

OUT ON THE RANGE

The Next Generation

Riding, roping and learning in Arizona. Words & photos by Kathy McCraine.

You hear it all the time: “There aren’t any good cowboys anymore.” And that old cliché, “The cowboy is a dying breed.”

On Campwood Cattle Company, nothing could be further from the truth. Our next generation is growing up in the saddle, tak-

ing on responsibility at an early age, and eagerly picking up the reins from their folks to keep the art of cowboying and the ranching tradition alive.

My husband, Swayze, and I operate three ranches, the 7 Up Ranch north of Prescott, Ariz., The Kate near Skull Valley, and the

Howard Mesa Ranch (in partnership with Richard Smyer) north of Williams, a combined 134,000 acres of rangeland, running more than 1,200 head of mother cows and stockers. These are strictly horseback outfits, and when you join the crew, you better be prepared to trot out before daylight and



Bailey Kimball, 15, “eats, sleeps, and breathes ranch stuff,” cowboss KJ Kasun says. She’s been riding at the nearby CV Ranch, following her dad, Beano, ever since she was old enough to ride. Now she trains her own horses and competes successfully in cutting at high-school rodeos. “She’s pretty gamey,” KJ says. “She doesn’t think anything about roping a big yearling or even trying to catch a wild burro.”



At five, Cutter Lewis is just starting to ride with his dad, Levi, who works full time for Campwood Cattle Company. Levi makes a point of saving jobs—like riding a small pasture or trailing cows just a few miles—so he can take his son along. It won’t be long before Cutter’s part of the regular crew.



KJ hired Charlie Bloomfield, 15, to help Logan roll up fence for the summer. An FFA member who had only ridden a little and worked a time or two in the branding pen, he quickly fell into the swing of things when it came time to gather and brand late calves at the end of summer, even dragging a few. “The biggest thing about Charlie is his tremendous work ethic,” KJ says. “Plus he’s got kind of a natural feel for the country and working cows.”



Seven-year-old Kyle Kasun likes to ride with his dad, but his true calling is big equipment. Just let KJ crawl under a truck to do repairs or change the oil, and Kyle is right there with him watching every move.



Logan Bates, 15, shown heeling a big calf at the winter camp branding, is a rodeo hand who has learned to be a cowpuncher. He's won numerous saddles and buckles in high-school rodeo team roping and calf roping. This spring he got permission to take his final exams early in order to help out with the spring works at Campwood. "He's kind of like a sponge," KJ says. "He rides his country good, soaks up everything you tell him, and does anything you ask." This summer, in addition to riding, he got a taste of the "unromantic" side of ranching, rolling up fence wire and building corrals.



Kreed Kasun, 5, has been riding by himself since he was two, when his folks gave him an ornery paint pony. After the pony knocked him off on a gate post one too many times, he got up, dusted himself off, and announced: "That's it! No more little horses." Now he rides with his dad when it isn't too long a day and even camps out on the range in a tepee with his bedroll. He's on the verge of figuring out how to get on his horse without help.



Kadence Kasun, 10, doesn't know which she likes better—cowboying or rodeoing. She has her own string of ranch horses and two rodeo horses for competing in barrel racing, roping, and goat tying. She's already won two saddles and a pickup load of buckles in junior rodeo. Every day that Kadence isn't in school, she's horseback helping her dad, KJ. He says, "She's the belle of the ball when she goes to town, but gritty and stingy when she's working cows."

spend a full day in the saddle riding brushy, rocky country that's hot and dusty in summer and freezing in winter.

These kids don't whine when they get tired, and they don't bring their iPhones. Our partner, KJ Kasun, serves as cowboss when the crew mounts up to brand, ship, or rotate pastures, and he runs a tight ship. He expects his junior cowhands, which include his kids, Kadence, 10, Kyle, 7, and Kreed, 5, to keep up with the adult cowboys, at least to

the best of their ability.

The crew also frequently includes Logan Bates, 15, an accomplished high-school rodeo hand who is rapidly learning to be a top cowpuncher, and Bailey Kimball, 15, who's been helping her dad, Beano, on the nearby CV Ranch ever since she was big enough to crawl on a horse. Charlie Bloomfield, also 15, hired on to help roll up fence over the summer and turned into a good hand on a horse as well. Cutter

Lewis, 5, is just beginning to go with his dad, Levi, one of our full-time ranch hands, on shorter circles.

Swayze and I don't have kids, but these youngsters make us feel like proud grandparents, knowing that one way or another, Campwood Cattle Company will pass into capable hands someday. ■

Kathy McCraine ranches, writes and photographs from Prescott, Ariz.