

Raley-Mae's Amazing Return

After enduring a life-threatening illness and surgery, this young cowgirl bounces back in remarkable fashion.

By Sonny Williams

In August 2009, Raley-Mae Radomske was on the brink of death. Doctors at the Mayo Clinic Hospital in Phoenix, Ariz., had to overcome complications during surgery when they attempted to remove a golf-ball-size brain tumor. After two separate procedures and weeks of hospitalization, Radomske made an incredible recovery and left for home in Ellensburg, Wash. The pathology reports showed no signs of cancer.

Not even a year after her harrowing experience, the 19-year-old amazingly returned to the cutting pen. Not only did she return to the cutting pen, she made the NCHA Western Nationals Non-Pro and \$50,000 Amateur finals aboard her great gelding Venture On Me during the first week of May 2010. Her parents, Jody and Harland Radomske, were both nervous and amazed by their daughter's courage and recovery, but they are also impressed that Raley-Mae has been taking a full course load at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. And as an additional bonus, she is on a rodeo scholarship.

"We are so blessed," said Raley-Mae's mother, Jody. "She's had a remarkable recovery. She's been riding her rodeo horses pretty good, and when she got her invitations to Western Nationals, she was really surprised she qualified because she had just shown a few times. We were worried because she hadn't ridden a cutting horse since before her illness. We said, 'Honey, you haven't had a chance to practice. You haven't ridden a cutting horse since before your illness. Do you



really think it's a good idea?' But Raley said, 'Oh yes, it'll be fine. Cutting's easy for me.'"

Indeed, cutting seems to come naturally to Raley-Mae. She has been riding cutting horses since she was 5. Among her accolades, she captured the NCHA \$10,000 Amateur World Championship in 2004 and won the Girls Cutting in 2006 and 2008 at the National High School Finals Rodeo, all riding 1997 gelding Venture On Me.

Back in the saddle

Confident and unflappable, Raley-Mae had no concerns about her abilities and was ready to jump back onto a cutting horse and continue her winning ways at the Western Nationals.

"I just got out of school and it was going to work out perfect to hit that cutting, and I figured I could make a little money," Raley-Mae said.

When Raley-Mae arrived in Ogden,



Radomske was a Western Nationals Non-Pro and \$50,000 Amateur finalist aboard Venture On Me.

Utah, to compete at the Western Nationals, her parents, on the other hand, were quite worried. Since Raley-Mae hadn't ridden a cutting horse since before her illness, they were obviously concerned for her safety.

"We were really worried because it's a different kind of balance riding a cutting horse versus her speed events, where the momentum is forward. We didn't really know how her herd work would go," Jody said.

Sterling, Utah, trainer Tim Denton gave Raley-Mae some lessons and helped her get her bearings.

"He helped a lot," Raley-Mae emphasized. "He's really good at schooling 'Harry' [Venture On Me's nickname]. He's very vocal and was able to help coach me through the run. He's worked with me quite a bit through high school. He was very good."

"She worked her horse twice and we had knots in our stomach," Jody said. "We didn't know if she'd have balance. She has no right peripheral vision, so she has to turn her head to see to the right. I thought herd work might be challenging for her."

But after her practice runs, her parents', and others', concerns were somewhat assuaged.

"[NCHA President] Chubby Turner came to us and said, 'I can't believe it.' After she practiced her first time, we felt fine, though during her first go in

competition we got sick again," Jody laughed.

Raley-Mae had been in physical therapy five days a week from September (2009) through January (2010). Her therapy was then slowed down to three days a week, but her physical therapist says her balance has almost fully returned.

"It was very stressful for us," Jody said. "She totally outshined us; we didn't even advance. She gets on her horse and shows four times flawlessly; her herd work was perfect; she just had unlucky draws. But finishing fifth in the \$50,000 Amateur and sixth in the Non-Pro, that was pretty great. We were just thrilled."

Though Raley-Mae has encountered some challenges, with one of the effects of her illness being short-term memory loss, she has also done well in the scholastic arena at New Mexico State University.

"She didn't realize college would be so hard," Jody said. "Her doctors can't even believe she is taking college credits. But she got an 'A' in her speech class; she loves to speak. She just loves to learn."

"I love it at New Mexico State," Raley-Mae said. "It's a great school. I really enjoy it there."

Come August, Raley-Mae will be joining the rodeo team full time, having been red-shirted her freshman year. A fierce competitor, she's anxious to throw some loops for the Aggies.

"It was really hard to watch everybody else compete and not get to," Raley-Mae said. "So I'm ready." ■

COURTESY OF THE RADOMSKES

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