

Minnie Lou Making Headlines

Bradley receives Livestock Publications Council honors.

by Miranda Reiman, Certified Angus Beef LLC

Minnie Lou Bradley didn't set out to be a trailblazer, but she became one anyway.

Most know her as the first female president of the American Angus Association Board of Directors, or before that the first woman to graduate with an animal science degree from what is now Oklahoma

State University (OSU), but she may shrug off those accomplishments if asked directly.

"I really didn't know I was the only girl in agriculture. I just didn't think about it," she says.

But Bradley — still Minnie Lou Ottinger then — did think a lot about livestock.

She did everything from milk the family cow and sell dairy products out of her bicycle basket to showing sheep, pigs and cattle in 4-H.

The young agriculturalist spent a lot of time with her dad and grandpa.

"School wasn't like it is today. You could take off for anything," she

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MINNIE LOU BRADLEY



says. “Every livestock convention or meeting or anything, I just took out of school and went with him. Everybody asks, ‘Why my love for livestock?’ And I don’t know. I don’t know why it became my passion, but I didn’t care about anything else if I could have my livestock.”

In between the Hydro, Okla., farm where she grew up and life today on her ranch near Childress, Texas, Bradley has poured hours of service into the beef industry, brought new ideas and created cattle that add value for everybody in the beef production chain.

Paving the way

For that, Bradley was named the Livestock Publications Council (LPC) 2018 Headliner Award winner. The award is given annually at the Ag Media Summit, which this year took place Aug. 4-8 in Scottsdale, Ariz.

“Not only has she had many firsts as a woman, but she has made some great achievements as a cattle producer,” says ag journalist Jennifer Carrico, the LPC board member who nominated her for the award. “She has helped many others see the importance of performance, genetic predictability, carcass quality and raising cattle to help improve the beef industry.”

A fellow Angus producer, Carrico says, “She is a hero to cattlemen like myself.”

In 1949, Bradley made history when she enrolled in animal husbandry at Oklahoma A&M (now known as OSU).

“I kept saying, ‘Just treat me like you would anybody else,’ and, for the most part, all the professors were very nice to me,” she recalls. “I think they were just wondering, ‘Who in

the world is she, and where’s she headed?’”

As a junior, Bradley signed up for the livestock judging team, knowing only seven would make the final cut to travel.

“I was always in the top five, so I was really looking forward to Denver,” she says. “They posted the travel team, and I wasn’t there. My heart was broken, because I thought — according to the scores — I had made the team.”



Minnie Lou's daughter, Mary Lou, and son-in-law, James Henderson, now manage the business with direction from the legend herself.

Team coach Glen Bratcher called her into his office. “He said, ‘I’m afraid that the people you give your reasons to will not be fair to you because of your voice being high.’ So I was heartsick.”

But she kept working, and they took her along to Fort Worth. The OSU animal science department head made sure Bradley knew all eyes were on her as she broke barriers.

“He said, ‘You’re the first girl that we’ve ever had on a team, and I’m telling you right now, you will be the last if you don’t come through today.’ And I said, ‘Yes, sir.’”

Bradley had a good day and went on to win high individual in the Intercollegiate Livestock Judging contest in Chicago later that year.

When they gave out a tie clasp, Bratcher said, “Don’t worry. We’ll have it made into a locket for you.”

After graduation, Bradley worked for the Texas Angus Association before marrying into the Bradley family and beginning her ranching career. She remembers riding with her future in-laws to look at the place she was about to call home.

“There was 10 miles of just ranch, the longest dirt road I was ever on, and we turned in and everything

was in disarray. Not a windmill was working. The fences were down,” she says. “We got to the north pasture, and Rusty got down on his knees and opened up his pocketknife and dug up the roots and said, ‘Well, the roots are alive. I believe it’s got a lot of potential.’”

They bought it in 1955, “and we’ve been trying to improve it now for 63 years,” the rancher says.

Early on, just able to make interest payments, Bradley asked the banker how others in the area were making it.

“He said, ‘A rancher, unless he’s got oil, in this part of the country doesn’t expect to make any money. It’s just living and living the life you want.’”

“I said we’ve got to do better than that,” Bradley recalls. “That’s when we went into the registered business.”

Living greatness

They bought a lifetime membership to the American Angus Association in 1958. Bradley 3 Ranch became known for cattle that work in harsh environments and go on to please beef consumers of all kinds.

“We wanted to raise our cattle just exactly like a commercial man

did,” Bradley says, first realizing performance and pounds essentially paid the bills.

The family pioneered the gate-to-plate movement, and opened B3R Country Meats in 1986. During the 25 years they owned it, they paid on beef quality and returned data so ranchers could earn more and build beef demand.

“Packers were hated by every cowman in the country. They cheated everybody. That’s what we thought,” she says. “I tell people today, every cowman ought to be a packer for one day. Just one day. You learned a lot.”

Bradley was inducted to the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame and Museum in 2006, and joined many of her early OSU mentors when her portrait was added to The Saddle & Sirloin Club in 2014.

“Surround yourself with good



“To say somebody’s just really great, that’s an easy thing to say. To live it is something else.” — Minnie Lou Bradley

people. Not only good morally, but those that have ambition, that want to do something or have done

something,” Bradley says. “I think that’s what makes you a better person in this life.”

When Bradley’s son Monte died in an accident, her daughter Mary Lou Bradley returned to the ranch. She and her husband, James Henderson, now manage the business with direction from Minnie Lou, whose impact is still felt well beyond her Childress, Texas, community.

“I always worry about some of these things that have happened to me; I don’t know if I’m worthy or not. And I don’t want anything I’m not worthy of. And I worry about, what can I do tomorrow to make myself more worthy of the good life I’ve had?” she asks.

“To say somebody’s just really great, that’s an easy thing to say. To live it is something else.” **AJ**



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