



A Long Journey Back

By Amy Conry Davis | Photography courtesy of Erin Kim and Home Place Pastures

Armed with an Ivy League degree and worldly experience, Como's Marshall Bartlett proves going home again can be the right thing to do.

For farmer Marshall Bartlett of Como, Miss., there's no place like home. Home Place Pastures to be precise. It's a sprawling 1800-acre farm (500 of it is used for the business) that's been in the family for over a century. Now, thanks to the renewed efforts of Bartlett and his siblings, it continues on to feed another generation.

Farming wasn't necessarily in Bartlett's sights, but a few years after college he realized he wanted to return home to carry on the family business. He had studied environmental science at Dartmouth College and worked in places like St. Croix and New Orleans, but something called him home. Though life could have taken him anywhere, he eventually returned to a small corner of the world in Mississippi's hill country.

"I feel like it was an inevitability... like the farm was always pulling me back," says Bartlett. "Maybe I just knew, even in my most reckless and carefree years, that I was just on a long journey back to the farm. I couldn't really picture myself doing anything else. The farm was always my anchor."

Armed with a degree and the energy and enthusiasm of a new endeavor, Bartlett took on the role of CEO and co-founder of Home Place Pastures in 2014. His brother Jemison and sister May also joined the business with entrepreneurial duties. Inspired by the likes of Joel Salatin, Will Harris, and other "generational" farmers, Bartlett wanted to forge a different vision for the land from what his father and grandfather had done before him. Rather than rely on conventional methods, he wanted to construct a more natural framework that would put



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the environment, the quality of the product, and the animals' welfare at the forefront.

As the business developed, Bartlett drew guidance from family, community, and his cultural upbringing. So much of what he had learned growing up in the rural South was proving to be helpful in his new position as farmer-entrepreneur. He'd had an "ideal boyhood" on the farm and spent his early years fishing, swimming, hunting, and trapping. In his older years, everything from food to music to literature influenced his identity. That mix of formal education, life experience, and self-reliance served him well and today influences much of his decision-making process as CEO.

"From my father and his employees, I learned to weld and fabricate metal, basic carpentry, how to operate and repair equipment, and how to design and build things," says Bartlett. "I liked the mix of liberal arts classes during the school year and spending my summers learning hands-on practical skills while helping the family business."

Seven years on and Bartlett and his staff have transformed Home Place Pastures into a "sustainable, pastured-animal operation." They raise pigs, cows, lambs, and goats. From birth to slaughter, all of the animals live humanely, roaming freely in pastures. It's a non-stop labor of love but with the help of 17 dedicated employees, the business manages to continue to grow and progress.

"I'm on the farm sunup to sundown Monday through Saturday. Despite financial stress and the day-to-day demands of what we do here, I'm beyond grateful to do what I love and build a viable business in my hometown," says Bartlett.

At the end of the day, all of the hard work does pay back. In creating a regional food system such as Home Place Pastures, Bartlett has generated an investment into the community. Not just for the neighbors of Como but for people across Mississippi and its surrounding areas. The high-quality, grass-fed/finished meat from the farm reaches homes and restaurants all across the state as well as Tennessee and Louisiana. With the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, area residents can order monthly boxes full of delicious treats like breakfast sausage, bacon, and bratwurst, delivered straight from the farm.

At the HPP Farm Store, visitors can go on tours, order fresh butcher selections or enjoy lunch on the outdoor patio. Bartlett also has a growing list of restaurants that buy his products which has been the result of fostering strong relationships with chefs. If success is measured by the ability to ensure long-lasting connections then it would seem that Bartlett's vision is on the right track. The healthy, thriving ecosystem of Home Place Pastures is extending beyond the boundaries of the farm and enriching the world around it.

"I wanted to farm in a way that added to this rich culture, created employment opportunities, and helped bring in outside attention and dollars from cities back to our rural community," says Bartlett. "Our events, products, and principles involve promoting our community and showing off the music, food, and talent that Mississippi has to offer."

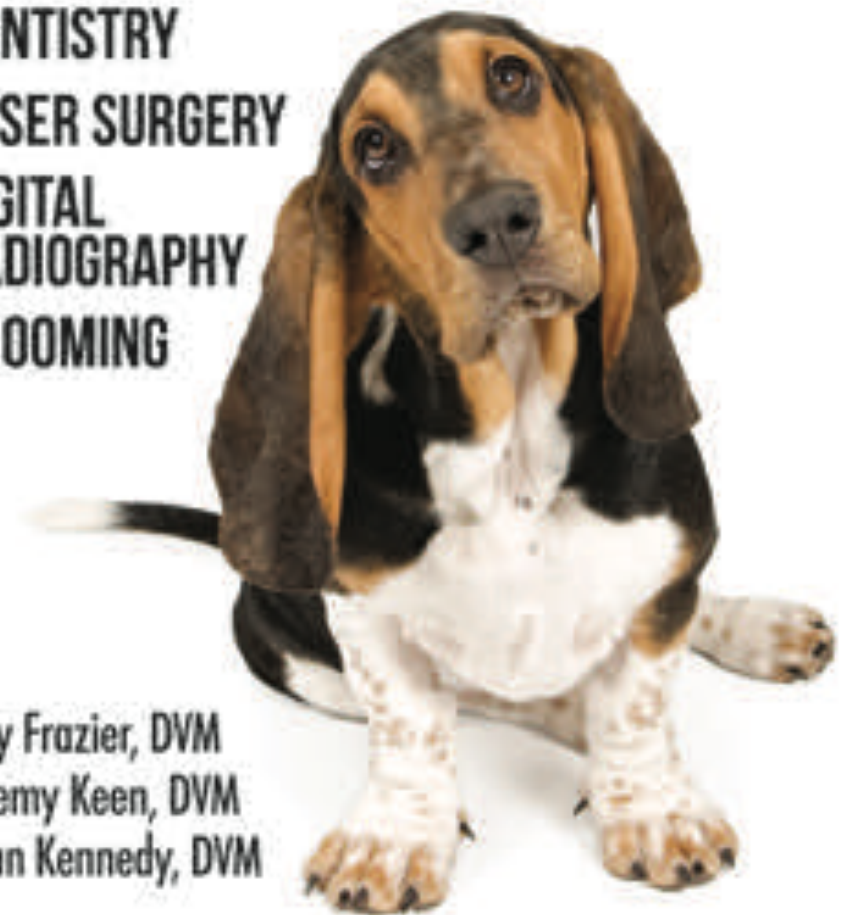
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Amy Conry Davis works as a photographer, writer, and content creator. She lives and travels full-time in an Airstream, often based in West Point, Miss.



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