Rising star stopped short in tragedy, lives on in family, friends and ‘his babies’
By Amy Blum

As a young boy, he adored farm life and was known to gently place his tiny hand over top his Grandpa’s as they rode together in the manual pick-up. As the oldest child, he was instinctively protective of his three siblings. As a young man, his infectious smile, caring nature and devoted work ethic told those who loved him most he was going to be a successful man and wonderful father.

While the dreams Jordan Mack had tragically ended in a farm accident on April 17, his young legacy has only just begun, especially within the cattle industry.

Emil & Renee Mack’s 22-year-old son lived – and died – doing what he loved … working with cattle and beside people he loved.

Though Jordan loved sports, especially Twins baseball as he got older, the Watertown native knew he couldn’t compete at the level he wanted in high school. So, when it came time to choose between showing cattle and playing athletics for the Arrows, Jordan chose cattle.

“As a boy, Jordan always loved the farm,” his mother recalled. “He always went to the Black Hills Stock Show, often with my parents (Marv & Anita Hanson of Revillo), and from the time he was nine or 10, he idolized Troy Thomas. Jordan wanted to be just like Troy, and he was on his way to getting there.”

Taking after his mom – who grew up showing Charolais cattle as part of her family’s Crow Timber Charolais Ranch – Jordan attended his first summer show at age eight.

“We bought Jordan a heifer from Troy (Thomas). We took her to the summer junior show, and Troy helped when we got there,” Renee said. “After the show, I was talking to Troy and asking him if he had summer camps or something at his place to help kids learn how to take care of their show animals. Troy told me to have Jordan come on out for a week.”

Soon, a week in the summer turned in to two weeks, and as Jordan grew to a teenager, the weeks at the Thomas Ranch near Harrold became the entire summer.

“After Taylor (Thomas) died, Jordan spent all summer with the Thomases,” Renee said. “He told me, ‘Mom, Troy needs me there.’ We have always been so proud of him and the way he was always there for other people.”

Jordan traveled the country with the Thomas family as he learned the tricks of the trade while caring for and fitting some of the nation’s top animals. He loved his Charolais cattle, but Jordan didn’t share his talents or joy with only one breed. No matter the show, exhibitors in need knew Jordan would be there with a smile if they needed help.

“Jordan had such a big heart and would just do anything for anyone,” Renee recalled. “If I could say one more thing to him, I’d let him know how much we love him and how proud we are of the young man he is.”

Being there for others and working alongside Troy were two constants in his life; however, Jordan’s greatest love was for his family and the cattle he raised and showed with them. The family’s show barn will forever be a reminder of the son and brother who encouraged everyone to be their best.

The Mack siblings – Stephanie (21), Caitlin (19) and Landen (17) – carry on their brother’s dreams every day. They watch over his babies with extra care and attention. They work overtime in the barn and on the cattle to make sure their big brother would be proud.

“As bad as I hurt for losing Jordan, our three other kids are always on my mind; I see how they struggle,” Renee said. “They have worked so hard to have the calves just like Jordan would, and I think they have done an excellent job.”

There is one area, however, where big brother wouldn’t be too happy. Thanks to Stephanie and Caitlin, the Mack show barn is sporting a fabulous shade of hot pink paint!

With a chuckle, Renee said, “Oh, Jordan would be so upset with the hot pink! But, he loves his sisters, and I know he’s still proud. The barn is turning in to more of a ‘girl-barn’, but there’s still so much of Jordan everywhere. From the little brushes he left here to the supplies over there, he’s really all around us.”

“Jordan was so good to his siblings,” Renee said. “The girls could ask anything of him, and if they pestered long enough, they knew he’d be right there for them, even if he thought what they were doing was silly. And Jordan was super proud of his brother. Landen transferred to O’Gorman in Sioux Falls to take part in their athletic programs. Jordan just loved telling people his brother plays for the Knights and was making a name for himself on the team.”

The challenges his siblings face as they move forward without their brother go without saying; however, their resilient nature shines through in all they do. All three of the Mack siblings – along with various friends and loved ones – leave occasional posts on their brother’s Facebook page, and they often check his page just for the connection.

###### On August 11, Stephanie posted, “I come on here often just to think maybe you will write something on here... This is the hardest thing to go [through]!! I miss you so very much! Love you forever Jordan!” Caitlin agreed through her ‘like’ of the post, and folks around the country certainly agree with the sentiment as they think about the loss of their comrade and colleague.

###### “As I look back now, I think about Jordan’s funeral and service,” Renee said. “It was probably the largest service our church has ever had. There were flowers, cards and memorials from people scattered around the country. To know our son touched so many people in such a short time is both a source of pride and pain. It all really reminds me that, for whatever reason, you don’t really know who your true friends are until tragedy strikes.”

###### Renee continued, “There’s a hole in your heart, and it’s just so enormous. No one understands, and everyone looks at you differently not knowing what to say. I wouldn’t wish this pain on anyone. But, we also want people to know that we think it’s good to see things about Jordan. We might cry and stuff, but we like to talk about him and hear his name.”

###### While no amount of wishing, praying or mourning will bring Jordan back, the family finds comfort knowing part of Jordan will live forever in the friends and animals he left behind.

###### “Jordan was so excited about his cattle,” Renee remembered. “This past year his bull had won Supreme at the State Fair. He raised a heifer and sold her down in Texas where she was reserve overall at the Houston Stock Show. His heifer Bailey sold bred, and her calf won a show in Louisiana. He was so excited with the babies he had this spring; he just couldn’t wait for people to start looking at them. Cattle Visions has just signed his bull Crack A Bottle to sell semen.  He was excited; things were just starting to fall into place for him.”

###### Jordan’s family is committed to making sure the excitement their “ring leader” had for livestock, showing and helping others is carried forward.

###### When Renee, Stephanie and Caitlin attended the season’s first show – Charolais Junior Nationals in Kansas City – without J-Mack, there were lots of tears and hard times, but there was also peace as the family awarded the first honor in Jordan’s name to Cally Thomas … a friend he considered one of his sisters.

###### “Jordan won the herdsman award at junior nationals in 2010,” Renee said. “The award was renamed this year, and we’ll sponsor the buckle from here out. Knowing Cally was the first to receive the honor after Jordan really means a lot to us.”

###### After Supreme Row at the SD State Fair, the Mack Family will present the Jordan Mack Memorial Award to someone in the barn who personifies Jordan’s love of quality cattle, helping others and working to be the very best. True to Jordan’s nature, the award will be a specially wrapped clipper box engraved with the honor’s title and year; each year, a new design will be chosen by the family to ensure no two recipients ever have the same box.

###### “College wasn’t really Jordan’s thing,” Renee said. “He loved cattle and the people he worked with. Seeing all those fitters come together to make an animal look its best is really one of the coolest sites. I can still see Jordan in that group of young men, and though they were usually so quiet while working, they were all dedicated to reaching the same goal. We want to remember Jordan by honoring those like him.”

###### The show ring will never again see an original J-Mack fit job. His name won’t be announced as the judge of a show. There will be many more firsts without him.

###### However, Jordan Mack will forever be a legacy in the cattle industry. At only 22, his name was already associated with his idol Troy Thomas, and he worked seamlessly beside industry greats like Jerry Talsma. His list of friends was long, and the list of those who considered him a brother was special.

###### Yes – Jordan’s life was tragically ended far too soon. Yet, the lessons he imparted and the lives he touched were greater than his years. His smile will shine always in the hearts of those blessed to have seen it, and his siblings and cousins can rest assured knowing he’ll never let them forget another tail head on show day!

###### Photo captions:

###### 11summer\_Mack-overall-res-champ-steer.jpg: Caitlin Mack’s Charolais steer was crowned overall reserve champion during the SD State Fair. Caitlin recalls this moment in the months after her brother’s death: *“This day I will remember forever!! :) my brother was soooo excited...broadcasted the whole thing on the side lines with plenty of excitement to dustin and gavin while i was out showing in the ring :).... that day i got the biggest hug i have ever gotten and it brought me to tears!! i love him so much and learned everything i know about showing cattle from him.”*

###### 11summer\_Mack-image.jpg: Jordan Mack (June 17, 1988-April 17, 2011) had a contagious smile and a passion for livestock.

###### 11summer\_Mack-ufit.jpg: Winning the U-Fit-It competition at the SD State Fair was one of Jordan Mack’s proudest moments.

###### 11summer\_Mack-kids.jpg: Stephanie, Caitlin, Jordan and Landen share an unbreakable bond; here, the four paused during a SD State Fair to capture a moment of doing what they love.