

Jasper's Going to Bishop! Are You?

By Helen T. Hertz

It's hard to believe that Bishop Mule Days is just around the corner. With winter behind us and spring in full swing, we can look forward to turning the corner into summer and to another outstanding Mule Days Celebration. Held every Memorial Day Weekend since 1969, Bishop Mule Days has set the standard for mule shows the world over. From high-stakes competition to hilarious spectacle, Mule Days teaches, entertains and amazes. Exhibitors return year after year to test their skills and enjoy the show, and their mules continue to exceed expectations, proving that "mules can do, and donkeys, too!"

The show has been well documented over the years. Ira Gostin continues to capture the Mule Days essence in remarkable still shots, and "Video Mike" Kerson's popular videos have become a must-have show souvenir. Offering her own unique take on Mule Days is Meredith Hodges. A former champion competitor and long-time show supporter, Meredith has produced "The Bishop All Stars" and "The Bishop Experience" as part of her documentary series *Those Magnificent Mules*, and this year, she offers her latest children's video, "Jasper Goes to Bishop," an enchanting tale of adventure and courage starring Jasper the Mule. Jasper and Meredith will also return to Bishop this year, where Jasper never fails to charm the crowds and thrill the kids.

Meredith created the Jasper character in order to introduce kids to mules in a positive way and dispel some of the myths that have plagued her favorite animals for decades. In 2003, she published the first book in the series, *Jasper: The Story of a Mule*, packed with charming illustrations by her good friend Tennessee Mule Artist Bonnie Shields. Four more holiday-themed books followed, as did the first video in the series, an animated adaptation of the first book. In addition, Meredith produced the "Jasper and Friends Present" music CD, featuring original music from "Jasper: The Story of a Mule" by Riders In The Sky and Nashville recording artist Mindy Ellis and, in partnership with Bonnie, the Jasper Goes to Bishop Coloring Book.

Meredith says she designed the series to be something parents can trust and kids can learn from—something that, these days, is rare indeed.

"In these stories Jasper overcomes life's biggest challenges by not giving up and doing his best, discovering the value of friendship and kindness along the way. I think those are important lessons for children to learn," she says.

"Jasper Goes to Bishop" was filmed over two years not only at the show, but also at Meredith's Lucky Three Ranch in Loveland, Colorado, and other locations. During filming, show management granted Meredith and crew generous access to the grounds and events. Event president M.C. Hubbard could immediately see the advantages of accommodating such a production.

"We're delighted to be part of the birth of this project," M.C. says. "I can just see that it will help people understand mules even more. They can be so fun—such characters—and something like this will personalize them even more."

With "Jasper Goes To Bishop" the Jasper library moves a step closer to completion, but Meredith isn't stopping there. Expect to see animated adaptations of *Jasper: A Christmas Caper*,

Jasper: A Precious Valentine, Jasper: A Fabulous Fourth and Jasper: A Turkey Tale within the next 18 months. In the meantime, if you're fortunate to travel to Bishop this Memorial Day Weekend, be sure to stop by Bonnie Shields's booth to say "hi" to Meredith and Bonnie, and keep an eye out for Jasper!

Bishop Mule Days takes place May 25-30. For ticket information, please visit www.MuleDays.org. For more information about Jasper the Mule and Meredith Hodges or to purchase products, please visit www.JasperTheMule.com or www.LuckyThreeRanch.com or call (800) 816-7566. And don't forget to visit the Meredith Hodges and Lucky Three Ranch fan pages on Facebook.

(Sidebar)

Summer Means Tours at Lucky Three

If your summer travel plans include Northern Colorado, consider booking a tour of Meredith's Lucky Three Ranch and Longears Sculpture Park. Located in Loveland, near the Rocky Mountain Foothills, Lucky Three Ranch is a truly unique destination. Meredith's champion mules never fail to impress and entertain, and her outstanding collection of longears sculpture is beyond compare. To book a tour please visit the "Tour" page at www.LuckyThreeRanch.com or call (800) 816-7566. Tours must be booked at least one week in advance.