

THE RACE & PACE

HERE TO STAY

Written by: Stephanie Tang

Ask 20-year-old groom Marissa Kleinsasser why she's in this industry, and she'll tell you.

"It's just an exciting business. There's nothing else like it at all".

Like many others, Kleinsasser was raised into the business. Her family has been involved in horse racing for four generations, and she picked up the reins at a young age. At the age of 13, she started working as a full-time groom on her uncle's farm. It's a job with early starts, long hours and cold days. Tough, but worth it, according to Kleinsasser.

When school started, she had to cut her hours on the farm. It meant that she missed out on races in Grande Prairie, Edmonton and Saskatoon, as her family would travel around. During the summer, her family would return to Calgary, giving Kleinsasser no opportunity to see any races. By the time she was 15, she was back on the farm full-time. She'd made up her mind on what she wanted to do.

Last year, Kleinsasser became an owner with fellow driver/trainer Preston Shaw. The two co-own Meadowlark Mr B S, and she also helps Shaw to care for his own horse, Outlaw Falcon. Both are a frequent presence on Century Downs' racetrack. It means Kleinsasser is also often in the backstretch, getting horses ready, sending them out and stripping half their equipment when they come back from warm-up. On a rare day off from her uncle's farm, she's busy taking care of her own horses. But none of that has put a damper on her love for her work, from getting to work with her family and friends, to being outside with horses all the time.

"When you work on a horse all week and you're the only one who's touched it, and you put in all those hours and then they go out and win, there's no better feeling than when your hard work pays off."

Kleinsasser is looking to take her career to the next level by getting her trainer's license. The dream is to own a stable in Alberta, where she's lived her entire life, and the license would be a first step. But while she's hopeful that everything goes well with the industry here, she's not bound to it by any means.

"...if it didn't work in Alberta, I'd probably move to wherever racing was still good. I'd like to have a stable here, but in the future. I'd like to travel to see other tracks and explore that way."

And if she couldn't make it work in horse racing? Kleinsasser says she would go on and find something else to do in this industry. Horses have been such an integral part of her life that she can't see herself giving them up. Her outlook on what it takes to survive and persevere comes from those around her, both young people like her who are just looking to start their career, and the veterans who have weathered hard times before.

"I'd like to try and keep this dream alive as long as I possibly [can]. I've seen a lot of people struggle in this industry, but they make it. They get by, they find a way."



If you have any suggestions for upcoming features in "The Race & Pace", please email stephanie.tang@cnty.com