

These ranch-owning brothers  
have business in their blood.

Story and photos  
by Holly Clanahan



GENETICS IS A FUNNY THING. SURE, YOU CAN INHERIT BROWN eyes, wavy hair or even a certain smile. But entrepreneurship?

Apparently, that's heritable, too, at least judging by the Abraham family of Canadian, Texas. And it seems to be a dominant trait.

The three Abraham brothers who are now making their mark on the world, Jason, Salem and Eddie, are doing it in some very imaginative – and very different – ways.

One is a cutting horse enthusiast who owns more than 700 recipient mares, leased out to cater to the booming embryo transfer industry. Another is a financial wizard whose small-town firm sometimes does up to 1 percent of all the trading on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. The third worked as a

commodities trader for about a decade before “retiring” to focus on his cow/calf operation.

“I guess it’s in the blood,” says Jason, an AQHA life member. “It has to come from Granddad. He was a deal-maker.”

So, to understand what influenced this innovative generation, let’s back up a few years.

### Business in the Blood

THEIR GRANDFATHER, MALOUF “OOFIE” ABRAHAM, WAS BORN TO Lebanese immigrants who settled in Canadian in 1913. His father, Nahim, had peddled ready-to-wear clothing out of a suitcase along the railroad before opening a retail store in the small Texas Panhandle town.

# It's in the Genes



Oofie was a colorful character. He graduated from high school at 14, then went to Texas Tech University. He left college after three years, though, to embark on other adventures. According to a biography in the *Amarillo Globe-News*, Oofie once checked coats, sold horned toads at the Texas State Fair and ran a restaurant.

"He was a ball of fire to be around," says Eddie, who's also an AQHA life member.

That exuberance served Oofie well, as he found success in the oil and gas business as it boomed in the 1950s. From 1966 to 1970, he served in the Texas Legislature, using wooden nickels as his signature campaign token. When he lost a 1970 Senate race, the *Globe-News* reported that Oofie

said his opponent "did me a favor and sent me back home to make some money."

Meanwhile, one of his sons, the boys' dad, Malouf Jr., was finding his own way in life. While serving in the Vietnam War as an Air Force doctor, Malouf Jr. was put in charge of an allergy clinic. The Vietnamese jungles were wreaking havoc on many soldiers' respiratory systems, and his task was to help them breathe better. As he experimented, he came up with homeopathic "vaccine" shots that introduce minute amounts of allergens and are designed to stimulate the body's immune system.

When he returned home to Canadian and set up shop, patients came from far and wide to see him and get his shots. In 30 years of practice, in a town of about 2,000, he saw



There are more than 700 embryo recipient mares running on thousands of acres of pasture on the Abraham brothers' ranch in Canadian, Texas.

46,000 patients. Now retired, he has formulated the shots into under-the-tongue drops that are sold over the counter nationwide ([www.allernon.com](http://www.allernon.com)).

## Continuing the Legacy

BY THE LATE '80S, JASON, SALEM AND EDDIE HAD GRADUATED from college, and Oofie, in his own characteristic way, decided it was time to take them under his wings. Jason remembers him saying, "Well, I'm going to take you three little turds and teach you how to make some dadgummed money around here."

Eddie, now 39, had gotten a petroleum land management degree from Texas Tech. Salem, now 38, was an honors finance graduate from the University of Notre Dame, and Jason, now 35, had gone through Clarendon College's ranch management program.

So Oofie formed Abraham Investment Co. with his grandsons in 1988 and placed an ad in the local newspaper. Here's an excerpt: "You will enjoy meeting and dealing with these sharp young men – they're full of get-up-and-go! They told me to get off my rear and get the show on the road. Here's the

deal: If you have some land or minerals to sell at a realistic price, give us a ring. We'll be in touch with you in 24 hours, make you a cash bid within 72 hours, and be ready to pay off as soon as the title is clear."

"With my brothers' interest in ranching, it worked out well," Salem says. "We could buy a ranch and fix it up and operate it for a while, then we might trade it. He was always good at finding an opportunity to do a deal. Even though a lot of the economy may have been doing poorly in '88, what we were doing ended up working out well."

Oofie taught the boys lessons about honesty and integrity as he coached them in business practices. "He had so many contacts," Salem remembers. "It was fun to be able to go with him and meet people who were doing interesting things."

Jason says, "Granddad taught us how to make the deal, and we've been making deals ever since."

## Seizing Opportunity

JASON MUST HAVE SENSED A DEAL READY FOR THE MAKING ABOUT six years ago, when he ran into a veterinarian friend at a cutting horse show. The vet was grouching about problems he was having with embryo recipient mares, the "surrogate mothers" for high-dollar show or race mares that need to continue with their careers instead of going on maternity leave.

This vet was getting recipient mares that were sick and sometimes wild, to boot. In the transfer process, an embryo is flushed from the donor mare and implanted into the recipient mare – so she needs to be healthy, and it sure helps if she's manageable, especially since she'll be mothering the foal until it's weaned.

Jason thought for a moment, then told his friend, "I bet I can fix that problem."

Oofie had owned quite a bit of ranch land, and after his death in 1994, Jason, Salem and Eddie were able to hang onto much of it. They own 61 sections, or about



COURTESY OF JASON ABRAHAM

"Oofie" took his grandsons, Jason, Salem and Eddie, to the local newspaper to have this photo taken when they started Abraham Investment Co. together. In the ad, Oofie says his grandsons are full of get-up-and-go.



39,000 acres. And Jason was tired of running cattle.

He drew up a business plan: buy gentle, halter-broke mares, keep them until it's certain they're healthy, then lease them out to mare owners who need embryo recipients. Then, he took the plan to his brothers. "See how many holes you can shoot in it," he told them. When they found potential problems, they worked together to find solutions.

Today, Jason owns about 700 mares, with plans to expand to about 1,000. He prides himself on personal service – he or his employees personally deliver all their mares to the customer – and the mares' success rate.

"One thing that makes our deal work so good is the mares run out in these big pastures and get to act like mares," Jason says. "When you roll in on a mare that's happy and healthy, she's ready to get pregnant. And most of these people, when they use my mares, their conception rate has gone up by about 10 percent. ... If you've got a good recipient mare, you're going to have a successful program."

Playing a part in the embryo transfer industry seems to be a natural fit for Jason. After all, he's a cutting horse enthusiast, and embryo transfers have long been popular among cutters. Plus, he enjoys the reproductive aspect of the horse business. It's not a stretch, then, to see how he would enjoy standing his own American Quarter Horse stallions.

Smart Avenger is a 6-year-old son of Smart Little Lena who has earned more than \$33,000 in the National Cutting Horse Association. Jason hopes to show him this year in amateur competition.

"He's a new young stud on the block," Jason says. The two more senior sires are "all completely different," he says. "We did that on purpose, because everybody has their own opinion on what kind of horse is the better horse."

Freckles Smokin Doc is by Freckles Playboy and out of Miss Doc Smoke, a granddaughter of Mr Gun Smoke. "He's got some great colts," Jason says. "Most of the ranch horses that we're riding now are out of him, and he had a full sister in the finals at the NCHA Futurity this year."

Strait Silver, who's 18, came to the Abrahams from the famed 6666 Ranch in Guthrie, Texas. His foals have earned 573.5 AQHA points and have also earned money in the National Reining Horse and the National Reined Cow Horse associations. "He's got a bunch of colts out there, and they've done good," Jason says.



In his spare time, Eddie competes in cowboy action shooting, which requires participants to dress in Old West-style clothes and use guns from that era.

Jason owns Strait Silver in partnership with his brother Eddie, the other ranch-loving Abraham.

## Gotta Be a Cowboy

AS THE BROTHERS AND THEIR GRANDDAD BEGAN BUYING RANCH land, Eddie took on the role of ranch manager, supervising the cow/calf operations. Horses, of course, played a major role.

"We used to take a chuck wagon out when we were branding and weaning. We had a lot of good neighbors around then, and we'd sleep in tepees for three nights and cook at the chuck wagon," he says. They never had a designated cook, but "it turned into a deal where everybody had their specialty. You had the cowboys who were branding that morning, that night they were cooking and cleaning dishes."

Now, Eddie runs about 220 head of commercial cattle. Although the chuck wagon is a thing of the past, he still tries to adhere to the old-fashioned way of branding calves.



Jason moves some embryo recipient mares into a corral, where they'll be taken through a chute to be palpated. He determines which mares are about to cycle and are thus ready to be delivered to a customer.

"It's a lot more fun for us," he says. He and his helpers normally rope the calves around their heels and drag them to the flankers, but "if somebody's talking tough out there, we may head one and bring it in to 'em, to see if they can handle it or not."

Horses are also used to move and check the cattle.

Eddie's cowboy lifestyle is one he's long been working toward. During much of the time he managed his grandfather's ranches, he was also a commodities trader, in partnership with his brother Salem, for about 10 years. "My goal always was to be out in the country full time, instead of part time, like I had been," he says, "to have my own place, no bosses, no employees and, hopefully, no debt. We were fortunate ... everything fell into place, and so far, it has worked out."

He's grateful that things have worked out so that he and his family can remain in Canadian. Growing up, "our best times were here in Canadian," he says. "I guess all three of us felt the same and just wanted to come back."

## Big Time in a Small Town

SALEM CERTAINLY FEELS THE SAME way. He had always planned to work in the oil and gas business in the Texas Panhandle, but midway through college, the bottom dropped out of that industry. "I thought, 'Well, what can I do to make a living in Canadian?' A lot of my energy at Notre Dame was focused on that."

He found a mentor who taught him about futures trading, and he became convinced that would be a viable small-town venture.



Salem, like Jason and Eddie, relishes living in small-town Canadian, Texas. All the brothers say it's a great place to raise their families.

"So when I went to work for my grandfather, I said, 'Can I try this trading business on the side?' He said 'Sure.' But he didn't like the futures trading. He said, 'Of all the ways to lose money, why do you have to pick the very fastest way?'"

Fortunately, Salem didn't lose money. He manages other people's money in the futures markets, and in the last 16 years, he has averaged a 25.2 percent rate of return, with only two down years.

About five years ago, he branched off into electronic trading on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. Fiberoptic lines allow him and his employees to make trades in Chicago in split seconds. He likens this technology to the 19<sup>th</sup> century railroad, which came through Canadian in 1887 and opened up a world of possibilities.

"You're out here in the middle of nowhere, but because fiberoptic lines run from the middle of nowhere to Chicago, you've got just as many opportunities as the guy right on the floor of the exchange," Salem says. "You're on equal footing." His accomplishments have earned him feature stories in *The New York Times* and *The Dallas Morning News*, as well as other publications.

On the ranch, Salem limits his involvement mostly to giving business advice. "See, when I go out there, I break things. Or I get hurt. So they say, 'OK, you stay and you run the office side of things.'" He and his children do go out for occasional horseback rides, and Eddie jokes that Salem shows up at brandings just long enough to get a little bit dirty.

## Three's Company

BUT THAT FAMILY JOKE SIMPLY ILLUSTRATES WHY THE THREE brothers make such a good team.

"With the three of us, the nice thing is that we all have different talents," Salem says. "Everyone brings something to the table that helps the others."

Jason agrees. "All three of us are completely different, but you put us together, and we're pretty unbeatable in whatever challenge comes up."

So maybe, besides those entrepreneur genes, the brothers also inherited some DNA that lends itself to teamwork.

"We all own the ranches together, and it's really a neat deal," Jason says. "We're all best friends. You see so many families fighting over stuff, but we're fortunate. Any little challenge that comes along, we all put our heads together." ❏