

Balance

a magazine for montana women

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE VOLUME 6 NUMBER 5 > May 19, 2009

Profile:

How Sarah Calhoun,
young founder and owner
of Red Ants Pants,
found her niche



REAL WOMEN | PROFILE

BY MICHELE CORRIEL

Sarah Calhoun, founder and owner of Red Ants Pants

Founder of the women's work pants company Red Ants Pants, Sarah Calhoun, 30, has been selling her particular brand of work wear for almost five years.

"I'd been farming, grooming ski trails, peeling logs, instructing for Outward Bound, as well as leading trail crews and that whole time I was wearing men's workpants because there was nothing else available," Calhoun says. "I knew there was a market for women's workpants."

Men's work pants get bunched up in the crotch, are usually too tight in the seat, and have

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Q&A

BALANCE: What do you consider your greatest strength?

SC: I think my greatest strength is getting along well with all types of people. I enjoy being able to relate to folks from all walks of life. This combined with some creative visioning has been an asset in the business world.

BALANCE: What do you consider your greatest weakness?

SC: I have a very hard time asking for help. In both my business and personal life, I'm very used to being self-reliant. I do think having the ability to be independent is extremely important, especially as a woman. I'm beginning to understand that there is a big difference between having the ability to be self-reliant, and being self-reliant.

BALANCE: Who are your heroes / role models?

SC: My parents are the best role models a young entrepreneur can ever have. They, as well as my grandparents, were all self-employed farmers. They have all been strong leaders in their communities and show great dedication to family, working hard and living life with integrity.

BALANCE: What is your favorite book?

SC: How do I choose? *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho is one of my favorites. It's such a wonderful story, simple, but so true. I used to read it out loud to my kids on trail crew. *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver is another favorite. It has such rich characters. And *Tales of a Female Nomad*, by Rita Golden Gelman is up there too. It fell into my hands while farming down in Belize and contains a great message that was very relevant at the time. I love when books cross your path at the right moment.

BALANCE: What is the key to balancing personal, family, career, and health?

SC: Being single with no kids yet makes it much easier. I have made an effort to get involved in my community through volunteering as an EMT, coaching junior high volleyball, serving on the Arts Council and Chamber of Commerce. Although this does add more work, I do think it helps round out my life with my other non-pants interests. I live behind my shop, so I don't have much separation between work and personal.

BALANCE: What is the best advice you ever used?

SC: My pattern maker, Beth Treweek was incredibly patient with me during the design process. She taught me so much. In the moments when I wasn't sure how I was going to pull everything together she would say, "Sarah, how do you eat an elephant?...One bite at a time." In those moments when I get overwhelmed, I try to remember this to keep it all in perspective.

BALANCE: What is your dream job?

SC: I'm writing this from the road on our "Tour de Pants." My sales rep Maggie, my dog Nellie, and I are traveling around the West in the 1964 Airstream Trailer. We have a beer sponsor (thanks to Big Sky Brewery!), and do house parties and promotional events meeting customers face-to-face. There are moments where I wonder how it could get any better. When I was a kid I wanted to be a veterinarian. That was phased out as soon as the phrase "organic chemistry" entered my vocabulary. I would like to work more with youth and spend more time working outside with agriculture and livestock. But for now, I am challenged, have travel and variety in my work and feel fulfilled.

BALANCE: What do you most want to change about yourself?

SC: I need to become better at asserting my needs, whether it's asking for help or being a more assertive negotiator with business partners. I tend to want to please everyone before I meet my own needs, which isn't always a good thing, especially in the business world.

BALANCE: What do you love about yourself?

SC: I'm happy that I know myself well enough to trust my gut when making decisions. If I don't trust something or someone, or it just doesn't seem right, I don't go through with it. It is scary to put so much faith in a hunch, but time and time again it proves right.

BALANCE: What do you do to relax?

SC: Exercise and whiskey. My ideal evening would be to take my dog Nellie for a hike in the mountains. Then I would return home to cook dinner, enjoy a jack ditch and a good book by my wood stove.



Photo courtesy Sarah Callahan