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BLUE STEEL MAN



Blue Jeans

The BADGETT Boys

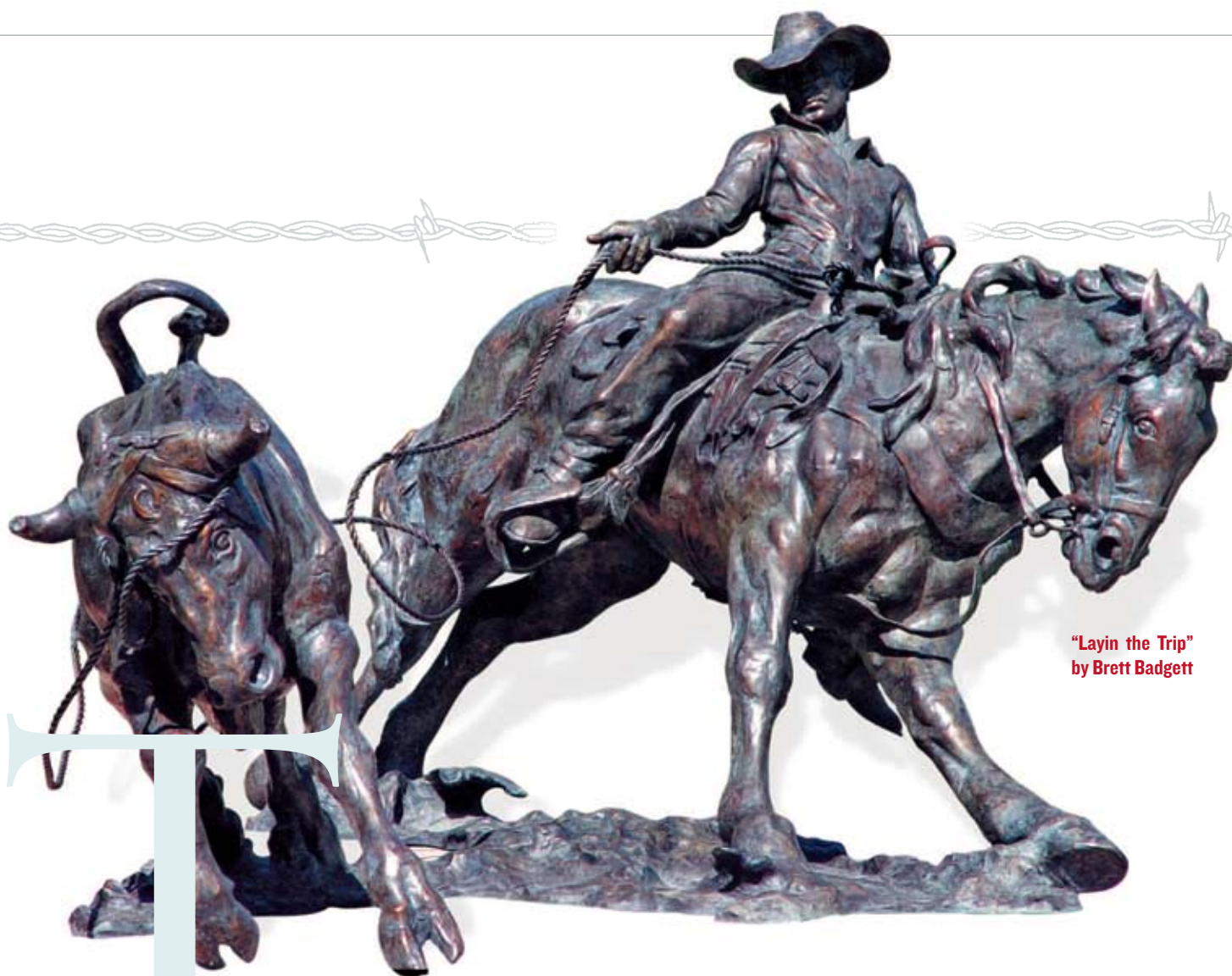
Father and son Wally and Brett Badgett
are different and, yet, the same.

By John L. Moore



Brett and Wally Badgett,
and Wally's alter ego, Earl.





**"Layin the Trip"
by Brett Badgett**

THEY ARE A STUDY IN CONTRASTS, THIS FATHER AND SON FROM Miles City, Montana. The elder, Wally Badgett, rode Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association rough stock for eight years – qualifying for one National Finals Rodeo in bull riding and leading the world for seven rounds – and draws

cowboy cartoons for a living. The son, Brett, is a natural horsemanship trainer and artist whose fine bronzes and oils win awards, draw raves from critics and sell for five figures.

Wally, a National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association bull riding champion, now coaches a community college rodeo team.

"I didn't have an enemy in the world until I began coaching," he jokes.

Brett has a bachelor's degree in fine arts and has trained with master artists. He resists being a full-time horse clinician because of its demand for self-promotion and salesmanship.

"I'd like to be a respected horseman," he says. "Not just a person doing Western art. And in turn, the horsemanship is just a path to the art."

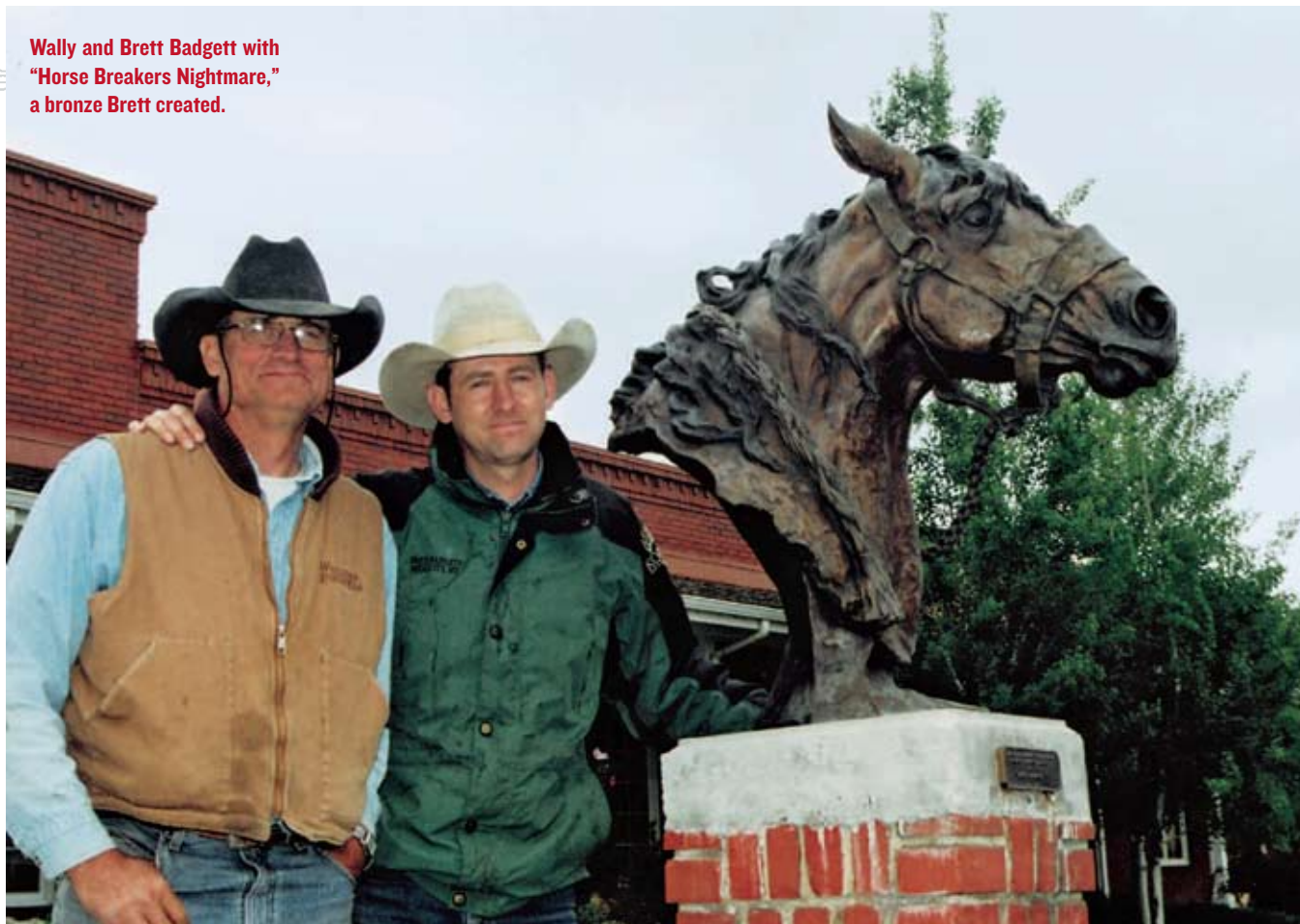
Wally engages people easily but is often frustrated with life's daily routines, like finding his glasses, car keys or wallet. Brett is patient with art and horses but shy with the public and self-demanding about style.

Wally says the main difference between him and Brett is attention span and patience.



**Brett Badgett and
Jeff Griffith work on
getting a young horse
used to a saddle and
rider.**

Wally and Brett Badgett with
"Horse Breakers Nightmare,"
a bronze Brett created.



"I draw cartoons because I can finish one in 45 minutes," Wally says. "Brett can work on a bronze forever. I rode broncs for eight seconds at a time. Brett will mess with a colt for days just to teach it one thing."

"You never really finish with a horse, a bronze or an oil painting," Brett says.

Wally grew up on a ranch on Otter Creek in the southeast corner of Montana. His father, Kirk, and his uncle, Lee, both rode for the famous CBCs, a 1930s horse operation that managed some 50,000 head of stock on the Northern Plains. Wally's mother passed away when he was young, and life was often severe for him.

"My father never wanted to ride unless the weather was absolutely miserable," he remembers.

Wally's heroes were bronc riders Shawn Davis, Casey Tibbs and Winston Bruce.

"I rode broncs and bulls until my brains came in," he likes to joke, but actually it was having a young family – his first child, daughter Whitney, was born in 1976 – that made him hang up his rodeo spurs and return to the family ranch.

The ranch, however, was no longer in the Badgett name. Wally's father had sold it and leased it back. But within a few years, Wally and his father lost the lease, and the Badgetts moved to Miles City where Wally became a deputy sheriff, and his wife, Pam, taught school. His art inspirations came early.

"When I was in the second grade in a country school, I discovered 'Sand' by Will James, and I was absolutely enthralled by the illustrations," Wally says. "All little kids are artists, and everything I learned about drawing horses in action, I learned by studying Will James."

Wally dabbled in pen and ink and pencil sketches for years but it took a painful recovery from a back operation 14 years ago to make him get serious about his artwork.

"One day of watching daytime TV will make a guy find something else to do," he says.

That something else became "Earl," a lovable and philosophic loser who has since appeared in more than 100 newspapers and magazines, 14 books and a series of calendars.

"I've since drawn close to 3,000 Earl cartoons," Wally estimates.

Most of those cartoons show Earl dealing with recalcitrant broncs, adverse weather, heartless bankers and sly lawyers.

"If I have a gift, it's for knowing what's funny and what isn't," Wally says. "The way I grew up, seeing guys bucked off was always a little bit funny."

Consequently, his alter ego, Earl, is a cowboy version of a crash dummy: He hasn't found a horse who can't and won't unload him.

The son shares much of his father's humor, but his approach to horses and art is decidedly more thoughtful.

Brett, 28, attended Montana State University on a rodeo scholarship, competing in tie-down and team roping. Spurred on by a clinic with sculptor Jeff Wolf, Brett's critical success came early with a host of critics' choice and best of show awards.

His half-size bronze of a steer roper, "Layin the Trip," is included in the rodeo event sculptures at the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

While his bronzes are noted for authenticity, detail and mood, Brett is equally at home with oils and pastels.

"I like sculpting because I like to work with my hands," he explains. "But I like oils and pastels because of the color."

Fine hands and artistic detail have also been the measure of his horsemanship.

"What kept Brett from roping with the very best was the price of a great horse," Wally says.

Brett's desire to make his own great horses led him to working and traveling with AQHA Professional Horseman Jeff Griffith and starting colts for the Copper Spring Ranch in Bozeman, Montana.

"I don't want to be a clinician," Brett says. "I train horses for personal reasons. I want to make good horses for myself."

Pam Badgett knows what it is like to live with a houseful of artists – Whitney, too, is an artist and has a degree in art history.

"Wally is upbeat and optimistic," she says of her husband. "Like my students at school, he needs to have recess once or twice a day, and he always seems to find time for it, too. But he's very forgetful. If it wasn't for me, his whole life would fall down around his ears."

Being a diplomatic mother, Pam is reluctant to discuss Brett's weaknesses but finally concurs that his high level of creativity makes it difficult for him to make decisions at times. He sees potential in every option.

"Brett has the talent to be another Charlie Russell, but he needs a

Nancy Russell," she says, referring to the famous Western artist from Montana and his wife, who encouraged him and managed his career.

The focus that makes Brett a fine artist translates into his horse training.

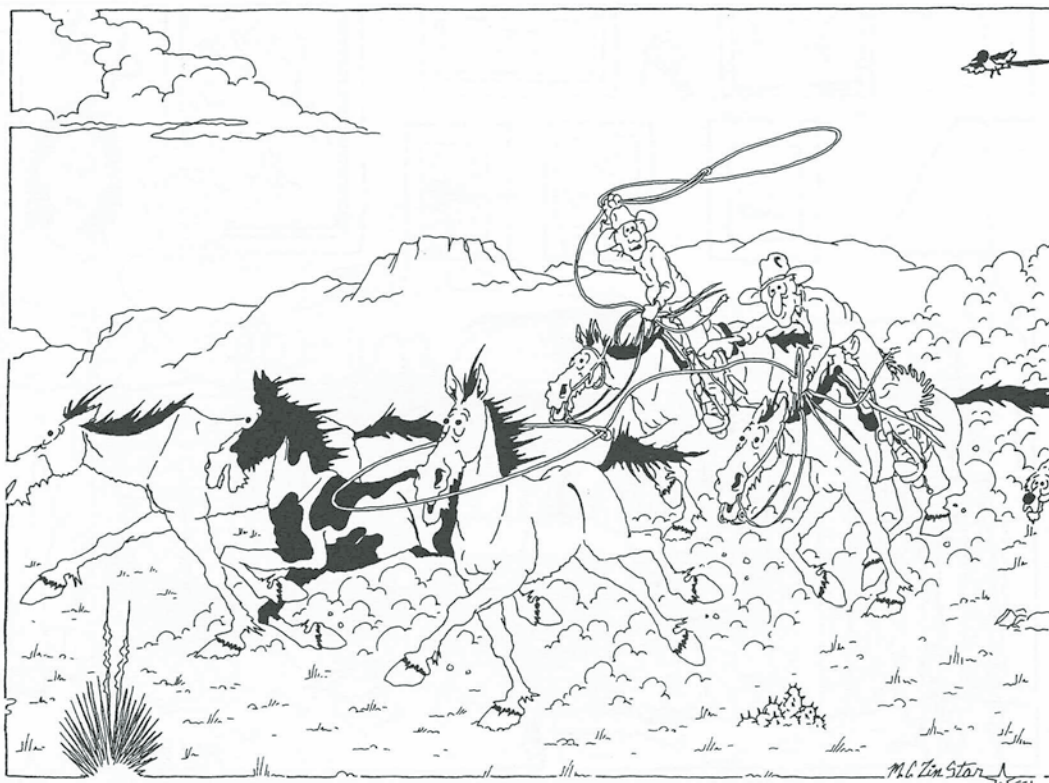
"He's the horseman in the family," Wally says. "He makes a good horse in the flesh the same way as he does in bronze, with soft hands and a good eye."

Wally likes to joke that his horsemanship skills involved being bucked off, piled up, run over and stomped on, but in Brett's detailed rodeo themes – like the sculptures "Undeclared" and "Horse Breakers Nightmare" – the family heritage is more succinct. His portrayal of animals shows the respect he learned from his father.

"Dad's my big hero," he says. "He always has been."

So while their respective streams of creativity flow in separate channels, the source of the inspiration is the same: a deep respect for horses, cowboys and the western way of life. ■

John L. Moore is a Montana rancher, novelist and journalist. For more on Wally Badgett and "Earl," visit www.earlshot.com. For more on Brett Badgett, visit www.badgettfineart.com



"EARL, IF YOU LIKED REGULAR WORK AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE CHASIN' WILD HORSES YOU'D BE A RICH MAN!"

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