

A True Herdsman

2007 Herdsman of the Year, Amanda Brooks, thanks her family and Hereford family for aiding in her success.

by Crystal Young



Amanda most enjoys being in the ring with her animals.

Only 7 years old, Amanda Brooks attended her first Junior National Polled Hereford Show in Perry, Ga., in 1993. As Brooks hit the road that year with her father, Robert, brother, Brian McClure, and good friend, Taylor Alred, little did she know this road would lead her to friendships, life lessons and championship honors.

Fifteen junior national shows later, Amanda would end her junior career in Denver as Herdsman of the Year. “This award means even more to me because the recognition is coming from other junior members,” Amanda says. “I have always strived to reach out to juniors who might need some direction or friendship.”



Amanda shares advice with first-time junior exhibitors Landon and Dillon Disney.

Amanda still remembers her first junior national clearly. She had never even stepped foot into a showring until the showmanship contest. “That 1,100-lb. heifer dragged me all over that ring, but I wouldn’t let go. Dad said, ‘Never let go,’” she recalls with a smile. After finishing the class, getting the heifer calmed down and wiping the tears away, Amanda was convinced by her family to go back into the ring for the owned show. “Sure enough, that heifer dragged me all over again. I guess it taught me determination and to never give up.”

Amanda’s determination and love of the breed allowed her to overcome many hurdles. Although originally from Tazewell, Tenn., she has lived in four different states and had numerous homes during her junior career, each time moving her cattle with her. “We have gotten cattle ready in drylots, sheds, chicken houses, air conditioned barns — you name it,” Robert Brooks, Amanda’s dad, recalls. “No matter what was happening in our lives, we were going to get Amanda to that next show.”

Overcoming adversity

For Amanda showing has always been a family affair, and she credits her family for helping her achieve all of her success. Her grandparents, mom and dad, older brother and uncle Red were always helping her persevere. “My daddy is my hero; he has been there with me through everything,” she says.

Amanda also considers people like the Mullinix, Alred and Redden families, Tammy and Tom Boatman, and

Debbie Hicks (Brooks’ first junior advisor) part of her own family. “I have grown up in this industry and learned so much from these people,” Brooks says. “I have dear friends from this business across the country. They were there to give me encouragement, friendship and guidance. Taylor Alred is like a younger brother to me; he has been there for every big honor that has come my way.”

However, this year one member of the team was missing. Shortly before this year’s Eastern Regional show, Amanda’s brother, Brian, passed away. “Brian worked his butt off for me,” says Amanda. “He taught me to work hard, spread joy and keep my chin up no matter how bad things were. He also taught me how to work hair,” she says smiling. Amanda knows that it would mean the world to her brother knowing that she had won this award.

This show has also been one of the toughest on Amanda’s dad, Robert. “I honestly didn’t know if I wanted to come this year. Brian was my best friend,” he says. In the end, though, Robert admits that it was the best thing they did, not because of the winning but because of the support they received from the Hereford family as a whole.

“There was a lady that came up to me, I didn’t even know her name, but she gave me a hug. That meant so much,” he says. Amanda agrees saying that it has been hard without Brian there cracking jokes and helping everyone relax on show days. “Brian was there for all of them,” Amanda says. “And if he couldn’t make it to the show, he was

there at home helping out as much as possible beforehand.” Amanda and her dad agree that in the end it was Brian who really drove them to the finish line.

Admired by many

Despite a tough year, it is still Amanda’s sparkling personality that shines through. Most people describe



After a difficult week, Amanda and her dad, Robert, celebrate.

her as outgoing and bubbly, and her laughter carries throughout the barn. "Dedicated," "a hard worker" and "a cattlemoan" were other words breeders used to describe Amanda.

Todd Herman, national junior advisor, says that when deciding who they will nominate for the herdsman award, they look for juniors that work really hard, do the work themselves and would be the kind of people they would want to send their own cattle out with. "Amanda definitely fit this mold that got her nominated," Herman says.

All junior members are given the opportunity to vote at the awards banquet for who they think embodies the title of Herdsman of the Year. "I knew who Amanda was even before she probably knew me," says Katlin Mulvaney, newly elected NJHA director, who looks up to Amanda as a role model because of her success both in and out of the showing. "She has such a passionate and contagious personality," Katlin says. "When she walks down the aisle and smiles at you, you can't help but smile back. Amanda is passionate, enthusiastic and has such a loving heart." She says, "She is devoted to the breed and has a love not only for the cattle but for the people as well. I believe she is the epitome of what a herdsman award winner should be."

Tammy and Tom Boatman, close friends of the family, who have known Amanda since she was born and later served as mentors for Amanda, have watched her grow into the young woman she is today. "Amanda's first junior national show was my last one," Tammy says. "I know what it is like to travel so far for that last junior national, but no one ever wants to miss it," she says. "Amanda is very well-deserving of this award. After watching Amanda develop her herd, we know how much she believes in them. In the junior program, Amanda is the real meaning of the word herdsman."

Lassie Domino 6008

Amanda's first real show heifer, Lassie Domino 6008, is the one she credits with most of her success. Amanda's dad knew that this heifer, bought

in 1995 from the Ohio River Blend sale, would help pave the way for Amanda's herd. This one cow has enabled Amanda to build a herd of 25 registered Hereford cows, which aren't only paying her way through college but have also helped her bring home purple banners.

Amanda remembers being second in class at the Kansas City junior national, and at the time it being a huge deal to her. But it was later awards the 6008 cow helped secure that meant even more. In 2005 at the Milwaukee JNHE, Amanda captured the reserve grand champion bred-and-owned heifer title with a 6008 daughter and was named premier breeder and exhibitor. Every animal that Amanda had in her string that year went back to the 6008 cow. A year later at the Louisville junior national, Amanda won grand champion bred-and-owned bull with a 6008 son. "This was something I had been striving towards for many years," Amanda says. "It had been my goal to produce higher quality bulls out of 6008. She is the foundation of my success."

Tammy Boatman has seen Amanda build her own program around the 6008 cow. "She really believes in what she breeds and produces, and she'll tell you about it," Tammy says. "At junior nationals in Milwaukee, a breeder asked the price of some 6008 embryos. She responded, '\$1,000 a piece,' and he told her she was crazy and out of her mind, and the discussion got a little heated," Tammy recalls. "But in the end, she ended up proving this person wrong, as she got her \$1,000 later from someone else."

Amanda has always loved showing cattle, especially Hereford cattle. "I really enjoy the livestock judging competitions and showmanship," she says. "But my passion is being out there during the actual show, presenting an animal you raised to the best of your ability. There is nothing else like it."

Future plans

Amanda has vowed to keep Herefords a large part of her future. She began her college career at Butler Community College, El Dorado, Kan., as a member of a national champion livestock judging team, coached by



Amanda and her dad work side by side on her bred-and-owned heifer.



Chris Stephens presents Amanda with her herdsman belt buckle.

Chris Mullinix. "When Chris talked to me about coming to judge for him at junior nationals that year, I really wasn't sure what I was getting myself into," she says.

From her years of experience showing heifers and some steers, Amanda was familiar with the cattle side of things; however, hogs and sheep were a different story. "I had never looked at a hog or lamb and had any idea as to whether it was a good one or not. To have to judge a whole class of them, in the beginning, was terrifying. Chris and my teammates just told me to put my faith and trust in them and everything would be OK, which was a great lesson to learn," she says. "Moving all the way to Kansas and trying something so new to me was an amazing experience. It taught me to step out of the box and learn on a whole new level. I strongly recommend the livestock judging experience to everyone. I met so many wonderful people in Kansas and was exposed to so many new things. It really changed my life."

Amanda is now completing her education at Maryville College, Maryville, Tenn. She is working toward a bachelor's degree in child development psychology with a minor in business and is currently writing her thesis on stress reliance in children and adolescence.

It is Amanda's goal to one day integrate her knowledge of the Hereford breed with her education. Amanda's future dream is having her own farm, where she can combine counseling and therapy with animals,

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specifically Herefords. "What I want to do in life I couldn't do it without Hereford cattle. They are the most docile breed and can really be trusted with people of all ages," she says. "It was a blessing from God that my daddy and papa brought Hereford cattle into my life."

Amanda has always said that when things get tough and life gets her down she can turn to her Hereford cattle and the breeders to keep her above the water. "That is why I am such a

big believer in this program. I want to offer other youth the same outlet and opportunities that I have had," she says.

Despite this being Amanda's last junior national, she says her family won't be able to stay too far away. Next year she hopes to have other junior members exhibiting cattle that she has bred and sold. Amanda's dad agrees, "When you look at other breeders' kids that have graduated from the program, you don't see them ever quit; they are back here year after

year." He says, "We have done it all — little league, dance, gymnastics — but this is the best program you can be involved in period."

Amanda says that she can't thank everyone enough for everything they have done for her over the past years. "This award really does mean the world to me, and I couldn't have done it without everyone being there by my side." **HW**