

In the Stars

The 2021 Herdsman of the Year says the stars aligned for her last year at the National Junior Angus Show.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

Every morning since the start of her Angus career, Miranda Raithel has risen before the sun without complaint.

Every morning since the start of her Angus career, the young cattawoman has headed out to the barn, shadowed by her dog, Dean, to work her show string of Angus cattle with a smile on her face and a glint of determination in her eye.

Every morning since the start of her Angus career, Raithel and Dean walked out to the barn with the same goal — to prepare for the 2021 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Grand Island, Neb.

“I put so much thought and effort into Thursday, July 15 — that one day,” Raithel chuckles. “I’ve been planning for it for six months. This summer it was just me, my dog and my nine cows.”

While Raithel’s work ethic has not wavered during her years in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), this year held special meaning. This would be the 21-year-old’s final time stepping into the NJAS show ring, and she was determined to make it count.

Worth the wait

The saying “save the best for last” seems to ring especially true for Raithel. During the weeklong prestigious show, Raithel was recognized at the NJAS for not only



the work she put in this year but the work she’s dedicated to the cattle industry since she first became a member of the American Angus Association in 2001.

Raithel was announced as the 2021 Junior Herdsman of the Year in front of her peers, family and friends. Walking up to receive the buckle, her smile was wide brimming with joy. Raithel says she still can’t believe she secured the prestigious title.

“I don’t know that reality has really set in,” she admits. “It was surreal. When you’re busy, it’s hard to notice other people who see that you’re working hard and doing a good job. As a family, we do our own thing. My parents have always pushed me to

not worry about what others think. So, I just put my blinders on and get to work. The daily grind is what makes a champion.”

The junior herdsman award is voted on by NJAA members, so while Raithel may have kept her head down and her eyes on her cattle, others couldn’t help but notice the passion she exudes.

The herdsman buckle wasn’t the only prize the Falls City, Neb., native took home this year. Raithel won several division titles and led the grand champion bred-and-owned cow-calf pair; but she says the most satisfying win was claiming another banner with Herbster Sara’s Dream 7237.

“Wanda” has been Raithel’s sidekick at the NJAS for the last four years. The female was the grand champion owned cow-calf pair last year and brought home a division banner every year prior.

“This was my last year, and her last year, too. She’s finally retired,” Raithel says. “She’s just the one that always gets me excited. Wanda has been the winningest part of my Angus dream — she was my four-year project to prove that good nutrition can prolong a heifer’s career and help her continue to get to the backdrop.”

Since Raithel took over the Herbster Angus Farms’ show barn at the age of 15, livestock nutrition has always been the subject she places

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the most emphasis on. For cattle of all types and kinds, Raithel says it all comes down to feed.

“Nutrition in cattle is 90% of any presentation. Period,” she explains.

Her parents, Ed and Mandy Raithel, managers of Herbster Angus Farms in Falls City, Neb., are no strangers to the Angus industry. When they brought their young daughter to cattle shows, she was drawn towards the work behind the scenes that it takes to get an animal right through nutrition and feed.

Lifetime of learning

Raithel credits her parents and mentors like Cash Langford, herdsman at Hunter Angus, Fair Grove, Mo., with teaching her how vital a good feed program is in the world of cattle producers.

“The best herdsman know how to manipulate the animal from the inside out through nutrition, and Miranda grasped that concept at a very young age,” Mandy says. “That’s why she loves the challenge of figuring out the perfect feed ration.”

Mandy says she and her husband raised their daughter to focus on “old school” techniques when it comes to raising and showing cattle. Although her parents did emphasize the art of feeding cattle, Miranda easily found her own interest in nutrition.

“I really just love to feed cows,” Miranda says.

That passion is obvious to others around her. From the excitement in her voice when she talks about her work to the no-nonsense attitude she

possesses as she maneuvers around the show ring, there’s no doubt that Miranda was the perfect choice for the herdsman award.

Besides her dedication to the Business Breed, it turns out that being top notch is a family tradition. Miranda jokingly says she was bred to be in the cattle industry, but it’s been her dad who inspired her to strive for the best.

At the National Western Stock Show in 1998, Ed was recognized as the Senior Herdsman of the Year.

“It’s that guy that taught me how to be a herdsman,” she says.

Alongside her parents, Miranda lists Charles and Judy Herbster as individuals who have filled the roles of both mentors and friends.

“They gave me all of the tools for excellence,” she says. “The goal to make Charles and Judy proud is the driving force behind the good fortune of my junior career. I’ll always be grateful for the opportunities the Herbsters have given me.”

Judy passed away in 2017, but Miranda says she still finds encouragement and inspiration from her daily. Judy’s mantra of “We don’t do average” plays through the young Angus breeder’s mind frequently. Miranda continues to strive to make Charles proud in all that she does, and to remember Judy’s legacy.

While Miranda always felt like she had big shoes to fill between both her parents, she’s never been one to back down from a challenge. The work she put in to make this NJAS one to remember proves it.

Miranda has made her NJAA career a top priority but has also pushed herself academically. She received her associate degree in animal science from Redlands Community College, spending time both on the livestock judging team and serving as captain of the beef show team before graduating in spring 2020. She is currently pursuing a degree in business administration and marketing at Peru State College.

Mandy describes her daughter as an opinionated, smart, stubborn young woman. From the classroom to the cattle barn, Mandy says Miranda is consistently at the top of her game.

“As a young lady in agriculture, you not only have to know your stuff, you have to work hard and be bold,” Mandy explains. “She has no problem taking control of the situation to get the job done.”

Like all other candidates up for the herdsman award alongside her, Miranda is soaking up the last few moments of her time as a member of the NJAA. She is grateful to everyone who has been a part of her Angus journey, and she is eager to see where her love for livestock and her talent for feeding great cattle take her next.

Still, for now, she can’t help but bask in the moment.

“I’m actually really glad to be recognized in my home state during my last year,” Miranda says. “Call it the stars aligning, but it’s pretty neat to win the herdsman’s buckle in Nebraska.” 