

PROGRESSIVE CATTLE

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West Edition

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Mali Drachman: Starting small with Highland cattle

Running a cow through a chute is pretty similar to feeding, bathing and putting two toddlers to bed. Although I'm usually not as tired after working the cows.

Mali Drachman is the co-owner and operator of J&C Ranch in western New Mexico. They run a small herd of Scottish Highland cattle on 143 acres of native pasture. Her work on the ranch includes a little bit of everything – purchasing new stock, designing chutes and runs, photography, marketing, feeding and more. Drachman also works off the ranch as an emergency room physician. She is learning about ranching from the ground up, having started this enterprise about three years ago.

How have your experiences working on your ranch influenced your growth, personally and professionally?

DRACHMAN: I am an emergency room physician by trade and have found a surprising number of similarities between ranching and medicine. The bottom line between the two jobs is: There is no such thing as a shortcut. You either get it done right the first time, or you exacerbate the problem and make it more difficult to solve by creating many more issues.

What roadblocks have you run into, and how have you overcome them?

DRACHMAN: I'd say they are the usual – drought, hay prices going up, cattle value unpredictability, etc. The other issue we have is: Our place is very remote, so getting qualified help is very difficult in this environment. We have been fortunate to make a few great friends in this business, like Myron Burnett in Alpine and Bart Wiltbank out of Springerville, a very

dependable livestock transporter. We also deal in registered stock and, unfortunately, we get a lot of people with access to the internet [who] think our cows are "cute" and want them for pets. Now, why someone wants a 1,000-pound pet that can trample you is beyond me. We even have people find us on the internet and ask for "bottle calves." We ignore that request because buying a cow for something to cuddle with sounds like a ticket on the pain train.

Who has influenced you in your role as a rancher? Why?

DRACHMAN: That would have to be my son, Carson. He loves the ranch and everything tractor-related. He thinks everything we do is just a ball. He loves the work, the cows (especially the calves) and the wide-open spaces we work in. He fell in love the first day we put a calf in the chute and he got to get his hands on it and familiarize himself with the animal.

What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

DRACHMAN: "If your daughter ever so much as mentions the word 'horse,' give her \$1 million cash in exchange for her never bringing it up again – you will come out so far ahead." That came from a family friend and, while a bit exaggeratory, it is so true. We have a couple of donkeys to keep the wolves away, but horses seem to be very costly to board and maintain. We'll stick with cows for now.



Mali Drachman is pictured here with her daughter, Juliet.

Photo provided by Mali Drachman.

What advice would you give to other women in your field?

DRACHMAN: What has been really interesting to me is the differences in how my husband approaches a problem versus the way I would do it. Last year, one of our young bulls got through our fence and started having his way with the neighbor's cows. My husband ran over there with a rope and planned on winging it, whereas I took a bucket of corn and a lawn chair over there and called his name and he came running. So, ladies, trust your instincts and ignore your husband's ...

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Photo provided by Mall Drachman.



Juliet and Carson Drachman help work a Highland calf in the chute.

What is your favorite thing about ranch life?

DRACHMAN: Something new every day. The place we work is one of the most beautiful areas on earth, no doubt, but I love the spontaneity of our operation – wolves, fences, calves, equipment, drought, solar, branding, ear tagging, vaccinations, grumpy vets, terrible dog, mud, snow, ice, elk – there is a brand-new problem that needs to be solved daily. I've heard Steve Rinella speak of varying grades of fun. The lowest grade of fun is like buying a ticket

and riding a roller coaster. You have a laugh and a thrill, and it's over. Whereas the most significant grade of fun is that which is miserable in the moment but amazing fun in hindsight. What a privilege to engage in that every day.

What inspires you to come to work each day?

DRACHMAN: I have always found that I accomplish more with better results with a full plate. When tasks are light, so is my effort.

Who are other female role models you look up to?

DRACHMAN: The biggest influence of my life has to be my mother. She raised four kids, virtually on her own, and never complained once. She is the epitome of keeping your head down and working being the best solution to any problem. If more people shared her work ethic, the world would be a better place.

How did you end up in the occupation you have now? Is this what you've always wanted to do?

DRACHMAN: Medicine has always been my calling. I was pre-med at Stanford. Spending time at the ranch helps me unwind, especially after the last few years dealing with COVID-19 in the ER.

If you weren't doing what you are now, what would your job be?

DRACHMAN: I would just raise kids. Running a cow

through a chute is pretty similar to feeding, bathing and putting two toddlers to bed. Although I'm usually not as tired after working the cows.

What is the hardest thing you've ever had to do on the job?

DRACHMAN: It's pretty tough watching the mama cows look into the trailer when their calves get loaded up.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

DRACHMAN: Pulling a calf. Our most productive cow, Felisha, was having a little trouble, so I had to get up in there and pull her calf out. Pretty awesome experience.

Tell me about a time you were most proud of being a woman in ag.

DRACHMAN: I just love the looks I get in town when I tell people we have a cattle operation. Most can't believe it.

What is your biggest pet peeve on the job?

DRACHMAN: Our German shorthair pointer named Gunner. If there is a problem, he is generally responsible for it. He loves chasing our cows too – that is until one of our donkeys gave him the better half of its hoof. That slowed ol' Gunner down for about 10 minutes.

Learn more about Drachman's ranch at jobbigblands.com

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