

Tracy Nicholson - 2021

A central coast native since 1969, Tracy Nicholson had a passion for the ranching way of life from a young age. "Words cannot describe the honor I feel in my heart and soul to be selected for this prestigious award," Tracy said. "My fellow Cattlewomen are my peers and my friends. They are strong, kind, hardworking, and honest. I owe those I know today and those who are now gone for this distinguished honor."

Born in Fresno, California, Tracy and her brothers Nick and Steve learned the value of hard work early on from their mother Sidney and father Dorsey. Her father had a plumbing business, and her mother ran her own beauty shop in Fresno. Tracy said her parents taught her "how to have a solid work ethic, to love your family and strive to make your dreams come true."

Tracy first became interested in agriculture at the age of nine when she asked a neighbor if she could help feed their horse. It was not long before she was riding that same horse, discovering her passion for horses and the ranch life.

In 1969, her family moved to Morro Bay to join her grandparents Nick and Shirley Tancredy. Her grandfather was an Italian immigrant who enjoyed having large family gatherings with all five of his daughters' families. "These gatherings were loud and fun with the best pasta ever."

After a few years on the Central Coast, Tracy's family leased and boarded horses at a ranch just outside of Morro Bay. Her father went to work at Diablo Canyon as a pipefitter, and her mother opened up a business, "Sidney Lee and Company Hair Parlor." The value of hard work was instilled early by her parents. "My dad would go to work every day, and when he came home, we would clean stalls and tend to the ranch."

Tracy attended Morro Bay High School from the 7th through 12th grade. At Morro Bay High, she became involved in FFA, taking steers to the fair, participating in public speaking contests and serving in leadership roles, including chapter president. Tracy has fond memories of her youth. "Going to school in Morro Bay and riding my horse Satin on the ranch was a feeling I never wanted to end." It was in high school where she met her future husband Bill Nicholson, a fifth-generation rancher and son of Bill and Myrtle Nicholson. "To me he is everything a husband and father should be. He is a true cowboy—patient, kind and a perfectionist. Being with him was all I had ever hoped for. I thank God every day for him and our life together."

The Nicholsons married in 1978 and had three children, Nicole, Chad, and Clint. Nicole Nicholson Stainer is a Doctor of Educational Psychology, and her husband Tom Stainer is a pilot for Delta Airlines. Tracy's oldest son Chad Nicholson is a detective with the San Luis Obispo Sheriff's Department, and Chad's wife Christine Nicholson is a registered nurse. Her youngest son Clint Nicholson is the Regional Sales Director for OutTech, a representative group for the outdoor industry, and his wife Brianna Nicholson is a buyer for Riding Warehouse. The Nicholsons have four grandchildren, Case (5), Caylee (4), Camryn (2) and Ford (1).

"Watching our grandchildren grow up learning to ride knowing it was in your dreams, does something to your soul," Tracy said. "When you get that feeling, you know you are very blessed. All of our kids grew up on a horse. Cattle ranching is our livelihood, and this is what we do. On the ranch we needed our kids' help, and this made for a strong family bond and close relationship."

With ranches in Morro Bay and Cayucos, Tracy said their lives were very busy, but satisfying. "Our children still played sports, but when it was time to gather cattle, work the cattle, or repair fence lines, those came first. There were a few times that the kids would arrive a little late to their games, but they knew the ranches were our first priority. They understood that, and they enjoyed helping."

While promoting the beef industry with the SLO County Cattlewomen, Tracy worked at her mother's salon. When their youngest son started kindergarten, Tracy went back to school. Growing up with a grandfather that spoke Italian, she decided to take Spanish classes at Cuesta College. "The Spanish language just came easy to me." She was hired by the San Luis Coastal Unified School District as a bilingual aide in 1992.

Throughout her 27 years with the district, she worked for 11 principals from kindergarten through 12th grade. The last 20 years of her career were spent at Morro Bay High School. Tracy was recognized as "Employee of the Year" in 1994.

Tracy said her career path was meant to be. "I find no greater pleasure than helping students achieve their goals. I worked with some of the finest principals and teachers in education. They not only taught the students I worked with to be better, they challenged me and made me better."

Tracy joined SLO County Cattlewomen in 1998. She was a director for three years, volunteering to cook and teach beef recipes to senior citizens in assisted living facilities throughout San Luis Obispo County as part of the "Beef for Seniors" program. She also helped organize the Great AGVenture program where fourth graders spend the day learning about agriculture and the beef industry.

Nicholson serves as the Cattlewomen's first vice president and has chaired the scholarship committee for four years. Prior to this, she served as chairperson for Agriculture in the Classroom, where she created and implemented the idea of bringing speakers to local high schools to talk about career opportunities in agriculture. "It made a huge difference to bring these different careers one at a time to the classrooms," Tracy explained. "This put a face to the career, and it became real to the students."

Though she is now retired, Tracy continues to support local students pursuing careers and endeavors in the beef industry. "As I move through my years as a wife, mother, grandmother and cattlemaster, I know that this is where I belong."