



# From Rodeo Competitor to Photographer

How do you stay involved with rodeo when your body will no longer let you get on a bull? You grab your camera! For 16 years Richard “Whitty” Whittenburg entered the rodeo arena on the back of a bucking bull. Twenty years later, Whittenburg still steps into the arena but now he is behind his Nikon camera.

Whittenburg graduated from Texas Tech University in 1969 with a dual bachelor’s degree in animal science and business administration. While he was enrolled at Texas Tech, Whittenburg competed in bull riding and bareback riding as a member of the Texas Tech Rodeo Team.

“I have made many life long friends with the young men and women that have competed in college rodeo,” Whittenburg said, “especially the Texas Tech students.”

In college, Whittenburg’s dream was to live on a ranch and continue to compete in rodeo professionally. He spent some time traveling to rodeos, but decided he wanted to start a family.

Whittenburg was able to move back to Graham to run the family ranch and raise his three children.

“While attending 4-H shows with my kids, I started taking pictures of them. Back then, there was not someone at the shows taking pictures,” Whittenburg said. “Other parents would ask me if I would take a picture of their kids and from there I just started taking pictures at livestock shows.”

Years later Whittenburg was asked to photograph a local rodeo. Once he stepped into that arena again he said he fell in love with rodeo photography.

“It was just natural that I go into livestock and rodeo photography because of my background,” Whittenburg said. “I could not see myself tied to a photography studio.”

Some of Whittenburg’s fondest memories are from when he was competing for Texas Tech. When he was given the opportunity to start covering college rodeos, he jumped at the chance.

“His involvement in rodeo is what makes him good at what he does; it was a perfect fit,” said Chris Guay, Texas Tech Rodeo Team head coach. “He has this knowledge of animals and being inside the arena allows him to take great pictures.”

Guay first met Whittenburg in 1997 when he started coaching at Texas Tech and said Whittenburg was excited to hear that they were hiring a new coach to grow the program.

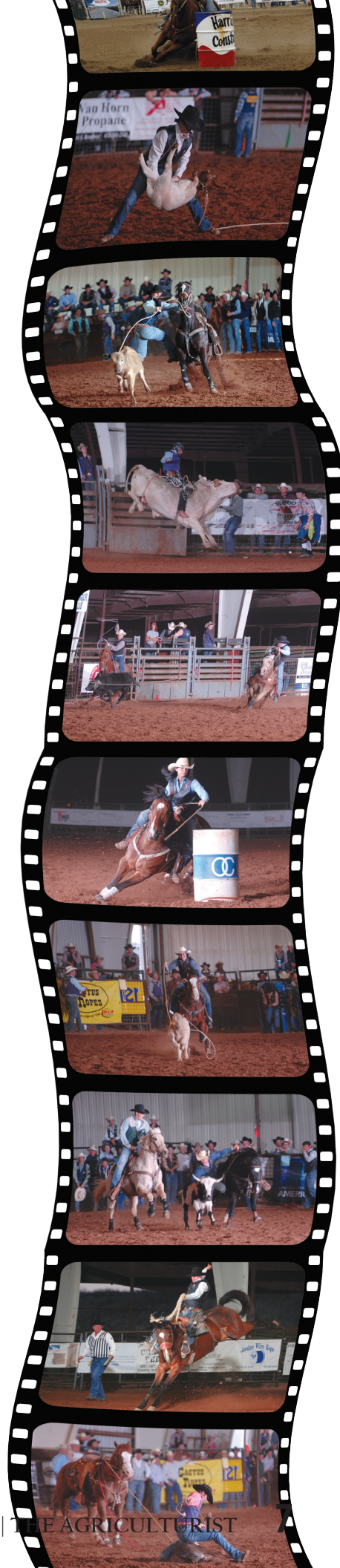
“Having him take pictures of the contestants is great for them and their families,” Guay said. “He can capture those exciting moments for them.”

Whittenburg said he has enjoyed being back in the rodeo arena and able to photograph students.

“Every time I got to a college rodeo one of the first things I would look for is Whitty,” said Ashley Davis, senior in human development and family studies. “I just know if he is there I will get a good picture of me competing.”

Whittenburg said that when he was younger it was all about trying to win a buckle. Now he said he just enjoys being able to capture the action from inside the arena.

“I use to think there was nothing better then winning a gold buckle,” Whittenburg said, with a grin. “But watching a student tie their first calf at a rodeo and capturing that for the family gives me more joy than any buckle or award ever has.”



Richard Kinsey | Del Rio, Texas

