



Genevieve Munson, left, holding Mirabelle, and Michaela Munson with, left to right, Zonderling, owned by Genevieve and the Holden Family, and Charlene, owned by the Munson family.

GENEVIEVE & MICHAELA MUNSON

SISTERS IN THE SPORT

By Anna Sachocky
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The first time Genevieve Munson's father placed her on the back of Renegade, the family pony, she screamed and howled like a wild banshee. Genevieve's outbursts came not from being put on the small equine, but when her father tried to remove his daughter from the saddle. "I started riding before I could walk," Genevieve said. "I was 4 years old when I knew I wanted to ride professionally."

Genevieve is quick to note that younger sister Michaela soon followed in her hoof prints. "By age 3, Michaela was asking people to help her tack up one of our small ponies. I was a bit more independent, but by the time the baby of the family arrives, there's a bit more help," Genevieve said.

Today, both Genevieve, age 20, and Michaela, 14, are fixtures on the show jumping circuit. Genevieve placed first and second in the

\$30,000 Tribute Grand Prix at the Wilmington's Winter in the Midwest in 2023 and won the 1.45m national Grand Prix at the Great Southwest Equestrian Center Winter Series 3 in Katy, Texas, last February. Michaela posted wins in the \$10,000 1.30m Cabo Bob's Jumper Classic during the Great Southwest Equestrian Center Winter Series in 2023 and dual victories in the \$15,000 Horseflight Jumper Classic and the \$5,000 Pyranha Junior/Amateur 1.35m Jumper Classic at HITS Chicago in June. And both girls are on track for more.

HOMEGROWN OPPORTUNITIES

The Munson sisters' story begins not on the sand in Florida or the rolling hills of Massachusetts, but on a 50-acre farm deep in the northwestern corner of rural Arkansas. "I definitely had a much different experience than my classmates growing up," Genevieve said. "I didn't really have neighbors. I had friends from school, but most of the time, I was with my friends from the barn, so most activities included things that happened on the horse farm. I definitely had a unique upbringing."

The girls' paternal grandfather was a veterinarian who passed on his interest in horses

to the next generation of the Munson family. When Genevieve's parents bought the family's 50-acre farm, which is now the Rogers Equestrian Center, she was barely a year old. Genevieve's older siblings went off to college, got married and now live what she calls 'normal lives.'

The family never had a recognized trainer on the farm, but pieced together a homegrown education. "My dad always made a point early on that we would travel to get a better education. We figured it out as we went, and my dad was supportive, always finding a way to make whatever goal I had set happen," Genevieve said.

Both Genevieve and Michaela credit their father for being central to success. Five a.m. starts, 10-hour drives, or watching his daughters debate over how to approach a jump-off are simply parts of his role. "Dad has always helped us. He always finds a way to help us get to where we want to go," Michaela said.

As a budding competitor, Genevieve absorbed clinics and trainers' lessons like a sponge, returning to the farm to implement what she learned. Traveling allowed the family to develop an impressive book of contacts with tailored information about training methods and lessons learned. "Because I heard different opinions and voices, I went home and workshopped myself. I think you retain more information that way," Genevieve said.

The homegrown education began paying off early. Claiming the USEF Pony Jumper Championship at the age of 10, Genevieve became the youngest rider to win the trophy in the championship's history. Over the years, Genevieve's skill and networking prowess caught the eye of top-ranked trainers and riders, and many have invested in the making of Genevieve, including Matt Cyphert, who excels at course strategy, and Linda Allen, who has been a global advisor since 2015.

However, life took a sharp turn when Genevieve won the USHJA Horsemanship National Quiz Challenge, and the opportunity of a lifetime came knocking. A Facebook message from Brooke Mallin, a board member of the quiz challenge, said she knew of a prominent person in the industry on the hunt for a rider to come to Europe to work. Was Genevieve interested?

Opportunities move as fast as a jump-off round, and Genevieve found herself on the phone with veteran U.S. show jumper and trainer Katie Prudent. Genevieve flew to Virginia a day later to meet Katie and her Plain Bay team. Within



Photos top to bottom:
Genevieve with Zonderling, known as Joey,
Michaela with Charlene, known as Charli.



Michaela, left, with Mirabelle, and Genevieve. The sisters have both found success in the show world.

a month, Genevieve filled the coveted position based at Rosières-aux-Salines, France, under the watchful eyes of Katie Prudent and Hunter Hawk.

Genevieve's days started early in the French countryside. Feeding and cleaning stalls for an ever-changing rotation of horses, Genevieve demonstrated a work ethic that matched her competition commitment. A scheduled five-month stint stretched to more than a year, beginning in the summer of 2022 and ending in the fall of 2023.

"You can't put a price or value on my time with Katie and Hunter; it was completely unexpected," Genevieve said. "I'm still using the tools I gained in France on a day-to-day basis. The networking opportunities I had while I was in France and Belgium don't happen every day. I could talk for hours and not explain everything that happened while I was there and the experiences I had. I learned so much about my own riding, training young horses, preparing horses to show, and caring for the horses in the barn, making sure they were prepped, comfortable and happy."

Whether Genevieve's year was her equivalent to college, two semesters in trade school or a gap year, the time spent opened more doors—doors the now-20-year-old professional willingly walked through with her sister, Michaela, close behind.

A SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

While Genevieve describes herself as selectively social, she notes that her younger sister, Michaela, is the quintessential social butterfly of the Munson family. Homeschooled and the Pied Piper of the local Pony Club,

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“Dad has always helped us. He always finds a way to help us get to where we want to go.”

~Michaela Munson

Michaela never passes up an opportunity to make a new friend. "Our dad calls her the Pied Piper because all the children at the farm follow her around with their little heads bobbing, waiting to do whatever Michaela asks them to do," Genevieve said.

While Genevieve attended traditional school until the sixth grade before switching to lessons on the road, Michaela was completely homeschooled. "I never felt a void. I've always had friends at the barn, whether riding with me or coming for a lesson," Michaela said. "We hike, ride or teach summer camp. We're always outside. We have lessons going every day except Sundays."

At 14, Michaela has already carved out her own place as a jumper, trainer and catch rider. Michaela embraced the path established by her older sister but nurtures relationships of her own, notably with trainers Emily Elek and Linda Allen. "I have a few ponies at home right now from Michaela Kennedy that I'm working with, and I used to catch ride a lot for Emily Elek. In 2020, I had four of her ponies qualify for Pony Finals," Michaela said.

Recently, USHJA President Britt McCormick had a horse that needed to be schooled. "He called Dad, wondering if I was still at the barn. I went over and schooled with Britt. I've always wanted to ride with him," Michaela said.

Genevieve and her father say that Michaela lives on island time. Michaela's pace may be slower—and she may stop for an ice cream—but the youngest Munson sister gets things