

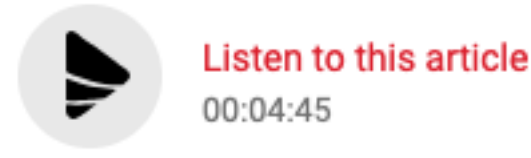
CASUAL COUNTRY: Carving a life in Nemiah Valley

From floods to droughts to the therapeutic side of wild horse, the Lares family is learning to share the good, the bad and the ugly.

Lara Lares and Michael Lares
Oct 26, 2024 1:34 PM



1 / 2 Lara, left, Nicole, Michael and Dylan Lares have called Nemiah Valley home since 2011. | Photo submitted



In the heart of British Columbia, the Lares family has carved out a personal sanctuary through years of faith, grit, and determination.

Michael, his wife Nicole, and their two children Lara and Dylan were born and raised in the southern United States.

They never dreamed they would have to leave the home they built in North Carolina, much less leave the country all together.

But in 2005 following the birth of their son Dylan, Nicole experienced a life-altering accident that changed the trajectory of their life.

Nicole thankfully survived, but the damage was done.

Years of slow and painstaking healing were constantly being reset by fluctuating weather patterns and severe barometric pressure changes. They needed a different climate to allow Nicole to heal peacefully.

"At first Canada was out of the question for us." Michael stated. "But there wasn't anything in the U.S. that felt like the right fit."

In a stroke of luck or call it synchronicity they discovered Nemiah Valley, a pristine mountain valley in the heart of the Chilcotin region.

A beautifully landscaped ranch was for sale with large hay fields and an old ranch house. It seemed like the perfect place to heal Nicole and raise a family.

Michael recently retiring from a 25-year dive career was asked by the local Indigenous Chief of the Xeni Gwet'in to work with the community. So, in 2011 they went all in and made the big move across the continent.

The valley was breath-taking and the peace was unmatched, but it came at a price.

The first few years were fraught with struggle and culture shock. Living off-grid in such an unbridled environment was punishing for the Lares family.

"When we first moved to the ranch we had no phone line, internet or cable." Michael said.

"The house was charged with two failing car batteries on an old inverter system."

From power issues to being three hours from town – Williams Lake, the young family faced challenges they never saw coming. Frigid -40 C winters, short growing seasons and predators on all sides dished struggle and strife.

They contribute community support and their close-knit family bond to their very survival and what kept them sane.

"Thankfully we never had a bad day at the same time," Nicole said about her and Michael's relationship.

"If one of us was having a bad day, the other was there to prop them up."

As they adjusted to their new wild life, the Lares family became well acquainted with the Xeni Gwet'in and learned their ways of hunting, living off the land and growing hay.

Where there's hay there's horses, and the wild Qayus of the valley often found themselves right outside the Lares' door.

Michael received his first horse as a gift from a Xeni Gwet'in cowboy to train and learn to ride.

It was trial by fire, but from it Michael learned drogues about how to work with the wild Qayus mind.

After years of stable weather and living off-grid in the rawest form of nature, Nicole healed fantastically. Oddly, years of hard work and steep learning curves were exactly what they had been searching for all those years ago.

Stepping out from under the protection of the modern world and challenging themselves to the core.

Witnessing first hand the magic of the wild horses and the wilderness, the Lares family sought a way to share their peaceful life at the Flying L Ranch with the world. In 2020, they were featured in the Canadian docu-series The Wild Ones, also known as Breaking Wild worldwide.

To further share their day-to-day, the family went to social media. Through their various accounts and most recently their SVOD platform, they enjoy sharing the real-life unfiltered trials and tribulations of their off-grid life.

From floods to droughts to the therapeutic side of wild horses, they make every effort to share the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Supported by their social media following, the Lares family cultivated numerous ways to achieve the ranch mission, benefiting the Xeni and their Qayus population.

From rescuing orphan foals to rehabilitating horses with broken legs, it's a rewarding way of giving back to the People and land that has supported them.

After 13 years of forging ahead, the Flying L Ranch is now a blossoming horse sanctuary with dreams of expanding into a non-profit and equine care facility to further support the local community.

Nicole has healed well beyond their imagination, and their two children are fully grown adults.