

Jay and Cathy Clements

Two equine neophytes have found a home with horses.

By Andrea Caudill

IN FIVE YEARS' TIME, JAY AND CATHY Clements went from not knowing how to tie up a rope halter to both finishing in the Top 10 at the Zoetis AQHA Versatility Ranch Horse World Championships.

It has been an epic journey for two people who chose to move to the country and turn their urban lifestyle inside out.

Jay was born into a career military family, and grew up in Houston among other stops in many moves. He graduated from Texas A&M University with a degree in philosophy, and found a career with Lockheed Martin, the aerospace/defense company, for the better part of 25 years. In that demanding position, he traveled all over the planet, moving 20 times.

Cathy, too, grew up knowing what it was like to move frequently. Her father was a California fish and game warden, and their family moved with each of his promotions. She graduated from Purdue University with an engineering degree, and during her career path, she, too, traveled extensively and for a stretch of time worked for Lockheed Martin.

"We have bounced around and have seen quite a bit of this great country of ours," observes Cathy.

The two met and ultimately married while working in Florida.

One day, Jay came home and told Cathy he was done with his corporate job. They decided they were ready to settle in one place for a solid period of time, and they ultimately picked Texas, where Jay could do consulting work and Cathy could still telecommute to her job.

They moved to Dale, Texas, just southeast of Austin, and settled at Balance Ranch on January 1, 2005. While Cathy had learned some rural skills from her father, Jay was a suburban dweller through and through, which meant, approaching 50 years of age, it was time to tackle a completely different challenge: the ranching lifestyle. Their ranch is down a dirt road, to another dirt road and 15 miles to the nearest traffic light.

"Our original intent was to live here about 10 years, then move on to a different chapter," Jay says. "We started as a cow-calf operation and tried to get smarter about horses."

They dove into their research with a good attitude: They bought matching "Caution: Rookie Rancher" baseball caps, signed up for Texas A&M Cooperative Extension courses, bought books and attended the San Antonio Stock Show. They worked their way up, topping off at 60 cow-calf pairs, and did all the work themselves.

"We got book smart, but there's nothing that replaces hands-on experience," Cathy says. "I think we would've really failed if we didn't have our neighbors here."

"We just can't do stuff like this alone, and that's a testament to the ranching lifestyle," she continues. "There were many conversations sitting on porches with people who had been through it before. Most suburban folks would Google it. We decided the smart thing was to do both."

In addition to cattle, they decided they needed a horse in their pasture. While at the San Antonio Stock Show, they watched events like a ranch gelding competition.

"People kept saying, 'These are really good using horses, these are really good ranch horses,'" Jay says. "None of that made very much sense, because we had no context."

Cathy continues, "At that point, we knew there were breed differences, but we didn't know what discipline we were looking at."

"We were green as green could be – kind of a nuclear glowing green," Jay adds, with a note of cheerful humor in his voice.

After several years of research, it was time to pull the trigger. In 2011, they brought home a horse by the name of Kips Biankus Flirt.

"He was a blue roan that was really pretty, had a really big motor and would, as we would find out, absolutely freak out in the show pen," Jay says.

"Buddy" was the horse who would transform their life. It turned out that while Buddy wasn't a fan of being in the arena, he loved his job at the ranch. At first, Jay and Buddy had a lot of trouble – Jay's fear fed Buddy's anxiety – but help

from a local trainer straightened them out. The local trainer was Craig Hamilton, a former world-champion-roper-turned-horse-whisperer, which wasn't something that Jay and Cathy understood what that meant until years later.

"Within a couple months, if that long, (Buddy's) whole attitude changed," Jay says. "A lot because we'd gotten significantly more comfortable being around him, but that whole emotional shift, from him being big-eyed and terrified because he was feeding off us, to coming up and putting his head on my chest and nickering, was what set the hook for me."

What was originally a concession to his wife's dream turned into something else for Jay.

"When Buddy would put his head against Jay's chest and have a conversation, I think they both knew," Cathy says. "Buddy knew he was home, and Jay found a passion for horses separate from his support of my passion. It really was a big switch in how Jay viewed the stewardship of these animals we are blessed to have."

The Horse Thing

A FEW MORE MONTHS PASSED AND THEY DECIDED THEY NEEDED a second horse. On his way to look at a prospective horse, Jay called a trainer they had met in the barn alley at the San Antonio Stock Show – a man named Mozaun McKibben.

"Mozaun's place was on the way when I went to look at this horse, and he said, 'You need to stop by and let's just talk,'" Jay remembers. "So I stopped by and we chatted just a little bit. At no point did I recognize what buckle he had on, nor did he ever tell me anything about himself. It was always just about horses and why Quarter Horses were the best."



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The affection from Buddy, the Clementses' first horse, would ultimately change their lives.



If you're unsure, ask for help, Jay Clements says. "Everyone will tell you why they made their choice. The first SHOT show I went to, five people told me to adjust my stirrups. Three said up, two said down. But the lesson there is pay attention to where your stirrups are. Take in all the information and balance it out."

Jay had decisions to make, and as he sat in his hotel that evening, he did a little more research. He went online and searched for information about Mozaun, and up popped numerous articles about the AQHA Professional Horseman's successes.

"It was like, 'Oh, this guy is a professional, an AQHA world champion rider, he probably knows what he's talking about,'" Jay says. "And you've got to trust somebody."

They chose to trust him. They bought a horse from him, and when he encouraged them to try out Stock Horse of Texas events, they tried that, too.

First, they went just to observe, then tried the clinic, then were convinced to try showing.

"Once we got started, SHOT was really, really good for us," Jay says. "Helping us get our horses trained better, teaching us a new vocabulary."

They cite SHOT's emphasis on education, including its clinics and the posting of judge's cards after a show, as what allowed them to analyze their performance, assess whether they are making progress or getting stuck, and giving them information for future lessons.

"(I had to learn), don't be binary," Cathy says. "When someone says, 'Put your leg on the horse, it's not on or off.' There are shades of gray. As an engineer, it was hard for me to appreciate how many shades of gray there are. But as we've matured and as we've learned the vocabulary of this sport and lifestyle, it's starting to mean things to us."

This past summer, they celebrated their five-year anniversary of competing within SHOT.

Jay and Cathy were continuously encouraged by everyone, from experts to fellow rookies, which drew them into the family atmosphere at ranch horse shows.

"They have become friends," Cathy observes. "That's the cool thing, in my opinion, having attended other association shows and such. I think that's a characteristic of ranch horse people. They want it to be a family, they want it to be welcoming and encouraging, and it surely has been for Jay and me. There is a level of camaraderie as you're waiting around to go; not negativity. Everyone's trying to do their personal best, and it shakes out the way it shakes out."

Suffice to say, their 10-year plan went out the

window several years ago. The world travelers have started growing deeper roots, and plan to stay as long as they are able, and as long as they're still having fun.

"It's a different lifestyle and until you get out there and do it, it's hard to understand it," Jay says. "I'm really glad we've made the decisions we have, with our horses in particular. It's a whole different level of enjoyment. As long as we can still get up and down off our horses, we're passionate about it, and having fun with it, we're going to keep doing it."

While their first horse, Buddy, passed away a few years ago, they currently own four horses.

Jay now rides the 2010 gelding Seven S Limelight, an AQHA Ranching Heritage-bred horse from the Stuart Ranch at Waurika, Oklahoma.

"He is perfect, in my mind," Jay says. "I was specifically looking for a Ranching Heritage horse because of what's available for those horses. I've had him for a couple years now, and he's a really good boy."

At the 2015 Zoetis VRH World, Jay and "Opie" earned multiple top-10 placings and were in the Top 10 overall.

Cathy's horse is The Queens Pistol, a 14-year-old daughter of Playgun. Cathy and "Reyna" placed in the Top 10 at the 2015 VRH World and the 2014 AQHA Level 1 Cattle Championships in ranch riding, and earned all-around honors at SHOT shows during their novice career.

"It took a little while for me to find out how talented Reyna is because I wasn't as an accomplished rider as she is an accomplished horse," Cathy says. "She loves working cows like nobody's business; yet she takes care of my nephew and niece when they come visit."



Cathy, Balanced Catalyst and Dustin Roach before they finished as finalists in junior ranch riding at the 2015 Lucas Oil AQHA World Championship Show.



Cathy's mount, The Queens Pistol, "wants to work a cow like nobody's business."

Jay and Cathy also have two homebred youngsters, both by Mozaun's Lil Ruf Catalyst and out of a mare they previously owned named Surely Gotta Player. The 4-year-old filly is Balanced Catalyst, who was a finalist in the junior ranch riding at the 2015 Lucas Oil AQHA World Championship Show. Her brother, a 2-year-old named Megans Blue Balance, is currently in cutting training.

Growth and Learning

"WHEN I STARTED AT LOCKHEED, I USED TO START MY SLIDESHOWS the same way," Jay says. "Because I'm a philosophy major, my favorite quote is 'I am a wise man, for I know that I am ignorant.' That's from Socrates. If you go at it and say, 'Hey, I don't have the answer, but there are smart guys out there who can help,' there is help. Maybe I can't get my horse to roll back to the left, how do I get this fixed? How do I pick a horse? A trailer? A bit? How do I build my barn? Everything we've done is a reflection of the input we've gotten from other people."

Everyone, from neighbors to fellow competitors, have been generous with advice. And the Clementses are also working to share their passions.

"Cathy and I try to do outreach when we do our roundups," Jay says. "We find people we work with in our professional lives who have never been to a ranch, truck them out here and put them to working the gate on the squeeze chute or helping tag or something like that. They bring their kids and get a whole different perspective, a little more understanding of where their food comes from."

And so, in only a few short years, the Clementses have found their balance.

Among their advice to others thinking about following their path?

"Don't get discouraged," Cathy says. "Everybody had their first time, and you don't get to have this much fun if you don't try. That goes for the horses, the ranching, for almost anything in life. My Uncle Bob used to say, 'Try everything twice – once to find out if you like it and another time to make sure.' Jay and I are not spring chickens. We came to this later in our life. Don't be afraid just because it's new. I think the best thing is there is a whole community out there so willing to help. Go for it!" Q

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