pomme. With his sire a World Cup Qualifier winner and a World Equestrian Games finalist with Ludo Philippaerts, and dam a successful contender up to 1.60m at the CSI5\* level with riders that included Shane Sweetnam, Lafitte's pedigree has surely aided with his natural-born talent.

"I was very excited for him to come to the United States and to start his hunter career, but I don't think anyone could have predicted how successful he would be and how quickly he would find success in the hunter ring," commented Steege. "Ever since he stepped off the plane, he has been impressing us. We are lucky to be the ones that snatched him up!"

Though she could not have known just how suited her horse was to the hunter ring, Olsten clearly had an inkling that he would be earning some prize money in his competitive career. Less than one year after purchasing Lafitte, his owner pledged to donate the majority of her horse's winnings to EQUUS Foundation, which is currently the only national animal welfare in the



United States totally dedicated to protecting America's horses and strengthening the bond between horses and people, a cause close to Olsten's own heart.

"After my initial call with Lynn Coakley, the founder of EQUUS Foundation, my very next communication was from Saugerties to say, 'Our boy just won the big hunter class. I'll be sending you a check for \$100,000.' That was two years ago, and he's been winning and adding to that number ever since. A win for Lafitte is a win for horses in need," expressed Olsten.

At only seven years old and one year removed from his transatlantic flight to America, Lafitte carried Steege to the top of the leaderboard in the \$500,000 Diamond Mills Hunter Prix at HITS Saugerties in September 2018, besting an impressive field of veteran challengers. The victory marked Steege's first win in the class after placing second and third in previous years.

The tricolor honors have continued to accumulate, with notable 2018 triumphs coming in the \$50,000 WCHR Professional Challenge at the Capital Challenge Horse Show, as well as blue ribbons in every one of his Green 3'6" Hunter classes that propelled him to the division championship and the Grand Green Champion title at the same show. In 2019, the pair won the \$50,000 National Show Hunter Classic, placed second in the \$100,000 WCHR Peter Wetherill Palm Beach Hunter Spectacular and earned third in the 3'6 1/2/3'9 1/2 Platinum Performance/USHJA Green Hunter Incentive Championship. During World Championship Hunter Rider Week in Wellington in 2020, Lafitte was honored as the 2019 WCHR Hunter of the Year, only the ninth horse to be awarded the distinction.

"The turning point for me was his WCHR win at Capital Challenge. I wasn't there to feel and share the excitement with Amanda and her team, but I was home watching the livestream. While he's had great wins and accolades since, for me, that's when I knew he was that special horse," recalled Olsten.

Though their impressive list of accolades together has certainly been a bright spot in Steege's career, some of her most cherished memories with Lafitte are the ones out of the saddle.

"Some of my favorite moments with Lafitte are the times we are alone in the morning preparing to show, or just hanging out with him in his stall. He has this sparkle in his eye and way of communicating with me and all of his people. That is so special," reflected Steege. "Lafitte's success is definitely a huge team effort that is managed by myself, Cheryl, my boyfriend and barn manager Tim Delovich, and all of the vets, farriers, and bodywork therapists that work on Lafitte. He seems to know each one of us, and everyone loves him for it. There's nobody that doesn't like Lafitte."

Olsten agrees that Lafitte's personality is one of his greatest qualities, a testament to the horse's character considering his exceptional movement and jumping efforts that turn heads in the show ring. While many talented horses can often get away with a sour attitude or a particular vice because of their winning ways, no such compromises are necessary with Lafitte, who is naturally curious and a crowd-pleaser.

"Lafitte has these wide expressive eyes, and it's as though he wants very much to talk. I always bring carrots and honey oat bars to the barn, so when he spies me from a good distance away, he zeroes in. Let's say, I've spoiled him," said Olsten. "A few times I tried to hide around corners so I could see him without his demands for treats, but he always sees me peeking around a corner. I guess I'm not very good at hiding!"

Based on Lafitte's personality, he is the ideal horse to transform into a storybook character. Already a crowd favorite, he is sure to pose for even more photos with fans as his popularity grows, but his rider and owner do not seem to think he will mind.

"We have had young girls that come to meet him and get their picture taken with him in Wellington. At the Devon Horse Show I've spent a lot of time walking him around and letting spectators come up and pet him and get to know him. You can't do that with every horse, but he really loves people and all of the attention," noted Steege.



Lafitte De Muzel was champion in his division before winning the \$50,000 Hunter Classic at the National Horse Show  
Photo @GeorgiaHammond for PhelpsMediaGroup

Still only a 9-year-old, Lafitte has already accomplished more in a short span than most competitive horses do in a lifetime. Adding to his noteworthiness is the fact he has managed to do so with a steadfast character, just one of the many traits that keep him at the top of the favorites list and helped to inspire his fictitious self. There's more to come from this special horse.

Steege and Lafitte De Muze rode to blue-ribbon success at the 2019 Devon Horse Show in the Green 3'9" Hunters.  
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