

Pawing into prime time

CASNR alumnus Travis Brorsen captures success with 'Greatest American Dog'

Millions of CBS viewers tuned in this past summer to see 12 dog enthusiasts and their faithful companions compete for the prestigious title of Greatest American Dog and a \$250,000 prize.

Dog enthusiast Travis Brorsen, an Oklahoma State University agricultural communications alumnus from Perry, Okla., spent his younger years helping around the farm. During his college days, he was an Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity member, acted in numerous stage productions and wrote stories for the *Cowboy Journal*. He never imagined he would win a prime-time reality show.

A hike of fate

"Presley and I were hiking through Runyan Canyon when a lady approached us about a reality show showcasing people and their dogs," Brorsen said.

Brorsen said he politely declined, telling the representative to look for someone with more experience. Presley,

his 2-year-old boxer, was "high-spirited, not well-trained and a little young to compete in such a large challenge."

"The next thing I knew we were auditioning just like everyone else," Brorsen said.

Before the taping of the show, Brorsen met with a trainer to help Presley "catch up" with the other dogs.

"It was simple," Brorsen said. "Just like other things in life, the more you work with something, the better you will be at it."

His theory can be related to anything. For example, the more you study for a test, the better the outcome will be, he said.

"As a state FFA officer, I gave speeches about hard work, determination and never getting discouraged," Brorsen said. "I had to listen to my own advice."

On the show

Brorsen used his own advice on the show and said, "After a while, it was like the cameras weren't there."

"It was like a really fancy compound, and the fridge was always stocked," Brorsen said. "We were in our own little world — a reality out of reality."

Without a script, Brorsen said he could choose what he wanted to say and had complete control of situations. Nothing was done twice, and he had no outside contact, except for one phone call to Mom, he said.

"Spending 24 hours a day for seven weeks with Presley was so rewarding," Brorsen said. "He became my shadow, following me throughout the house."

Each episode showcased a new challenge, ranging from a doggie dance to a photo shoot. Each pair worked together using trust, talent and skill to be competitive.

"The episode starring the elephant charging down the lane amazed me the most," Brorsen said. "I don't know that I could sit in a circle while an elephant was charging at me, and I wasn't sure how Presley would handle the situation."

Bill McFarlin was one of the 12 contestants living in close quarters with their canine companions.

"Living with 12 dogs wasn't as difficult as most would think," said McFarlin, owner of Star, a Brittany Spaniel. "We had different styles of training, and it was interesting watching the interactions with dogs and owners."

Although McFarlin had his eye on the \$250,000 prize, the friendships — especially Brorsen's — made the experience worthwhile.

Travis Brorsen (left) and Presley join host Jarod Miller after winning "Greatest American Dog" on Sept. 10, 2008.





SHELLY SITTON

The “Greatest American Dog,” Presley, takes a break at “Travis and Presley Day” in Perry, Okla., on Oct. 17.

“He’s just a nice guy,” McFarlin said. “As a father, I can tell you his parents did a good job. He’s a straight-up, honest, Christian guy.”

Everything on the show was real — friendships, drama and competition, McFarlin said.

“When I got the boot from the show, I knew Travis would probably win,” McFarlin said. “He had been getting better and better each week.”

Pursuing the dream

Although the name “Travis Brorsen” may be a new name to prime-time television, he is in no way a newcomer to acting or Hollywood.

“In college, I participated in five or six main stage productions,” he said. “For months before the performance, we rehearsed every night for two to three hours.”

Although Brorsen said friends were living the “college life” while he was rehearsing, he knew he was onto something. He was working on a production for which he was not getting paid or earning college credit — but enjoying every minute of it.

“At the time, I wondered, ‘How great would it be to make a living doing something I enjoy?’” Brorsen said.

After graduating in May 2001, Brorsen worked on the family farm with his parents, Verl and Dianna Brorsen.

Brorsen recalled one conversation with his father.

“My dad was in front of me pulling the swather, and I was daydreaming,” he said. “He stopped, and I didn’t.”

His dad reacted like most would after thousands of dollars worth of damage had been done, he said. He jumped out of the tractor and yelled, “What are you doing?”

“At the end of the conversation, Dad said if I wanted to go to New York or Los Angeles, [my parents] would sup-

port me,” Brorsen said. “I rented a U-Haul and loaded my ’91 GMC pickup and drove to L.A.”

Although Dianna and Verl Brorsen were nervous and excited for Travis, they were 100 percent supportive.

“Be true to who you are,” Dianna Brorsen told her son. “And, remember where you came from.”

One day at a time

Her words stayed with Brorsen as he made the trip to California. He had three months’ rent in his pocket and big dreams in his heart.

“When I got to L.A., it was one day at a time,” Brorsen said. “So many people make goals of being an extra within a short period of time, and when it doesn’t happen for them, they get discouraged.”

Brorsen listened to his own advice from his state FFA officer years and realized he could make his dream a reality. He took it day-by-day, researching acting classes and photographers for head shots.

“I was on the set of *Desperate Housewives*, playing Bree’s [Marcia Cross] lawyer when the actor playing the policeman jokingly said I was really young to be a lawyer,” Brorsen said. “Marcia joked back about my references and education — that’s when I realized they were normal people, but they’ve just been doing this longer than I have.”

Living the dream

Brorsen currently lives in Los Angeles and is working as a full-time actor.

“If in five years I decide acting isn’t important,” Brorsen said, “I will look back and know I followed my passion, went after it, and never settled for anything less than I wanted to do.” • *By Brooke Clay, Perkins, Okla.*