

# Reflections from a cow man's daughter

*UW grad student documents seasons in ranch life*

**Laramie** – When Jennifer Faulkner heard about the Larsh Bristol Memorial Award that provides funding for a photojournalism project for UW students, she immediately knew she had to submit a proposal.

“I have always wanted to do some kind of project with photography or film that represents the ranching lifestyle, and from the point of view of someone who grew up in it,” she says of the idea, which grew into the photographic collection “Reflections of a Cow Man’s Daughter.”

Faulkner, a soil science graduate student in UW’s Department of Ecosystem Services, formally Renewable Resources, in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, had also applied to a film school program, so she says she felt the opportunity was serendipitous.

“The purpose of this project is to create a photographic collection representing the dynamic and multi-dimensional life of the rancher, from the perspective of a cow man’s daughter,” wrote Faulkner in her project proposal in March 2011.

## Capturing seasons

After receiving the award, Faulkner began gathering images in March 2011, a project that lasted for a year, through March 2012.

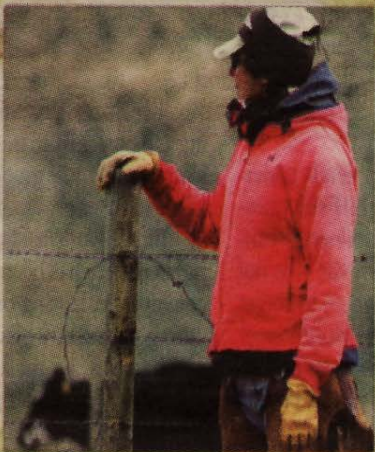
“I tried to capture each season in ranching,” she explains. “It has been my experience that each season on a ranch creates unique imagery with which to work.”

“My initial pictures were from local brandings and spring work,” she notes, saying that reintroducing herself to photography took a lot of practice. “I started locally, but I also had phases of intensity where I sought people out around the state and spent more time editing photos as the year went on and the weather changed.”

Faulkner’s family currently lives on a place outside of Saratoga, but she says she grew up on a ranch north-east of Rawlins, so that is where most of her connections were.

“I also tried to put myself out there, and go to ranch

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odeos and other events to introduce myself to people,” she says, adding that most people were completely gracious. “Some people were hesitant, but I was very surprised as to how many

people said ok. As a result, I saw some really beautiful places, and it was fun.”

**Return to ranching**  
Looking back on the project, Faulkner says her favorite part was being

The following is an excerpt from UW soil science graduate student Jennifer Faulkner’s project proposal, which received UW’s Larsh Bristol Memorial Award. She used the project to document ranch life in her photojournalistic project “Reflections of a Cow Man’s Daughter.”

“I feel a strong desire to give back to this culture, which so hugely shaped my connections to the natural world. I feel extreme gratitude to my parents for choosing to raise their children in the country and on the land. To my father I especially owe thanks for exposure to a work ethic and integrity, which have gone unequally witnessed across all of my travels and experiences.

“As a child I spent countless days on horseback, roaming Wyoming’s sagebrush deserts. I have many memories of being forced from bed, already in the work clothes I had put on the night before just to catch an extra few minutes of sleep in the morning. I would eat a big breakfast, eyes half closed, knowing it might be that night before I ate again.

“Once outside, even the jolt of a brisk frost on exposed skin may not raise my alertness. It usually took the jog around the weathered wooden corral in pursuit of my pony of the day, to bring me to a more conscious state. I was usually dreading the day ahead, imagining the soreness in my body from whatever physical endeavors lie ahead. Whether it was gathering cattle on horseback, fixing fence, driving a tractor or trying to get out of some kind of wreck, I could count on being tired and enduring the harsh scrutiny of my dad along the way.

“I was the only ranch kid that went to the schools to which I commuted 45 miles

## Continuing the project

Of her future plans, Faulkner says her mom keeps asking her about putting together a book, an idea of which she’s not yet sure.

“I realize that, from a technical standpoint, I wouldn’t have included a lot of the photos, had I had a photographer audience, but I felt a lot of them told a story, even if the picture was flawed, and I found it useful,” she comments. “This project has prompted me to want to improve my photography skills in the future, and the medium is perfect. I’m not sure in what aspect, but I would like to continue the project.”

“I feel that ranching is often misinterpreted, and the purpose of this project was to give a voice to ranching that, I think, is sometimes unheard,” says Faulkner. “That’s what I

horseback so much more than she has been while in college.

“I’ve been away the last several years, and being around the people and the exposure to being out there in the ranching environment again was really good for me,” she says.

## Reflecting on ranch life

every weekday. I did not own my heritage as a child the way I so possessively do today. I was always anticipating going to town, where there were lots of treats and people who realized a person did not need to work so hard to make a living.

“My parents did not try to impose their choice to live in the country on their children, once we left home. They instead encouraged us to pursue our own passions and happiness. I spent many years away from Wyoming, and the immediate influences of the ranching lifestyle. Despite this hiatus, the remnants of a childhood filled with sagebrush, dust, hayfields, blisters, galloping horses, belching cows and extreme consequences for poor choices but deep gratification for thoughtful ones, have left a permanent impression.

“Along with the physical and emotional memories of ranching, I am now able to add the comparisons of my interactions with other types of land managers and users, to my assessment of the rancher as a steward. Not all ranchers do a great job of taking care of their resources, but when they do not nurture the land, eventually the odds overwhelm them and they cannot make it here anymore.

“In my experience ranchers have been among the most hard-working, thoughtful, and honest people, to whom I have been exposed. They are a leery bunch, skeptical of promises and long-winded explanations founded on inexperience. But they also share a love and appreciation for the landscape and its inhabitants, which I find is the ultimate connection between this group of people and all others who seek to protect and honor Wyoming.”

**“I feel that ranching is often misinterpreted, and the purpose of this project was to give a voice to ranching that, I think, is sometimes unheard.” – Jennifer Faulkner, UW grad student**

hope to accomplish.”

## Galleries feature photos

One of the requirements of the award is a gallery presentation at the end of the project, and Faulkner says for the show she selected images that she feels represent a rancher’s life, including images capturing the emotion, events, challenges and successes involved in a rancher’s day-to-day as well as cumulative experiences.

Faulkner will show a portion of her images in a university gallery in the Wyoming Union from April 30 through May 17, but a larger show on May 18 at

Laramie’s Hart’s Alley is her addition to the project’s finale.

“I have quite a few more images than fit in the small room at the university,” she says.

Faulkner plans to show over 100 photos at her show May 18. The show will run from 6 to 9 p.m., with a dedication and acknowledgments by Faulkner at 7:30, followed by several readings from Faulkner and others.

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