

Learning Life Lessons

by **Emma Ballinger**

As spring rolls in, many of us are cleaning out trailers, show sticks are finding their way into show boxes, and we are getting back into the rhythm of show season. There's a certain kind of excitement that comes with this time of year — the dust has settled on Cattlemen's Congress and the National Western Stock Show — and we have the anticipation of seeing friends again, setting new goals and stepping back into the showring.

Seeing your hard work recognized while standing in the showring beside an animal you've spent months caring for is meaningful in a way that's hard to describe. And taking a backdrop photo with people who have supported you along the way is something we all look forward to. But if you stay involved in the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) long enough, you start to realize that what lasts isn't the banner itself, it's what you built while working toward it. The banner that hangs in your barn today will eventually collect dust, the backdrop photo will get pushed down your camera roll, and the buckle that once felt so big will someday sit in a drawer. The wins are special, and they should be celebrated, but they are not the lasting legacy of your junior career. What lasts is who you become in the process. Banners fade. Character doesn't.

The NJHA has never been only about raising good cattle. It has always highlighted raising capable and grounded young people

who understand responsibility, sportsmanship and the value of hard work. The lessons learned in the showring often carry far beyond it. Years from now, most of us won't remember every class placing or buckle we earned. What we will remember are the friendships built in the barns, the mentors who guided us and the confidence that grew little by little each time we stepped into something that challenged us. We will remember the early mornings that taught discipline, the long days that strengthened our patience and the small moments of encouragement that reminded us why we started in the first place.

None of us do this alone. Behind every exhibitor in the showring is a parent who helped load the trailer, a mentor who offered advice, someone who answered questions or a friend who stepped in to lend a hand. As this season begins, take a moment to thank the people who have invested their time and energy in you. A simple "thank you" goes a long way, and it reflects the kind of character the NJHA works so hard to build.

As you head into another season, work hard and set big goals. Take pride in your cattle and the effort you put in each day; but also, recognize that even when the results don't go exactly as planned, you are still learning lessons that last. Every class, conversation and mile traveled with a trailer in tow is shaping you into someone prepared for responsibilities beyond the showring and beyond your junior years. **HW**



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