

Mike and Makayla Bister on the campus of Mississippi State University. (Photo by Dominique Belcher)

LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

For the Bisters, love for Bulldogs is a family affair

By Vanessa Beeson



MIKE BRISTER, '91 POULTRY SCIENCE alumnus, began raising German shepherds before his daughter Makayla was even born. Mike's father gave him his first dog when he was a teenager because the young Bister was interested in becoming a veterinarian. That gift spurred a love of animals that now spans generations with Mike's daughter, Makayla, following in her father's footsteps. Not only does she share his love for animals, she is also a current student in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Mississippi State.

Makayla is majoring in environmental economics and management in the Department of Agricultural Economics while also majoring in wildlife, fisheries, and aquaculture with a pre-veterinary concentration in the College of Forest Resources. If this weren't enough, she is past-president of Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences

(MANRRS) and spent last summer in Washington, D.C. as a Demmer Scholar. She's also an ambassador for the College of Forest Resources and serves on the MSU Student Association's Judicial Council. She's even played trumpet for the Famous Maroon Band and is considering trying out again next fall.

When Mike was in college, beyond making extra money as a photographer for the student newspaper, the Reflector, and shooting for the yearbook, he focused mostly on academics. While he was originally on a pre-vet path, when his father died, Mike decided to focus on finishing a poultry science degree so he could immediately enter the workforce.

Still the passion for animals was there and he continued to breed German shepherds, owning a total of fifteen dogs over the decades. Mike said at first Makayla was a little scared of dogs. When her younger brother was born,

however, Makayla's apprehension abated.

"I didn't realize Makayla was apprehensive of dogs until her brother came along, we had a litter the same time Kylan was born and he showed no fear. After that, Makayla became more comfortable because she had to be the big sister and couldn't be afraid."

Her father said Makayla's attitude of embracing apprehensions and challenges was evident throughout her formative years.

"I remember a time when she was around five years old. She wouldn't leave the park until she mastered the monkey bars. She told at the time, 'Dad, this thing can't beat me.' That's been her drive in life. There is nothing she's encountered that she thinks can beat her."

When it was time to choose a college, Mike wanted to make sure Makayla knew she could go anywhere. That's one of the reasons Mike took a promotion in South

Carolina even though it meant spending time away from his family during the week. "I wanted Makayla to understand that the world was her canvas," said Mike, who has since been promoted to complex HR manager in Carthage, Texas. (He now makes the four-hour commute home every weekend.)

While Makayla knew she could go anywhere, she said her search was over when she came to Starkville.

"MSU was on my radar because I'm from Mississippi; my dad came here as well as my uncle. Also, my brother was five years old at the time and was a huge Mississippi State sports fan. When I took the tour, my mind was settled because it felt like home," Makayla said.

She said her father has inspired her along the way.

"Growing up and saying I wanted to be a vet, Dad would always talk to me about his poultry science days," she said.

"His love of agriculture influenced me. He always said pick something you love and it'll never feel like work."

Mike said watching Makayla come into her own at Mississippi State has been a joy. "My wife and I have enjoyed watching how being a part of the campus has made Makayla so well-rounded as an individual," he said. "She's given her brother a different outlook on the possibility of going off to college. Her confidence has taught him how to encounter new people, things, and experiences and learn how to embrace them. She's given us a lot and absolutely filled these four short years."

The Bisters say they are all huge Bulldog fans these days. The family named their most recent edition, a newborn German shepherd, after Morgan William, one of MSU women's basketball stars.

"When our puppy was born, she was very small. My brother took one look at her and the nickname Itty Bitty popped

in his head so we decided to call her Mo," Makayla said.

This summer, Makayla will be studying tropical veterinary medicine and One Health issues in Uganda. The study abroad includes insight into international animal production and health management, disease surveillance, public health systems, and food safety and security under the direction of Margaret Khaitsa, professor in the Department of Pathobiology and Population Medicine in MSU's College of Veterinary Medicine. The course is in collaboration with Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda.

Makayla plans to graduate in May 2019 and hopes to continue on to veterinary school.