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TAMING THE WEST ON THE BACKS OF MORGANS

Bobbi Blankenship's love of our breed is both heartfelt and pragmatic. The Morgan has been her family's perfect companion for ranch life.

By Laura Hornick Behning

Horses are still a valuable part of the workday in many parts of the world. The American West is one such place. Horses can get to areas that a mechanized vehicle cannot. They are less likely to spook cattle, and for an observant rider, a horse's reactions and ear movements can give advance warning of danger or a stray calf down in the bush. The spirit of cooperation is strong in the West. Ranchers help one another in times of need, doing everything from branding calves to rounding up strays.

One day Bobbi Blankenship, of TruWest Morgans in Glendive, Montana, received a phone call from a neighbor needing assistance with some particularly wily escapee cattle. She and son Jesse saddled up and headed over to help. The neighbor was not joking; the cattle were pretty wild, but eventually they got them moving in the right direction. The herd slipped down into a gully, and Bobbi followed. The next thing she knew she and her mount were up to their bellies in quicksand.

"I didn't have much time to think," Bobbi remembers. "All I really remember was Jesse yelling at me to get off the horse." She knew that wouldn't be a good idea as she was just as likely to sink anyway. Her next memory was of being on the other side of the mess, on dry land. Off her horse. Both of them safe.

It's no surprise to those of us who know and love the Morgan breed to discover that Bobbi's mount that day—and many other working days like them—was a Morgan.

Bobbi's attraction to Morgans started quite young. Her teenage dream horse was a buckskin Morgan mare. Early exposure to the breed came via Marguerite Henry's *Album of Horses* as well

as Jeanne Mellin's books. At age 19, Bobbi moved to Montana from Ohio and began working for a veterinarian. The following year (1963) she met and married her husband Robert (Bob) Blankenship and joined him in ranching. The couple eventually had five children: Sally (1966); Johnna (1968); Virginia (1969); Jesse (1973); and Robin (1976).

Bobbi wanted to get a horse that was truly her own, and Quarter Horses didn't really turn her head. About that time *Western Horseman* magazine published an article about Mary Wolverton and her do-all golden palomino Prince Of Pride, "and my heart took off like a rocket," Bobbi says. "That was what I wanted...my horse, a Morgan, that is as beautiful as an Arabian, can run as fast as a race horse, work cattle like any other cow horse, and a whole lot of other plusses that I learned as they became evident later. I ordered a copy of *The Morgan Horse* magazine and never looked back."

Bob's father, like many ranchers of the '30s, '40s, and '50s, had been using and breeding Morgans and part Morgans, so he

was familiar with the breed, but at the time had no pure Morgans in his string. However, Bob's aunt and uncle, John and Selma Blankenship of Savage, Montana, located 75 miles northeast, raised cattle and registered Morgan horses. Selma Venable Blankenship grew up in Miles City with a very strong connection to Morgans. Her father was Joseph Milton Venable, who worked at the Remount Station, formerly the US Cavalry station Fort Keough. It was he who brokered the registered Morgans that were sent out from the old government farm to be distributed to ranchers, Native Americans, and farmers out in the broad western environs of the United States.



ABOVE: Bobbi Blankenship with her "Smokey" (TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke).
RIGHT PAGE: TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke (H-Saracen x Pure D Powder) (photo © Heidi Osgood-Metcalf).





ABOVE: Current junior stallion at the ranch is the dunalino TruWest Navajo Silver (TruWest Silver Suede x TruWest Senate Queen), shown here with Logan Eays up dragging calves to the branding fire and with Sally Birkelo in the inset (photo © Heidi Osgood-Metcalf). **RIGHT PAGE:** TruWest Satin Dolly (TruWest Pure Prairiesmoke x M River Satin) 2007 bay mare, shown here with Sally Birkelo at The Art of the Cowgirl photography retreat, August 2019 (photo by Phyllis Burchett).

“She and Uncle John were married in Hardin, Montana, and later moved to the ranch out of Savage,” Bobbi says. “In 1969 she retired from nursing. She and Uncle John took her last tax return and went down into Wyoming and bought six mares from Johnny Lee of Lander, Wyoming. They were the gleaming gold-coated Gladly Lee, and Lady Of Lee, the Chief Justin Morgan daughter Popo Agie Cora and her mother Red Canyon Squaw, Twin Creek Beauty and her daughter, Lovely Paintbrush. At first, they used stallions from Nancy Rott of Sheridan, Wyoming, whose father Carl Rott owned the Sheridan Press and a number of registered Morgans with the Homeseeker bloodline. Later, Uncle John and son Johnny went to Jackson Ranch and purchased stallions from them, and back to Johnny Lee in 1981 for Pride Of Shoshoni. Their intent was always to produce good, hard-knocking, working ranch horses for the boys to grow up on—Morgans of course. Even after eventually selling the ranch, Selma kept a parcel of land and went on breeding until failing health forced her to move into town. Her last days were spent in a nursing home in Mile City; she passed away in 2004.”

One June day in 1972 Bobbi loaded her little girls into the family station wagon and went to visit Aunt Selma and Uncle John. Since they were quite isolated at their ranch, she wanted her kids to

meet their cousins so they’d have some kids of similar ages to grow up with. Upon arrival, John asked Bobbi if she’d like to go out and see the horses. “I’d told him that I was hoping to get into Morgans, but honest, I was not at all thinking of buying anything at that time,” Bobbi says. “Uncle John was driving, and I was shotgun with the backseat and way back full of kids. We approached a group of mares and foals. Uncle John rolled down the window. Up popped a little face, a deep rich chestnut, big liquid eyes, and a light roan smudge across the forehead as if it had been brushed by a powdered wing. Without a thought I blurted ‘Uncle John, I want to buy that foal!’ It did take some time and camping on their doorstep to get that filly bought, because they wanted to keep her, but I think they finally gave in because I was such a pest.”

Bobbi named her new addition Powderwing. When the registration papers came back, she discovered Selma had added Flee for the sire, FleeField, to the front of the filly’s name. “Morgan papers and bloodlines were all new to me,” Bobbi says “Even so, one horse, one name, jumped off the page and I knew it was something I should remember. That name was Warhawk (Flyhawk x Sentola). I joined the AMHA, subscribed to the magazine, and joined the Big Sky Morgan and Pacific Northwest Morgan Associations. At that time the Morgan magazine featured ads promoting stallions



Rhysia Burchett
PHOTOGRAPHY

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TOP ROW: The smoky black stallion H-Saracen (Chingadero x Teal Eye) with Robin Blankenship in 1993. H-Saracen is the sire of TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke, the ranch's senior stallion; The 1992 black stallion TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke (H-Saracen x Pure D Powder) (photo © Heidi Osgood-Metcalf). **BOTTOM ROW:** TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke shown here circa 2006 with Bobbi's grandchildren Bowen and Riata Smith; Heir apparent to his sire's throne is TruWest Smoky Mntn Chief (TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke x M River Red Candy), a 2019 black colt.

that included pedigree diagrams four generations back. That was very useful for a newcomer to learn the Morgan pathways. It delighted and encouraged me to see names that connected to my horse's family. The directories from the regional clubs were also an inestimable help."

Flee Powderwing was started by a local cowboy, Marvin Ley, as a three-year-old. Though Bobbi had no show ring aspirations, Marvin really liked the mare and took her to a few local shows. "In Montana, local means anywhere within our far-flung borders, and sometimes adjoining states and provinces as well," Bobbi explains. "It was amazing to see Powder, in a predominately Quarter Horse world, come out with blue ribbons." Unfortunately, as a five-year-old Powder suffered a very severe wire cut on her right hind leg and Bobbi very nearly lost her. "But just so you know, God really does listen to our prayers and pleadings, and in spite of the vet's dire prognosis, Powder pulled through, but her working career was over," Bobbi says. Flee Powderwing went on to produce 11 foals that would not only help to run the ranch but become valuable

contributors to the TruWest breeding program.

Powder's 1981 foal, a chestnut filly named Mickey Midnight (by Mortana Beaver), became Bob's mount of choice. Bobbi has a favorite story about this mare. "We were branding calves at the south end of the ranch one June day when a big, burly bull calf broke away from the wrestlers and headed north in a high lope (aka warp speed)," she says. "Mickey was tied close by. My boy Jesse looked at me and asked, 'should I?' meaning should I jump on Mickey (Dad's horse) and go after the calf? I said, 'cinch up quick and go!' The odds of overtaking a calf that was bullet running back to where he was last with his mother are generally considered to be pretty slim. The work had to go on, so I just said under my breath 'see ya back at the ranch, Jaybird.' Furthermore, if Bob had ever taught Mickey anything about the rope business, it was news to me, and we were married over 49 years. So, on we went branding. About the time Jesse would've been riding into Glendive (33 miles or so north if he was still in pursuit), I looked up from vaccinating and here comes Jesse, dallied to the horn, Mickey full

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into her breastcollar and looking glad to get back, towing that big calf through the sagebrush with a neck and foreleg catch. She'd never done that before. It was sure a pretty sight."

Another hard-working ranch hand produced by Flee Powderwing was her 1982 colt Shoshoni Coaltrain, by Pride Of Shoshoni (who was by the Brunk stallion Chief Justin Morgan, probably best known as the sire of the frame overo pinto stallion, War Paint). "'Roscoe' was the best cowpony pal I ever had," Bobbi says. "Twice we got to our day's job without a bridle (oversight loading), gathered all day and helped work the herd in a Johnson halter. Lord knows how I loved that horse." Roscoe also helped out with Bobbi's 4H horse club. "Once I took Roscoe and some of the kids and their horses to a little show in Circle Montana, in McCone County," she remembers. "I intended to ride him in the Western pleasure class even though I'm the queen of stage fright. But one of our premier riders didn't have a horse. The family had only two horses, Hawk and Brownie, and his sisters were entered on them. I couldn't bear to see the sadness on his face. I said, 'run over to the office, scratch me, enter yourself in bareback and Western pleasure and hurry back.' So, he did all that and rode Roscoe (who I'd taught to lope real slow and collected, but still a Western pure three beat lope, so slowly he could underlope the Quarter Horses), and won two blue ribbons. This boy was Shaun Stroh. In case you don't remember Shaun's name, he had a blazing career riding saddle broncs and went to the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo four times."

Powder's 1988 filly, Pure D Powder ("Dizzy"), was by the Lippit Pecos son Triton Dallas, bred by Robert Morgan, Gilroy, California, and owned by Bobbi's friends Ron and Anita Fillmore of Apple Pi Morgans, Moorcroft, Wyoming. Around that time *The Morgan Horse* magazine published an article by Barb Fogel about a smoky black Cross Ranch stallion, H-Saracen, owned at that time by Butch Martin. Bobbi went down to Shoshoni, Wyoming, to see him and in 1991 took Dizzy and another mare to be bred. Dizzy's foal from that mating was the black stallion TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke—Bobbi's heart horse. "The next year I arranged to bring Saracen to the ranch on a lease," Bobbi says. "I had him at the ranch for three summers. He was the first stallion I ever managed; he was so gentle, kind, and easy to handle. Best of all he put the finishing touches on the conformation I had been building toward, a genuine double-ended cowhorse conformation: well-exposed withers, full deep hip that drops off a long, smooth croup rounding in well below the level of the stifle, a wide, deep loin, a dry, tidy head, big kind eyes, the

flawless leg set all around, and the most perfect naturally balanced trot which I learned came from Warhawk. Saracen's mother, Teal Eye, and Powderwing's mother, Lovely Paintbrush, were both own daughters of Warhawk (I remembered, remember?). In addition to that list of hopefuls, I also wanted that perfect blend of substance and refinement that was Powder to a T, and enough size for the big guys in my family. Oh...and great dispositions and temperaments. Saracen did all that and was such a joy to be around."

When Smokey was three, Bobbi sent him to Robert Hartford in Black Forest, Colorado, for training. Not long after that Robert mailed her a video showing him riding Smokey, loping around the corral in a halter after only 30 minutes—not days. Robert took



The foundation broodmare for TruWest Morgans was the 1972 chestnut mare Flee Powderwing (FleeField x Lovely Paintbrush), shown here with her 1988 daughter Pure D Powder (by Triton Dallas).

him to some reining contests and cattle events, and soon discovered that Smokey loved cattle work and loved to slide and was happy doing all the other reining maneuvers. "When Smokey was five, we heard that the Canadian Morgan Horse Association was going to produce their first National Morgan Horse Show in Regina," Bobbi says. "Hot dog! Regina is just a handful of miles, give or take, north of our ranch! And they are including Western Performance classes! We're going! We had to support this new opportunity, didn't we? Smokey won the sweepstakes for the Western Performance events and we went home with lots of prizes. I have to say that beyond all that, we were treated so well by our Northern neighbors and met so many really great owners, riders, breeders, and Morgan aficionados in general. After that glow-in-the-dark experience, it was back to ranching again. My daughters Sally and Robin showed him again and again in regional events and in the Western Performance events at shows that were produced

by the Western Working Morgan Association, the Big Sky Morgan Association, and the Morgan International Cowhorse Association" For all his show ring success, the black stallion's main purpose was to be a ranch horse, so whenever he came home that's exactly what he did—in addition to his breeding duties. Smokey has 62 registered foals to his credit to date, his most recent arriving just last year. He has also sired many part Morgans. Not bad for a 28-year-old stallion!

Several of Bobbi's favorite broodmares have come from the M River program of Dave Williams in Harlem, Montana. "Many years ago, I had the golden (pun here) opportunity to lease a bay mare, M River Satin, through the generosity of her owner, Liz McClain, to breed to my cremello stallion, TruWest Shotta Starlight, in hopes of getting my unforgotten dream, a buckskin Morgan filly," she says. "I had sold him but reserved this breeding before he left.

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TOP ROW: M River Satin (Mortana Senator x Red Lu Ann) and her 2012 colt TruWest Smokey Prairie (by TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke); M River Double Take (Mortana Senator x Blazie Phantom) with her 2018 red dun colt TruWest Silver Bullet (by TruWest Navajo Silver). **BOTTOM ROW:** TruWest Glory B Dun (Robbi Sue's Success Story x TruWest Shotta Glory) 2005 dunskin mare, is one of six TruWest prefixed broodmares currently in production at Harvey Seidel's Bar Non Morgans in Thermopolis, Wyoming. She is also the dam of Bobbi's long-awaited buckskin mare, TruWest Savannah Smoke (by TruWest Pure PrairieSmoke) (photo courtesy Harvey Seidel); Pure D Powder (Triton Dallas x Flee Powderwing) with TruWest Little Chubby, her 2005 colt by Robbi Sue's Success Story.

There was one shot only, and we didn't get a pregnancy. But this mare was so terrific; I was able to arrange to keep her for a long time. Her sire was Dave's great producing horse Mortana Senator (Senatefield by Fleetfield, out of Julee Star by Red Flash), the purest of the highly respected old golden cross of Brunk/Government horses. In the time that we had her she and Smokey produced a dozen fabulous using/performance event horses. A bunch of them are still in my family. Sally has two mares, Johnna and my grandson Matthew each have a gelding, Robin has used many of them ranching, in ranch rodeos, and in her job as a district brand inspector, granddaughter Riata has beat the big boys in Mounted Shooting on TruWest Smarty Smoke, named after Smarty Jones who won the Kentucky Derby in 2004, the year he was born." M River Satin made such an impression that Bobbi purchased two more M River mares from Dave's program, M River Red Candy

and M River Double Take. M River Red Candy (Mortana Senator x Red Lu Ann) is currently carrying her third foal by Smokey. This pairing previously produced the colt TruWest Smokey Mntn Chief, who along with his three-quarter brother TruWest Kit Carson (out of TruWest Silver Kitten out of M River Red Candy) are potential heirs to their sire. M River Double Take (Mortana Senator x Blazie Phantom) foaled a gorgeous red dun colt in 2018 by TruWest Navajo Silver. "These mares are fabulous!" Bobbi says. "All three are by the Senator and out of mares that Aunt Selma raised. Dave bought those mares when she sold the last of their herd."

The ranch's current junior stallion is the dunalino, TruWest Navajo Silver (TruWest Silver Suede x TruWest Senate Queen). A dunalino is a palomino who also carries a dun gene; it is a very rare color combination in the Morgan breed. "We are delighted with him as he has proved himself as an easy-train, all-around



TOP: TruWest mares in pasture (photo © Heidi Osgood-Metcalf). **BOTTOM ROW:** Bob Blankenship on Ashley's Beau (TruWest Pure Prairiesmoke x Long-X Ashley), photo taken in 2009; Bobbi Blankenship pushing cattle on her 1995 black gelding Ashley's Beau, photo circa 2011.

ranch horse deluxe, and also as a sire of quality dun foals with limited breeding so far, three for three,” Bobbi says. “I’ve always believed that a good horse is a good color, but I also love variety.” Navajo Silver came to TruWest as a yearling, part of a foal back deal between Bobbi and Harvey Seidel of Bar None Morgans. Harvey had purchased TruWest Senate Queen and already had TruWest Silver Suede. “Harvey and Lois and Sally and I have been great friends for many years,” Bobbi says. “Their late stallion was S-B Pierre Noire, a half brother to Smokey, so we had a lot in common from the beginning. They currently have six TruWest mares in production, and of course, Silver Suede.”

Harvey recalls his first meeting with Bobbi, when he purchased several mares from her some 20 years ago. “We met in Billings and transferred horses from her trailer to mine,” Harvey explains. “Not knowing me and being a businesswoman, she wanted cash.

Which I gave but told her I would never do business with her again that way; she either took my check or no deal. Both of us laugh about that now. That was the beginning of some wonderful days.” Bobbi bred two of her mares to the bay dun stallion Robbi Sues Success Story, who stood at Bar None for a few years. Two bay dun mares were the result—TruWest Glory B Dun (x TruWest Shotta Glory) and TruWest Adobe Rose (out of Pure D Powder), both now owned by Harvey. Adobe Rose is best known as the dam of Harvey’s current senior stallion TruWest Silver Suede (by S Bar B Pierre Noire).

Suede, a smoky grulla foaled in 2008, has certainly stepped into his late sire’s hoofprints, siring 79 offspring to date. Many of them are colorful. His bay dun son Ukelele Charlie NV (out of Bar Non Fiddle) is beginning a career at stud with owner Ryan Droubay; Suede daughter Bar Non Suede’s Princess (dunalino,

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TOP ROW: TruWest Senate Queen (Mortana Senator x Pure D Powder) is the dam of the ranch's junior stallion TruWest Navajo Silver as well as six other foals for Harvey Seidel of Bar Non Morgans (photo courtesy of Harvey Seidel); Full siblings TruWest Smokey Topaz (mare) and Smoke Gets In Your Eyes (gelding) (TruWest Pure Prairiesmoke x Bar Non Bay Jewell) are a matched team that are parade and traffic safe. They have been used to haul vacation Bible School kids around town. Owners John Hutchison and Kristen Cesnik driving. **BOTTOM ROW:** TruWest Silver Suede (S Bar B Pierre Noire x TruWest Adobe Rose), 2008 smoky grulla stallion, Harvey Seidel up (photo courtesy of Harvey Seidel); Eatons Hill Siska (TruWest Silver Suede x Shibui Black Pearl) 2019 red dun or dunalino (color testing pending), filly owned by Tim and Lisa Wong, Eatons Hill Stud, Australia; Eatons Hill Sierra (TruWest Silver Suede x Eatons Hill Malou), 2019 bay dun filly owned by Tim and Lisa Wong, Eatons Hills Stud, Australia.

out of Bar Non Do Something) is producing for Rafter Bar D Morgans; red dun gelding Bar Non Red Shadow is learning natural horsemanship with owner Frances Phillips. TruWest Silver Suede has also put both Bar None Morgans and TruWest Morgans on the international Morgan map. Last year two dun fillies by Suede were born at Tim and Lisa Wong's Eatons Hill Stud in Brisbane, Australia. While living in the States some years previous, Lisa had noticed TruWest Adobe Rose for sale, but the time wasn't right to add her to her herd. She kept an eye on the mare and her son, TruWest Silver Suede, and in 2018 decided she wanted a grulla Morgan mare and contacted Harvey about importing frozen semen from Suede. "It was a very difficult decision for the Seidel family to move Suede

across four state lines to an approved collection facility," Lisa says. "I am so glad they believed in this adventure. He is an amazing stallion. This was confirmed by so many respected people in the Morgan industry, who agreed it would be extraordinary to have those lines in Australia. I believe this old school temperament and hardworking ethics, plus the amazing blood lines, are essential for our Australian Morgan lines. We are selling frozen semen on behalf of Bar None Morgans in Australia and have 15 doses available for sale to the public." Eatons Hill Sierra (out of Eatons Hill Malou) and Eatons Hill Siska (out of Shibui Black Pearl) share the honor of being the first dun Morgans in Australia.

Although participating in shows has never been a primary

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focus, Bobbi's children and some of her grandchildren have shown successfully in 4H Horsemanship, Mounted Shooting, parades, Ranch Horse competitions, and expos. In 2017, a Ranch Horse class was added to the Morgan Grand National. Bobbi and her daughter, Sally Birkelo, really wanted to support the AMHA's recognition of the Western working Morgan, so they entered and headed to Oklahoma with Sally's mare, TruWest Satin Dolly (TruWest Pure Prairiesmoke x M River Satin). "Now bear in mind, Dolly had never worn shoes, been stalled, or hauled like that," Sally says. "Dolly had shown once in 2015 in a Western Dressage schooling show. That was all the exposure she had to a show ring. She handled everything as if she were seasoned. She did everything that I asked of her, well, except for the inflatable ghost! As you know, the aisles were decorated at MGN and as I rode her through a barn, she stopped short and refused to walk past an inflatable ghost! I didn't push the issue, just stepped off and led her past. She had done absolutely everything I had asked, including enduring blanketing prior to our departure as fall in Montana is pretty frosty, and our horses are woolly by October. So, she got a pass on the ghost!" Out of an incredible 38 entries at that inaugural Ranch Horse class, Dolly finished in 8th place. "It was a very special moment for Mom as she watched a home-bred TruWest horse take home a top-ten finish," Sally continues. "Dolly is just simply an extraordinary mare and will do whatever I ask of her. In 2018 I rode her in the Morgan classes at a ranch horse show in Billings, Montana, and she earned the top Morgan placement and a belt buckle. The next weekend we worked cattle, and roped, and doctored calves."

Last summer Sally was invited to bring Dolly to a photo shoot for a photography retreat for The Art of the Cowgirl. The mare was the only Morgan representative in a sea of Quarter Horses. Adding to her increasingly detailed resume, Dolly is currently in foal to TruWest Navajo Silver.

In addition to supporting her local Morgan clubs, Bobbi became involved with the fledgling National Service Organization for colorful Morgans, the Rainbow Morgan Horse Association, shortly after its founding in 1990. The earliest RMHA group ads in *The Morgan Horse* magazine were spearheaded by Bobbi, placing the club and its members in the public spotlight. "I could see color preference swinging back to gold coats, roans, grays, grullos, and other dun expressions," Bobbi explains. "At that time the AMHA was not registering cremellos, which are the quickest way to pass on the cream gene that produces palominos and buckskins. In fact, there was a great deal of resistance to the idea. With the encouragement of the RMHA officers, I attended the AMHA convention, which was in Phoenix that year, and addressed the committee with the information that there was indeed a swelling of interest in palominos and buckskins, and if the AMHA would legitimize cremellos, we could be ready to supply that demand with Morgans. It sounded like a win/win to me anyway. Otherwise, breeding for gold coats is hit and miss, as in miss that market. Still,

there was no action taken on that idea for quite a while, until other breeders stepped in with more convincing arguments that led to the inclusion of cremellos and perlinos in the registry. The RMHA led the way for many other new sub-associations under the AMHA umbrella, and that created a much broader sense of inclusion for many, many members."

Originally, the Blankenships ranched on the Crow Reservation in south central Montana, where their first three children were born. They then moved to a 45 section (a section is 640 acres) ranch south of Glendive, Montana, where they were located for 41 years, raising Hereford cattle as well as their Morgan horses. "The country was big, rough, and timbered, and you needed a horse that would not wear out—a Morgan horse," Sally remembers. "I grew up riding and gathering these big pastures on all-day rides. It was just what we did. Dad was an old-school cowboy and the hardest

working man I have ever encountered. He was also the best cowman I have ever known. Dad never had ear tags in his cows, but he could look at a mother cow and tell you if she had a steer or heifer last year and what her mother looked like. Everything was done horseback and correctly, regardless of the time it took. Cattle were handled quietly and stress free. We rode in the heat and in the cold, starting as little kids. Our gathers would start by riding up to several miles to reach the pasture we were going to work. We would have to mother-up cows and calves after branding and ride into a herd of 300 or more cows with calves and carefully work the pairs out. It took good horses and good stockmanship to do this correctly. I like to think I learned from the very best."

And the family's Morgans have been there every step of the way. "Whatever the day's work is, they do it," Bobbi says. "And they do it willingly and eagerly. They climb big hills like they were flat ground... no need to pedal them up. They help gather big pastures, then rope and drag calves to the branding fire all afternoon. Rain, snow, too hot, too cold, whatever—not a one has ever quit before the job was done, then the long ride home."

Bob Blankenship passed away in 2013. Later that year the family sold the big ranch, and Bobbi, along with Sally and her husband Jim, relocated to a much smaller property in Carbon County. "I can stand in one spot and see all the fences, but I am happy here," Bobbi says. "Jim and Sally are too. They do all the heavy lifting. Up by the mailbox I can see three gleaming mountain ranges, all offshoots of the Rockies. I have had many hip issues but still hope to get riding again. And I do have my buckskin Morgan mare, TruWest Savanna Smoke. I get the indescribable, utmost pleasure just seeing these elegant, uber-useful horses out my windows every day. I grind up carrots and apples and feed them to Smokey in a bowl and he tells me where he wants me to scratch. He keeps himself exercised, running up and down his fence making faces at the lesser mortals, but only when there's someone nearby to appreciate his superiority. There's only one Smokey. Even with two promising scions, there's still only one Smokey. I love him with all my heart." ■



TruWest Savannah Smoke (TruWest Prairiesmoke x TruWest Glory B Dun) is Bobbi's dream Buckskin mare.