

# EMBRACING THE AMERICAN DREAM

## HEIDI AND JASON VANDERBRINK

By Kimberly Suta :: Photography by David Teran; personal photos courtesy of the Vanderbrink family

*For Jason and Heidi, life together has been exactly what Jason promised when he proposed: an adventure.*





Jason and Heidi both grew up in Michigan and even attended the same college without ever meeting — until Heidi's brother introduced them at the Bay County Gun Club. "My brother told me about this guy he thought was perfect for me," recalled Heidi. "He was a regular member there, shooting on Sundays with his dad."

Their first meeting led to another date and then another. By January, they were engaged, and by November, they were married. "We were married a year later," said Heidi, warmly. "He said our lives will be an adventure together, and that it has been."

Jason's career path has been as dynamic as the couple's personal adventures. From dreams of becoming a Secret Service agent, to an internship in law enforcement, to an esteemed career in the firearms and ammunition industry.

To begin, Jason attended the University of Oxford for his postgraduate studies, explaining, "I actually chose Oxford because there are no tests in class; you have to debate the professor on the subjects. I would much rather debate someone than take a standardized test. Of note, I also won the debate at Oxford, where they give the class a subject and you debate the class and then the professor. The subject (many years ago) was on immigration."

After college, Jason forged ahead on his dream to become a Secret Service agent. "I even interned at Saginaw, MI U.S. Secret Service Field Office but quickly learned that the job was more about examining counterfeit money than protecting the president. That's when I realized my path was meant to be somewhere else," he shared.

So, Jason steadily worked his way from sales rep to Chairman and CEO of The Kinetic Group — the largest ammunition manufacturer in the world, owning CCI, Federal, Fiocchi, Hevi Shot, Remington and Speer. "That's the American dream," said Jason. "We live it every day. Coming from rural Michigan to where we are today is pretty amazing."

Life here has been about sharing the values he grew up with — hard work, self-reliance and service. He imagines entering politics one day, ideally in a role that's about true public service rather than personal gain. "I think political jobs should be unpaid. It should be about serving the public, not yourself," he said. "I feel politicians should have the same set of rules that private sector

employees have, like a 401k, not a taxpayer funded pension, term limits so it isn't a career, no lobbying allowed when you leave office, etc. All of these things just make people get into politics for the right reasons. Far too often, in my opinion, politicians are just in it for themselves and forget who/how they got there."

For Heidi, before becoming a stay-at-home mom, she had an exciting career in ophthalmology — a chapter of her life which was anything but ordinary. She once worked as a contract assistant to an ophthalmologist at the Springfield Federal Medical Center, a prison that also served as a medical facility for inmates. During her time there, Heidi walked the same halls with some notorious figures, including mobster John Gotti and Woody Harrelson's father.

"It was quite the experience," she admitted. "I worked alongside the ophthalmologist during surgeries, including cataract surgery and even a cornea transplant, right there in the prison."

Over the years, work and wanderlust have taken the Vanderbrinks from Michigan to Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Minnesota and finally Texas. "We knew as we were aging, we wanted to live where it was warm," said Heidi, with a laugh. "Jason's an avid hunter, and living in Texas is a great opportunity for that. Plus, the politics here are more aligned with our values." Jason quipped, "and taxes."

Hunting happens to be a shared passion, something Jason introduced to Heidi early on in their relationship. The family particularly loves adventuring in Africa, a place the Vanderbrinks have visited 15 times so far. "It's a wonderful opportunity," shared Heidi, "We've harvested game that's gone directly to feed entire villages — meat they wouldn't otherwise have."



Jason elaborated, "We really feel it is important to explain to the greater public about the benefits hunting does for local communities around the globe. While hunting can get a bad reputation, it is generally through misinformation or lack of education on the subject. When we go to Africa or Mongolia, or other rural areas in the world, our money for the fees goes to the local communities, the local rancher, the landowner. The community uses the money to help the communities out, whether it be water projects so the community has fresh water, building new schools, providing text books for the children, or



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*- HEIDI*

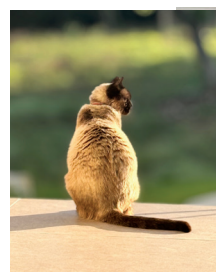
funding various projects that are needed. When you harvest the animal, there isn't anything more rewarding in the world than to see the local communities coming out to the harvest site and taking back all of the meat to their families. Many times, this is the only time the locals get protein to eat. If the population would better understand that the animals are not wasted and the local communities depend on hunting to get the meat, they would better understand why hunting is necessary and why local communities depend on it for economic reasons and health."

The trips also include delivering school supplies, soccer balls and other items to local children. "It's neat to integrate into their day, see what the kids are doing, and experience the culture. The first time we went there, they were kicking around a water bottle for a soccer ball. They were able to use the soccer ball we brought in a local soccer tournament. It's been good for Grace to see the gratitude in those communities," added Heidi.

Their daughter, Grace, now 13 and an eighth grader at Voss Middle School, shares their love of travel as well as hunting, which she learned on hunting trips when the family lived in Minnesota. She's also active in volleyball, soccer, golf and her church youth group. Plus, she loves family pizza nights, custard from Andy's Frozen Custard, excursions out to the family's ranch in Utopia, and her new puppy named Snickers. "Grace is a little spicy sometimes, but she's very loving and always sees the best in people. It has been our greatest joy seeing Grace grow into such a fun, loving, caring, young lady. We can't wait to see what the future holds for her. She has been our greatest blessing," confided Heidi.

The Vanderbrink's second home, a ranch in Utopia, is also home to exotics (not pets) like sable and kudu, and serves as a place where family, friends, law enforcement and first responders can enjoy hunting and spending time in nature.

As for life in Cordillera Ranch, they regularly make use of the Clubhouse dining venues, golf course and gun club, but it's the privacy and community spirit they value most. "It's close to Boerne but out in the country, and you're not on top of every-



one," explained Jason. "People are really friendly — no one has anything to prove." Heidi agreed, "It's nice to have privacy on our 25 acres, but also have neighbors who are genuinely kind and welcoming."

One of Heidi's newest interests is beekeeping on their property. "I'm hoping to get another hive next year," she said. "I've planted flowers for pollinators, and I can't wait to have our own honey." Together, the couple shares a great appreciation for music — country and classic rock are favorites — and they are happy to travel to seek out bands that top the list. "We love the Eagles, and our last concert was George Strait," said Heidi. And then there's their love for cars, from Jason's 1961 Corvette to Heidi's 2024 model they take on road trips. When asked what their dream cars are, Jason declared his was a red Ferrari while Heidi confided she wanted a Rolls-Royce.

Even after nearly 25 years together, the couple is still adding to their list of adventures — next up is a trip to Italy in October, starting in Rome and ending in Milan. Harkening back to when they fell in love, Jason remembered like it was yesterday, "I knew she was the one because she was adventurous. She didn't mind going hunting or trying things most women might not."

While their travels take them across the globe, the Vanderbrinks are just as content unwinding close to home. Cordillera's private park on the Guadalupe River is one of their favorite neighborhood perks. "You can fish, float, kayak, even camp down there. It's only two miles from our house, but it feels like you're miles away from everything," Heidi said. They love showing and sharing the many amenities that Cordillera Ranch has to offer with family and friends, and simply enjoying the slower pace that drew them to the Hill Country in the first place.

Texas living did come with some surprises, however. "The heat was an adjustment. That first year we had 45 days of 100 degrees or more," said Jason. Heidi laughed, adding, "And the bugs — scorpions and centipedes — were new for us!" Still, after three years, the Vanderbrinks say they have fully settled in and can't imagine living anywhere else. ☺

