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Stuck in the Past

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through historical war reenactments

The Dog Whistlers
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ON THE COVER



Issy Powell finds comfort and inspiration
in her cozy home.

Photo by Vanessa Polozola.

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Editor's Note

Greetings, WeatherfordNOW readers!

Are you planning to spend some time with family and friends this month? I know I am! Thanksgiving has always been a joyous holiday for me. I enjoy catching up with family members and feasting on all the traditional Thanksgiving dishes, of course.

My typical meal offering is green bean casserole. (I use French-style green beans.) I've also added pecan pie to my Thanksgiving repertoire over the past few years. The men in my family usually gather 'round the deep fryer in the backyard to cook up the

main course. If you've never had a fried turkey – I highly recommend it. If you fry one at home, please keep safety in mind.

Whatever is on the menu, I believe the fourth Thursday in November is a chance to be thankful for what we have and honor tradition with our loved ones.

Enjoy yourselves and give thanks!

Amber

Amber D. Browne
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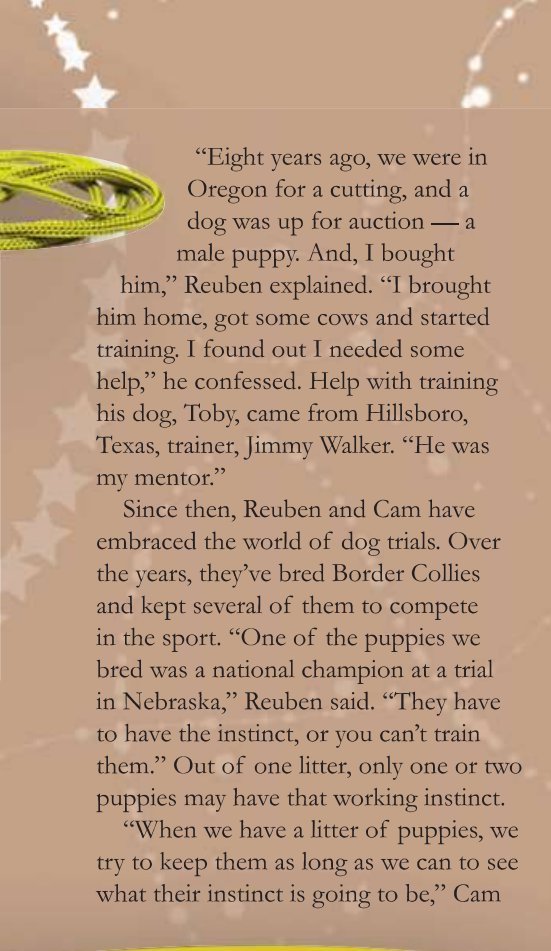
THE DOG WHISTLERS



— By Amber D. Browne

Imagine a life traveling the countryside — driving thousands of miles with nearly a dozen Border Collies and two cutting horses in tow to compete in sheep and cattle dog trials. That is the life of one Weatherford couple. Reuben Parton and Cam Brandon met at a cutting horse event in North Carolina several years back and soon became friends. Because of her interest in cutting horses, Cam moved to Weatherford and started a life with Reuben. They've been married now for 10 years and have spent the past eight years building a life of training and competing their Border Collies.





“Eight years ago, we were in Oregon for a cutting, and a dog was up for auction — a male puppy. And, I bought him,” Reuben explained. “I brought him home, got some cows and started training. I found out I needed some help,” he confessed. Help with training his dog, Toby, came from Hillsboro, Texas, trainer, Jimmy Walker. “He was my mentor.”

Since then, Reuben and Cam have embraced the world of dog trials. Over the years, they’ve bred Border Collies and kept several of them to compete in the sport. “One of the puppies we bred was a national champion at a trial in Nebraska,” Reuben said. “They have to have the instinct, or you can’t train them.” Out of one litter, only one or two puppies may have that working instinct.

“When we have a litter of puppies, we try to keep them as long as we can to see what their instinct is going to be,” Cam



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said. "I've become my own adoption facility for Border Collies, because we try to find good homes for the ones that just don't have that instinct and give them away as pets."

They love all of their 12 dogs, each of whom has his or her own personality. "Night and day. Just like kids. If you have three kids, you have three opposites. These dogs are the same way," Reuben confessed. "My young male dog, Sean, is everybody's favorite." Reuben considers Oreo his strongest dog. The dogs that



compete are kept in a kennel with a dog run, but the older dogs or those that don't have the working instinct get to lounge inside the house. "Of course, Toby, the old dog, sleeps on the bed with me until Cam gets into the bed," he chuckled.

Reuben and Cam work their dogs in both sheep and cattle trials. For cattle



dog trials, Reuben and Cam ride on horseback, which is referred to as rodear (rodeando), or compete on foot with their Border Collies. They compete only on foot for the sheep dog trials.

"Very few dogs can do sheep and cattle, because they have to have a different intensity about them. The sheep are flighty and want to bunch together. So, to move them, a dog has to stay way back off the stock, because any little movement can make them react," Cam explained. If the dog bites a sheep

at trial, it is disqualified. But, in cattle, sometimes the dog must strategically bite on command to control the livestock. "To take one dog and use it both ways is pretty rare. We're fortunate that we have two dogs that are really good at that," she said.

"When you're at an open level of trialing, your dog does most of the work. You have to stand at a post called the handler's post. You stand there, and you send your dog with a whistle or a voice command. Usually open handlers use the whistle to take the emotion out of it," Cam explained. "If it's getting really close, and it looks like the dog may miss getting the cattle through the obstacle, you don't want to excite the dog," she said. "In the open trials, you are kind of stuck standing there at the mercy of the cattle, the dogs and the sheep." In other trials, the handler can move around while



working the dog and open the pen for the cattle and sheep to enter.

A whistle is used to direct the dogs. With one plastic whistle, the handler can blow different sounds to command the dog. "He'll go the direction the whistle tells him: a lie down, a come here or a walk up," Reuben explained. It takes at least one year to train a dog to compete in a trial and about three years for the dogs to learn how to fully understand the commands. However, Border Collies learn and improve throughout their lives. Reuben works with the dogs at least five days a week on a course on their property. "You get a relationship that you don't get with any other animal. They do exactly what you tell them to do," he said. "I don't know any other sport with an animal with quite that level of teamwork."

The Texas Sheep Dog Association sanctions many of the trials they attend.

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The National Cattledog Association (NCA) is another organization that sanctions competitions. Reuben and Cam have even held several NCA-sanctioned events at their home. “We have people from all over,” Cam said. “We had more out-of-staters than we did Texans.”

The dogs compete in various events at trials. “In one of them, they set the sheep out 700 yards away from where the handler has to stand,” Cam explained. “They have to be trained to go in the direction the handler tells them. They can’t even see the sheep, because they’re on the other side of the hill.”

Most trials last from two to four days, and many handlers travel in campers to stay on-site. “It’s a large group from all over the country and Canada. Frequently, we’ll have people judging us from Ireland or Scotland,” Cam said. “He drives the big RV. I drive the living quarter horse trailer. So, if I leave him to go to a cutting, I’ve got a place to hang my hat.”

They’ve made a lot of friends through their involvement with the sport. “We all cook together and socialize,” Reuben said. “Everybody pitches in and helps, but we’re the cook trailer,” he said. “It’s kind of a tradition.”

The Weatherford couple will continue their travels across the U.S. for sheep and cattle dog trials. With five adult daughters between them, Reuben and Cam often have a cheering section at the trials. Three of their daughters live in North Carolina, one resides in California, and another lives just six miles from them. “My granddaughter, Katie, spent one summer with us, and we let her trial a dog. She won,” Reuben said, grinning. It’s a sport that can be passed down to future generations. But for now, Reuben and Cam plan to pack up and hit the road for more competitive adventures with their furry family members. **NOW**

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