

AS
Tootie Bland
production

Ranchers tell stories. Actors
show you the stories. Event
producers create the stories.
And Tootie Bland has done it all.

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“If I had been born in the 1800s, I probably would have been a story teller standing on the side of the street with a goat.”

But you don't need a 19th century goat to tell a story when you've lived the life Tootie has. From the ranch life of the San Joaquin Valley to the bright lights of Los Angeles and the seclusion of Noodle, Texas, her life narrative reads like she's lived more than just one life—all of them equally as fabulous as her wardrobe.

Ranch Life

Tootie admits that she was pretty spoiled growing up in the San Joaquin Valley, in the central part of California. Her grandfather, Ben Crane, was a rancher, farmer and a wine maker. She spent most of her childhood on her grandfather's ranch, lucky to have her very own horse by the age of 5. Her father, Jim Bailey, was a sports broadcaster over the radio, and her mother, Nadine Bailey, was a homemaker. Older brother, Ross, didn't care much for the horses but loved football.

But Tootie was definitely the sparkle in her grandfather's eye.

“I'd spend all day on the ranch with my grandfather. When I started kindergarten, he would call my mom and tell her he was going to pick me up from school, which was all the truth...” recalls Tootie. “Except he would pick me up five minutes after my mom dropped me off at school. So I'd spend the whole day with my grandpa on the ranch.”

Tootie says she had the best of both worlds growing up, living in town with her parents, but basically being ranch-raised because she spent all her free time on the family ranch. While in high school, Tootie competed in the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA) and in open team roping events. She went to college at Fresno State University, then later Cal Poly, on a rodeo scholarship competing in all the women's events (goat tying, barrel racing, roping) in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association (NIRA), as well as continuing to compete in WPRA and work Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association (PRCA) events.

Even after her grandfather passed away the year before Tootie graduated from high school, she still had a little piece of him with her in the arena.





One thing I am known for is : It is not what happens to you that matters, its what you do with it

The essence of this gift received from her grandfather turned out to be something that is still with her to this day. The American Quarter Horse, Slats, was the perfect partner for Tootie in the rodeo arena, her partner in every event at WPRA and PRCA rodeos. And just like her grandfather, Slats taught her valuable lessons that would shape her future.

“He’s the horse that taught me the most in life,” says Tootie.

Slats went blind half way through Tootie’s college rodeo career. While many told the blond cowgirl to put the horse to pasture, Tootie knew he still had the spark in him. She continued to run him in barrel racing, still picking up big checks along the way.

“He taught me the biggest lesson in life, and that was building trust with your horse,” she recalls. “He trusted me that when we ran into the pen and I said ‘Whoa!’ he’d turn because he trusted that I put him in the right spot.”

“It was great, competing with Slats,” she continues. “I was learning what I and my horse was capable of doing. I never would have thought we’d accomplish what we did after his injury, but it was on his faith and trust, and my ability and determination. I had to try. That’s a mantra of mine—don’t be afraid, try it.”

Tootie completed a double major of history and political science. She kept a busy schedule with college and professional rodeos, school and a full-time job. She even completed a Masters in history just because she enjoyed school and the rodeo team so much.

“I always enjoyed school,” she says. “I’m a voracious reader and I just love the history of our nation and the world. I tried to stay in school as long as possible and stay on the rodeo team!”

Her closest friends, whom she still stays in contact with, were met and made in college. Her time in the rodeo arena shaped the next step in her life, as she started to work as an professional rodeo secretary in California, Nevada and most of the Western states.

Little did she know that her off-the-ranch hobby of water skiing would be her next step, and next story, in her eclectic life.

Life in the Spotlight

While working as a secretary at a rodeo in Los Angeles, out of the blue a friend asked Tootie if she could water ski. When she answered yes, he asked her to show up later that weekend to replace a water skier in a movie.

“I thought, ‘well, hell, sure.’ While the idea of water skiing is to stand up, he wanted me to ski a distance and then fall,” she says. “So I showed up and that’s what I did. It wasn’t very hard.”

Thus began Tootie’s career with the Screen Actors Guild as a stuntwoman. Once she received her paycheck from that one water skiing stunt, she was hooked. How else could she earn big checks doing something she loved like water skiing, plus continue rodeos?

“When opportunities presented themselves, I just jumped,” says Tootie. “I’ve been fortunate that opportunity has been laid in front of me several times and I just go for it.”

“I think life is worth living every minute. I’ve been accused often, but it’s true that I like living on the edge. I’ve been fortunate.”

Tootie moved to Los Angeles to pursue her new career as a stuntwoman. As she started to become busier in the film industry, she phased out her job as a rodeo secretary. Tootie began to work on both sides of the camera as a stuntwoman and as a producer. She thrived most on being behind the camera, letting her imagination run wild as she helped bring ideas to life.

“I love the creation of making the films, more so from what went on behind the camera,” she says. “I loved everything that was possible in the film industry that you can create things from your imagination and watch them come alive, it is story telling at its best. I think that goes back to my love of history—history is just story telling.”

Love Life

Tootie’s life as a single woman turned into history the moment she looked into the blue eyes of Steven Bland at a California rodeo. He was a professional rodeo cowboy from Texas, and the two dated from state to state until he came to Los Angeles, knocked on the door, and Tootie agreed to move to Texas with Steven.

The move to Noodle, Texas, was a dramatic one for Tootie. Coming from the city of angels, where a Starbucks was on every corner, she arrived in her high heels to a dilapidated trailer home on a ranch that was 25 miles from civilization. It was a shock to her psyche when she saw the trailer overrun with mice and weeds.

“But, you know what, it was the best thing that happened to me. There was so much fun, love and adventure.”

The Blands married in 1990. Tootie traded in her high heels for a pair of working cowboy boots again, and together the couple built their ranch and a home.

“Once I got over the shock of (the change), I got along great,” she says. “We were ranchers, which suited me just fine because of my grandfather and my roots.”



Steven became interested in the film industry with Tootie, and together the two worked from Texas, sometimes flying to Los Angeles to be on set. The pair provided animals for movies and were actors and stunt people.

Life on the Road to the Horse

One winter Steven and Tootie brought a mare and newborn foal into the barn to get them out of an ice storm. Unbeknownst to them, in wiping down the foal and getting rid of the ice, they imprinted the filly. As she grew up, the filly did not exhibit any resistance to the things Steven and Tootie were teaching her. Training Miss Olena ended up being a breeze—she never raised a fuss with haltering, saddling or anything. But they still didn't know why this filly was different from the other horses they'd trained in the past.

As Tootie started reading more about Tom Dorrance and stories of the famous "Horse Whisperer," it was then that they put the dots together and realized they had imprinted the filly. The mare, Miss Olena, went on to work in the film industry as a popular cast horse for notable films, and an event for the ages had been sparked.

Discussions at the dinner table turned into talking about clinicians with their own gentling techniques, who took rogue horses and gentled them, building a relationship and partnership with the horse. Steven, the Texas-raised cowboy, was skeptical about the process.

"So being the people that we are, the first thing that came to mind was to find the proof in the pudding," says Tootie. "We talked about creating a competition to see if it was possible to gentle a horse like these clinicians say they can."

The original name of Road To The Horse was El Camino Del Caballo. Tootie and Steven wanted people to go back to the horse and learn, on his terms, how to communicate and build a partnership.

That first event debuted in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2003. While it wasn't a success financially, it was a success because it was proof to Steven that you could take an undomesticated horse and gentle it enough to be ridden. He and Tootie wanted to share more with horse enthusiasts everywhere.

"It was all of a sudden a burning passion where you feel that you have this knowledge and you want to share it with everyone," says Tootie.

"For both Steven and I, we can attribute everything that's ever happened to us to the horse," she continues. "For me, I had a great family relationship, got through college and meeting my best friends because of my horses, spent a lot of time working Westerns, I was at a rodeo when I was given the opportunity to work in the film industry and meeting my husband. If it weren't for the horses, none of that would have ever happened. I feel a tremendous debt with the horse, and I feel so much gratitude with the animal that I want to make life better for him as he has done for me."

Steven pushed to have a second competition, so the couple moved it East to aim it towards a new crowd in Murfreesboro, Tenn. The move proved to be successful because the stands were packed with 4,000 fans—a growth of more than 100 percent.

"Nobody was more shocked and surprised than me," laughs Tootie.

Since then, the event has grown to international status with television coverage and waiting lists for tickets. The move to Lexington, Ky., was to help accommodate the popularity of the event. It's definitely not your typical horse event,

Steven was able to see their small event turn successful before he passed away suddenly in 2005. He was only 47.

"I will never be as thankful in my entire life than I am that my husband got to see Road To The Horse be successful. To see all those people in the stands, all the cars lined up...I couldn't believe it," says Tootie. "We walked up to the gate together and Steven was holding my hand. He looked down and winked at me, and that said it all. He was my best friend, my husband, lover, business partner..."

"Life is worth living every minute."

Steven's death crippled Tootie.

"I really did not think that I could put one foot in front of the other," she recalls. "I couldn't think about Road To The Horse, I couldn't breathe. I did not know how I was going to survive without him."

Amongst all the emails, phone calls and cards Tootie received in the months following Steven's death, there was one card from an old friend and fellow stuntwoman, Mae Boss, who simply said: "Tootie, I know you got bucked off hard. All I'm asking you to do is get to your knees." Mae wanted Tootie to just try. Those words pushed Tootie to stand up and put one foot in front of the other.

"Steven made me think that I can do anything—he instilled that into me," she says. "He was such an example of how courageous and strong he was because of his childhood diabetes. He showed me what courage was and that life was worth living. I had to prove to him that he was right to have that belief in me. A lot of this has been a drive inside of me to do this for him."

Life Under Construction

The Road To The Horse is much more than another horse event—it's an event for the people just as much as for the horse. The atmosphere is electric, with attendees buzzing about the horses and the clinicians. That electricity is what started to draw more and more people that wanted to work with Tootie, including multiple world champion mounted shooter Tammy Sronce, who now calls Tootie a friend.

"The first time I attended Road To The Horse, I was working as a sponsor, and I really didn't want to go because I had

been to so many horse expos and events," explains Sronce, Director of Operations for Road To The Horse. "From the minute I got there, I was just in awe of what I was seeing. I had never seen a celebration of the horse quite like it."

"Horses, in general, have taught me over a lifetime that courage, understanding, patience, communication and unconditional love are all life lessons. They all apply in life," says Tootie. "We need to learn to communicate. We need to be able to unconditionally love—be it human or animal. Isn't that what we need to do in real life with our partners and our friends? Road To The Horse is bigger than just the equine industry."

"We have seen miracles. We've seen things that, honestly, you have to see to believe," she says. "All the way to Clinton Anderson standing on the back of his horse at the very first event—I thought I had seen it all and it brought me to tears."

Passion is what drives Tootie.

"You will never see someone as passionate about the horse and about life as Tootie," says Tammy. "She's definitely someone you want to befriend—when you need a friend, she's there. And you can't help but feed off of her passion for Road To The Horse."

"There isn't anything you can't do. Follow your passion," Tootie persists. "No matter who you are, if you put your mind to it, you can do it."

The road in life is paved in uncertainty, but Tootie has learned that you don't just roll with the punches, but you make your destiny.

"I've had a great life—even though it's been blemished, I've had a great life. If it were to end tomorrow, it was a wonderful, wonderful life with a great man in it, and I've enjoyed it."



Tootie, the Western Fashionista

"I think I was born a fashionista," she says. "It's an expensive habit, but I love the creation of a fabulous outfit. I love fashion, but I don't like talking about how big my closet is!"

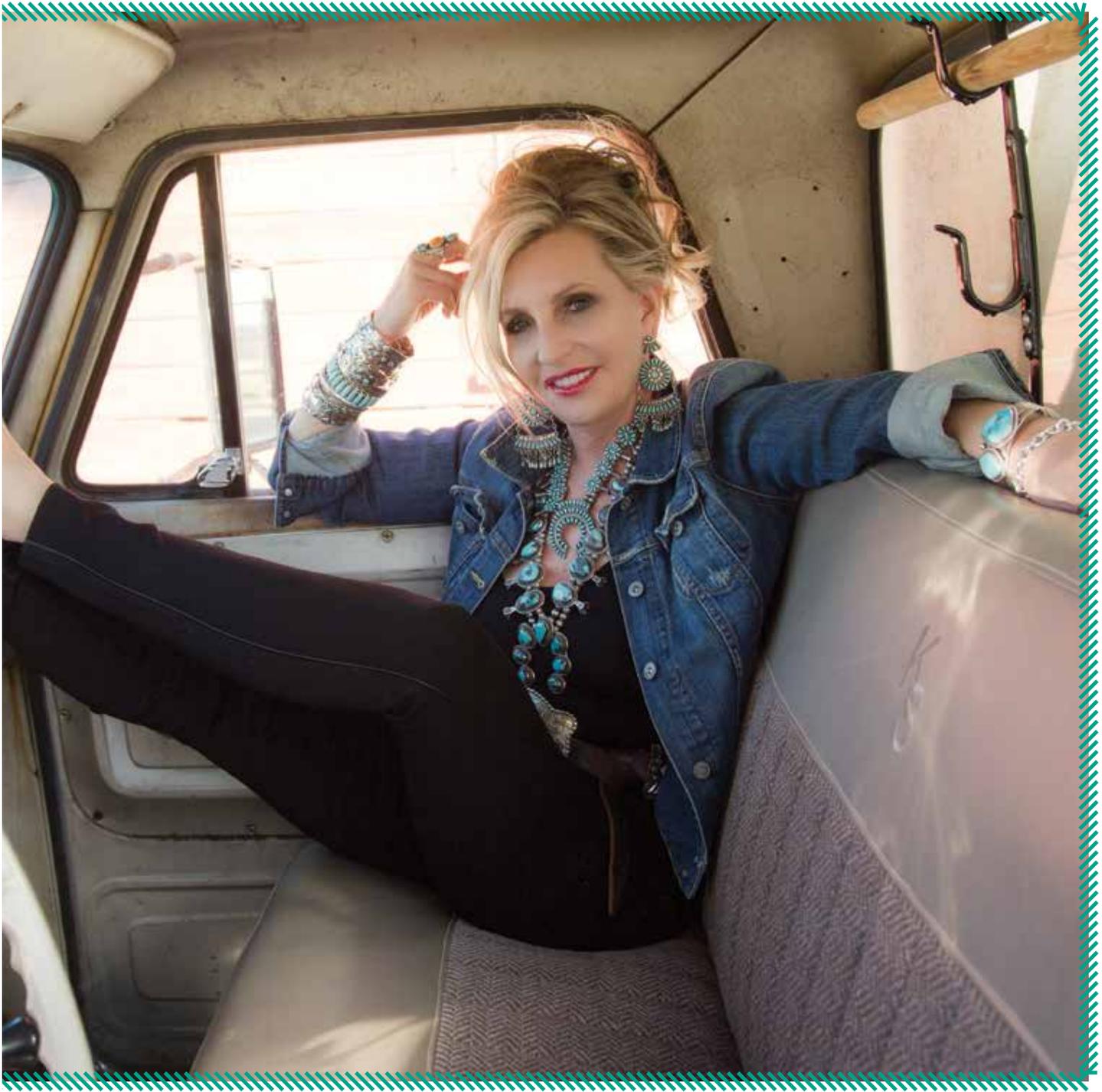
Tootie likes to pick up items from swap meets and combine her finds with pieces from High End Boutiques and vintage stores, mixing Western wear with high fashion for her own style. She's a fan of Trace Outlaw boots, JW Brooks hats, Wild Rags silk scarves and Rickrageous jackets. Her most favorite jacket from Rickrageous was a Christmas present from Steven, and you will see her wear the Yellow Rose of Texas jacket at least once

during the Road To The Horse every year.

During the Road To The Horse event, it's not hard to spot Tootie—she's the blonde that's sparkling from hat to the tips of her boots.

But Tootie's quick to point out she doesn't always look that fabulous when she's working on the ranch in Noodle.

"I'm not put together all the time. On the ranch I wear jeans, worn out cowboy boots, and a shirt that most likely has 'Road To The Horse' on it," she laughs.



The Political Side of Tootie

The political fires are just starting to warm up, and everyone tends to have something to say about the state of the country or the economy. Tootie Bland will be the first to admit that she's not always politically correct, but she is always concerned about the future.

"I'm very worried about Western heritage being passé," she explains. "The cattle industry and horse industry, in particular, have a lot of challenges and hurdles ahead because our children are no longer as interested in the Western lifestyle as they once were. I feel like the youth need to put down their phones and

get back to what is really important in life, and that's family, life...the Western lifestyle is where your word is your bond. I feel like that's diminishing." 🤠

