

# BRADLEY WAFFA



## *Sewanee- University of the South*

I didn't begin riding horses until my freshman year at Sewanee. I rode once in Arizona when I was like 5 years old. My parents plopped me on an old mare named Pepperoni at some roadside tourist trap because she was supposed to be tiny, slow, and good with kids. That I ever got back on a horse.

a cranky old lady cantered me halfway across the Sonoran before they caught her and pried my petrified hands from her mane. It's actually a miracle I credit Megan Taylor, my coach at Sewanee, single-handedly for my equestrian experience there. I was on my mountain bike one Fall day, flying down trail past

the Equestrian Center when she ran out. I thought I must have been trespassing; her voice just about knocked me off my bike. She asked me to ride a horse at a show that coming Thursday as her Walk-Trot rider had just 'placed out,' whatever that meant. I told her I didn't know how to ride a horse and she told me she didn't care. "If you can sit on that bicycle, you can sit on a horse. All I need is a warm body to sit on that horse and not fall off. I'll teach you the rest later," she said. I got fifth place! And she did teach me the rest.



As a guy and a rookie, I stuck out like a sore thumb. But my team points counted. I rode alongside classmates who boarded their own gorgeous horses, who enjoyed parental sponsorship, while I was just glad mine paid for lessons and pitched in for muck boots. It was a ton of work, and while everyone at the barn burned with a fiery passion for riding, non-equestrians wondered why I disappeared for weekends at a time. But I wouldn't trade the experience for anything!



I think few things prepared me better for veterinary school than my time spent on the Sewanee Equestrian Team. Not because of the large animal experience it afforded me, though I'm sure that helped me get in, but for untold other reasons. I mucked the stalls and moved the port-o-potties at shows. It was pretty much the blow to my ego I needed before entering a now female-dominated profession with some of the sharpest minds and

strongest personalities you will ever meet. My coach, Megan Taylor, was also my life coach and a mentor — she pushed me physically and mentally farther than I knew I could go. Eric Hubbard, our assistant coach, kept things light when tensions were high. Al Brown, our barn manager, was my spiritual advisor. He taught me to break the ice in a 5-gallon bucket. After grad school at Tulane and veterinary school at NC State, I finally made my way home to





Raleigh where I bought a house with my fiancé and we've already filled it with animals. I'm working at a phenomenal small animal private practice that holds to university level standards of care and excellence but has built its business and reputation on the relationships we build with clients. I love going to work every day and take great pride in the difference I make for pets and their people every day. 🐾