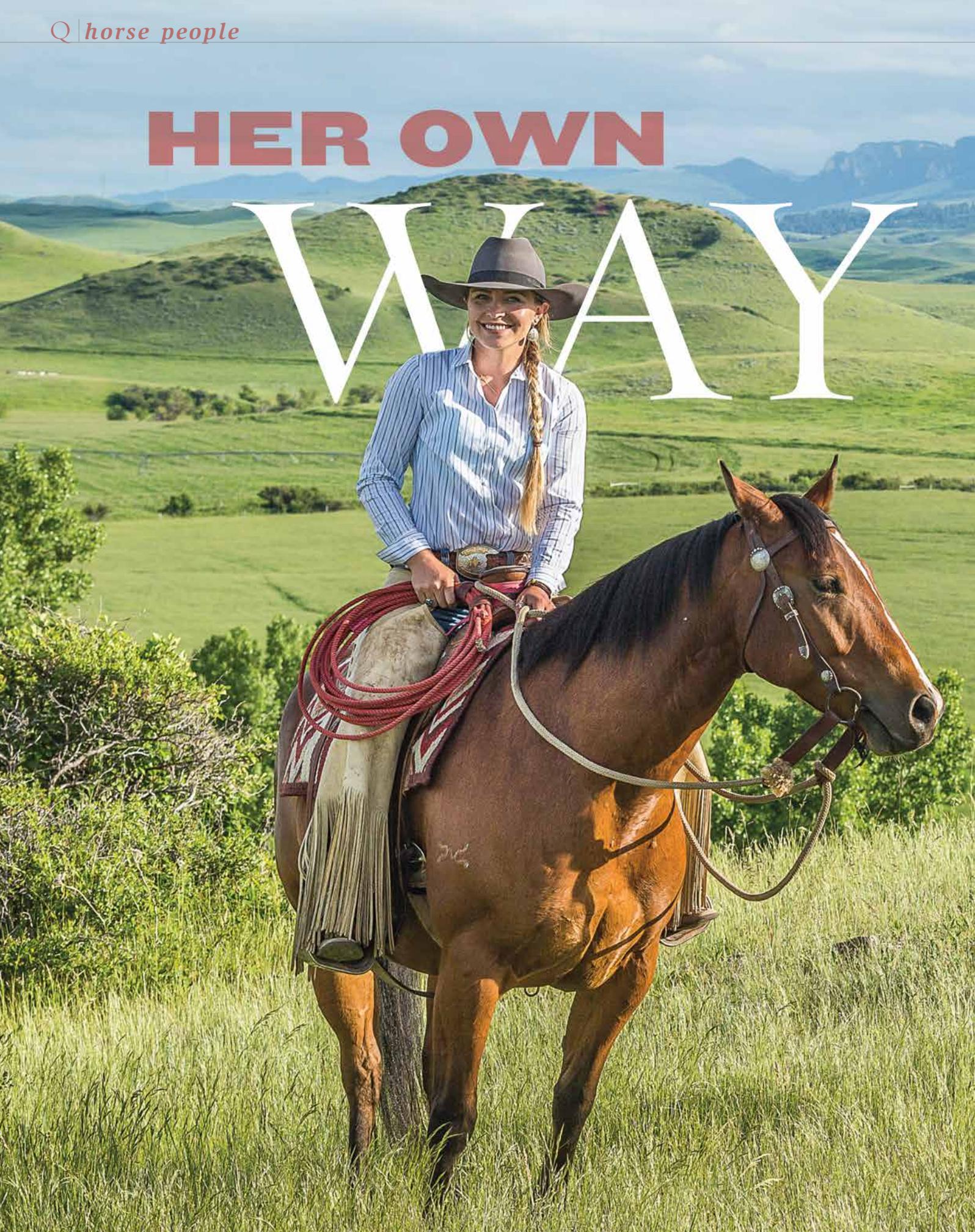
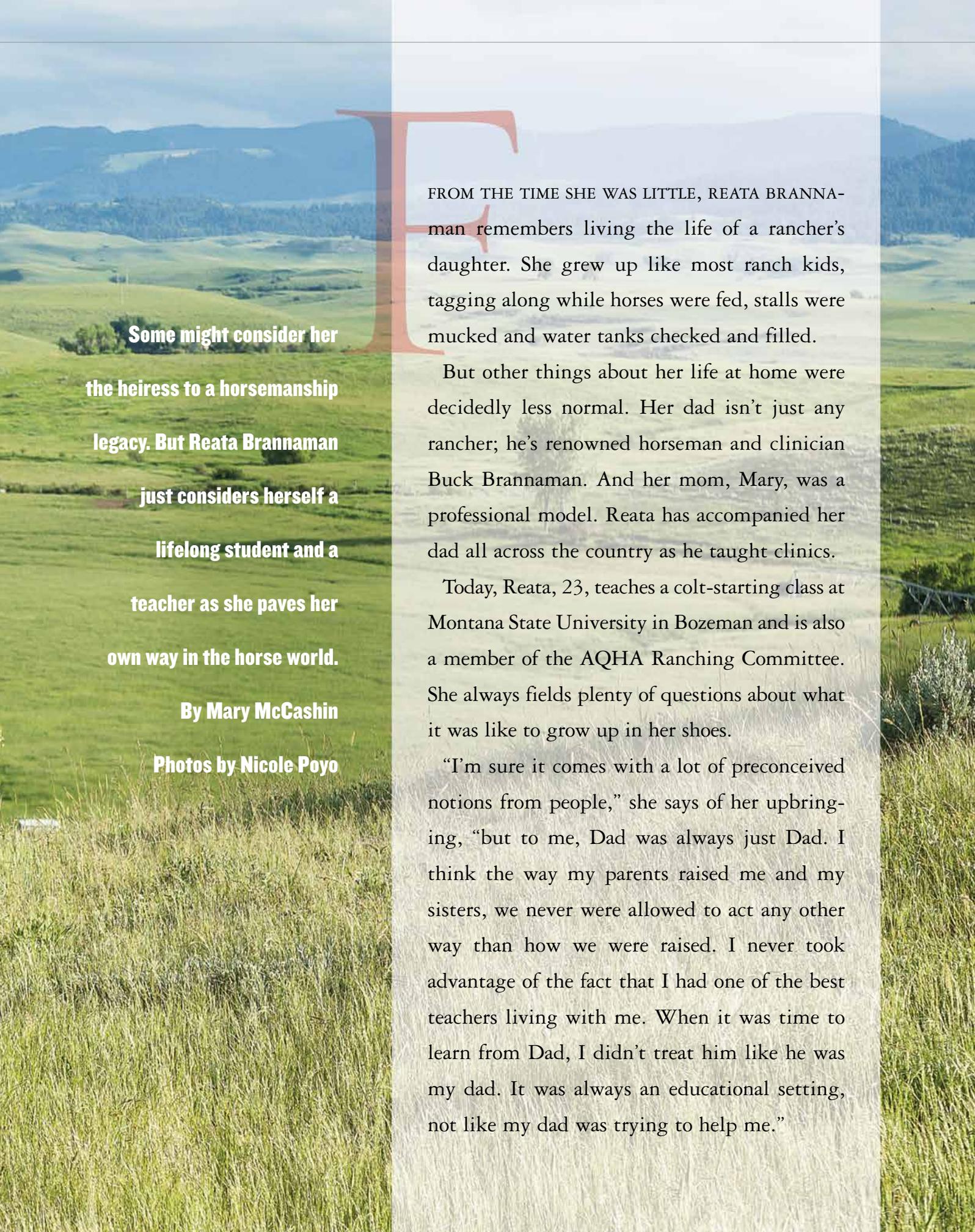


HER OWN

WAY





Some might consider her the heiress to a horsemanship legacy. But Reata Brannaman just considers herself a lifelong student and a teacher as she paves her own way in the horse world.

By Mary McCashin

Photos by Nicole Poyo

FROM THE TIME SHE WAS LITTLE, REATA BRANNAMAN remembers living the life of a rancher's daughter. She grew up like most ranch kids, tagging along while horses were fed, stalls were mucked and water tanks checked and filled.

But other things about her life at home were decidedly less normal. Her dad isn't just any rancher; he's renowned horseman and clinician Buck Brannaman. And her mom, Mary, was a professional model. Reata has accompanied her dad all across the country as he taught clinics.

Today, Reata, 23, teaches a colt-starting class at Montana State University in Bozeman and is also a member of the AQHA Ranching Committee. She always fields plenty of questions about what it was like to grow up in her shoes.

"I'm sure it comes with a lot of preconceived notions from people," she says of her upbringing, "but to me, Dad was always just Dad. I think the way my parents raised me and my sisters, we never were allowed to act any other way than how we were raised. I never took advantage of the fact that I had one of the best teachers living with me. When it was time to learn from Dad, I didn't treat him like he was my dad. It was always an educational setting, not like my dad was trying to help me."

Buck has similar feelings.

“For me actually, it’s really a dream that she ended up being in love with the horses like I have been all my life. You never know if your child is going to have the same interests as you. But the thing that’s so unique about Reata is that she’s not approaching this like she is Buck Brannaman’s daughter. She’s very much her own person. It’s more like I’m Reata Brannaman’s dad! Reata really respects what I do and what I’ve spent my life doing, and she’s realistic about it. She knows I have thousands and thousands of horses’ worth of experience that she doesn’t. She’s not delusional about where she is. She doesn’t have what would predictably be a level of arrogance for someone so young and who’s that handy.”

When Reata was 18, she began attending Montana State University in Bozeman. Shortly after, MSU approached her about taking over and teaching the university’s colt-starting class, which is part of the equine science program in the MSU College of Agriculture. The program was struggling and, with her parents’ blessing, Reata hit the ground running.

“I got horses donated, and students started trying out to be part of the program. It has really helped progress my teaching abilities. I have to manage 20 students, often ones who are older than me, and look out for their safety and the horses’ safety.”

Every April, the MSU colt-starting class hosts the Top of the West Sale in Bozeman. Horses that have been worked in the class are auctioned off, and the money goes right back into the program.

Her mom, Mary, loves seeing Reata’s successes at MSU and beyond.

“I’ve been truly impressed by her ability to connect with people, especially those her own age, and to teach them,” Mary says. “She’s very dynamic that way. I’m not surprised by her tenacity and her ability to press forward. She has a lot of irons in the fire right now, and she gets everything accomplished! That might be a little DNA-based, of course!”

Reata graduated from MSU in December with a degree in marketing. She chose her major because it “would be something that complimented anything I was doing, and I could use it in multiple directions.”

Reata acknowledges that her dad built a name for himself without marketing or self-promotion. He didn’t use sponsors to attract people to clinics, he simply allowed word to spread the old-fashioned way, by word of mouth. However, Reata plans to employ some marketing techniques when it comes to her own business – and she plans on helping her father, as well.

The Brannamans host the Pro Am Roping every year, which pairs rookies with experienced ropers in the world’s richest ranch roping, held in Santa Ynez, California, every fall. Reata markets the event to sponsors, manages entries and works closely with Isaac Johnson on every facet of the event.

She also thinks like a marketer when promoting her stallion, Movin Easy Whiskey by Paddys Irish Whiskey, and



Reata’s parents, Buck and Mary, are proud of their daughter’s accomplishments as she forges her own identity in the horse world.



Reata’s talent with young horses has led to a career as instructor of Montana State University’s colt-starting class.

her dad's homebred stallion, Guapo Gato by Metallic Cat. Reata bought Movin Easy Whiskey, bred by the AQHA Best Remuda Award-winning S Ranch, when she was still a senior in high school. Family friends had posted an ad on Facebook advertising him, and with the encouragement of her parents, she made an investment and purchased the bay stallion.

"He was the ultimate choice to get our breeding program going again," she says. "He produces babies nicer than he is. They're pretty, built, have great brains and anyone can ride them. You can get a job done on them and be proud of them. He has allowed me to get my feet wet in the breeding industry. He's producing something that people can afford and can ride, and Dad will be mounted on horses we raise for the rest of his life."

Movin Easy Whiskey is out of a mare who traces to Sugar Bars and Doc O Dynamite.

As he turns 18 this year, one of Movin Easy Whiskey's offspring, a 3-year-old colt named Pasamesumwhiskey, is slated to be the family's next stallion in a few years' time.

"I think Quarter Horses just have the best foundation," Reata says. "When you have something of such high quality that you can balance on, depend on and have the natural ability, that makes the job so much easier. That's not all I've ever ridden, but when you find something you like, it's hard to stray away from that."

And while Mary takes care of the ranch when Reata's teaching and her dad is on the road, Reata knows the value of taking care of her own horses.

"I think it's such an important aspect of the horse industry that people miss out on: being able to take care of your own horse, knowing how to take care of them and being responsible for them. It's easy to hire someone to do something for you, but when you're responsible for them, then that's where a level of pride comes in. If you take pride in your horses, then your horses will reflect that."

Now, if Reata were taking care of her horses back home at the family's ranch in Sheridan, Wyoming, both her parents would be happy.

Reata says, chuckling, "Dad is notorious for having these big projects he wants to do when he comes home, and I'm conveniently on summer break. Last year, he, Isaac Johnson, and I built an entire cedar round pen. It took us a week straight!"

Buck says, "The competition is on right now between Montana State and Buck and Mary as to who can be the most influential in getting her to come there and live. Right now, MSU is winning, but it could be a long war!"

Wherever she chooses to go, it's clear that Reata will do so with a quick mind, a brilliant business brain and a continual pursuit of knowledge for the horse. And while she never plans to hit the clinic road like her dad, Reata's approach to teaching has certainly changed.

"If people want to learn, they'll learn. You don't get anywhere in life pushing knowledge or your beliefs onto someone else. You have to let them ask and let them be curious to find a new way. If anyone asks me a question, I'm more than happy to help them or show them why I do things a certain way. But it's not my place to push my ways onto them, sometimes you have to just walk away and focus on your horse and your own ride." 🐾

Mary McCashin is a freelance writer from Mocksville, North Carolina.

