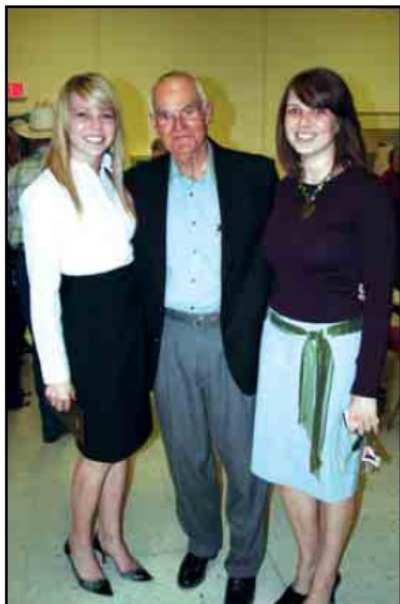


Jennie Pearson, left, stands with former Eunice resident Bill Weaver and her sister, Maggie Pearson.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



# Scholarship winner wouldn't trade her rural upbringing

## The ranching way

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *The following story is the third in a series about past recipients of Maddox scholarships.*

**RICHARD TROUT**  
NEWS-SUN

Jennie Lee Pearson's nearest neighbors are eight miles away, but she still credits them with being a huge influence on her as she grew up 20 miles west of Eunice.

"If any of us are in trouble or any of us need anything, they'll be there in a heartbeat," she said of the Smith, Sims and Berry families of Eunice and Kelly and Joann Myers of Jal and Chris Seed of Hobbs.

Jennie, 19, one of four 2008 Maddox Scholars, had to get used to living in a tighter environment last year when she studied at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

Each year, the J. F Maddox Foundation



awards a full-ride scholarship to one Maddox Distinguished Scholar and \$4,000 a year scholarships to four Maddox Scholars.

Back home for the summer, Jennie is working on the ranch established by her family in 1897 and getting up at 4:45 a.m. every morning except Wednesday to train for the cross country team at SMU. Jennie is also studying for a personal training certification by summer's end.

"I absolutely loved it," she said about SMU. "It's definitely a huge change from living in a rural city, growing up on a ranch. It's definitely a big change, but it's great to meet a bunch of new people and it was a great experience overall."

She's met people from Louisiana, California,

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Arkansas and Texas, and she's met some students who grew up on ranches, but nobody who grew up in an area as rural as Eunice or Lea County, Jennie said.

Her primary major is applied physiology of sports management and her secondary major is English. She hopes to become a personal trainer who would design conditioning programs for professional teams — preferably the Texas Rangers.

"As far as English goes, I would love to write children's books," Jennie said, adding she would also enjoy being a teacher.

### Fan, athlete

Jennie has been a Rangers fan for as long as she can remember. She recalls visiting family in North Texas and watching Ivan "Pudge" Rodriguez when she was young.

"The past couple of years I've really gotten into it and taken my own initiative," Jennie said. "I'm trying to keep stats for them when I watch the games and just really get into it."

Since living in Dallas, she's been able to see four games at Rangers Ballpark.

Tommy Pearson is Jennie's uncle who lives and works on the family ranch. To understand Jennie's drive, he said people should recall her when she was running in track and playing on the basketball and volleyball courts.

"Those are some of the attributes that will help her no matter what she does in her career," Tommy said. "That's perseverance, heart and work ethic."

Jennie won state titles in the 100 meter hurdles her sophomore, junior and senior years and won state in the 300 meter hurdles her sophomore and senior years.

Just out of high school, Jennie ran every morning before daylight just to stay in shape, Tommy said.

"She's real dedicated to whatever she does, whether it's school work or physical fitness," he said. "That will carry on in her professional life, whatever she does."

### College options

Jennie said it's debatable whether she would have gone to SMU had she not received the Maddox scholarship.

"SMU is obviously a very expensive school, and I think a lot of the things I applied for and received wouldn't have been possible without the Maddox Foundation because it has such an upstanding reputation," she said. "It's hard to say what would have happened, but I'll have to say it would have been difficult."

Duke, University of Southern California, Baylor, Texas Christian University and University of Kansas are just some of the other

schools Jennie applied to. Her application process was made easier by a universal application form called the common app.

Learning how to manage her time in college wasn't a big adjustment, Jennie said, because she had already been involved in several extracurricular activities in high school.

"As far as time management went, it wasn't hard to jump in and get involved and get my priorities straight," she said.

Jennie said her biggest adjustment was cultural — "just adjusting to the different people and the different attitudes and the way of life."

### Stepping stones

Regarding how growing up in Lea County affected her character, Jennie said it had everything to do with it.

"Everyone is so friendly and they know who you are," she said. "Anyone I know, they'll look me in the eye and shake my hand and I know whatever comes out of their mouth is going to be the truth."

The values of hard work, being honest and being a good friend are some of the tenets that were passed on to her.

"I can't say how much that has paid off in college because it's really helped me build strong, meaningful relationships that I know are going to be an asset to me in the future," Jennie said.

Her parents are Clabe and Luann Pearson. She has one sister, Maggie Pearson, 24.

The Maddox recipient can't point to any one thing she did to be successful; rather, it's a gradual process.

"I think it's just a matter of realizing the things that you commit yourself to are the things you're really going to have to prioritize and work toward achieving," Jennie said.

She described her Maddox scholarship as the first stepping stone to her college experience.

"I just can't say thank you enough to the Maddox Foundation and the Maddox family," she said. "I really encourage the community to support them and to support education in Lea County."

Tommy said the scholarship program is great because it helps young people from a rural area to get a good start.

"It gives these kids a chance to get into some of the better colleges," he said. "And I think Jennie going to SMU has been great for her because she's close enough to home where she can still commute if she needs to on the weekend, but it's far enough away that she's getting her feet wet and getting to see a little bit of the real world."

The way of life Jennie knows — being independent yet being dependent on your neighbors — will stay with her forever even if she goes far away, Tommy said.

"I will speak for Jennie on this, but we wouldn't trade the way we were raised for any other way that we could have been raised," he said.