

Mary Lichtle Burger



Writing and Re-Writing History

by Joyce Loomis-Kerneck

Mary was born in Decatur, Indiana, on August 18, 1948. She was the second youngest of six children born to Adrian and Agnes Lichtle. Although Mary grew up on a farm and her father always had horses, she is the only one of the six children to continue a life with horses. When she was 4 1/2-years old, Mary's father bought her a pony - Ginger.

Then, Mary was diagnosed with Perthes Disease. Perthes is not really a disease, but that was the name given to this condition when it was first discovered. Perthes is a condition where the femoral head is no longer round and does not move easily in the hip socket, causing hip pain and restricted leg movement. In Mary's case, it went from hip to hip and rendered her unable to walk. Her first pony, Ginger,

became her transportation. Ginger was not only Mary's mode of transportation, but Ginger helped in the eventual healing of her Perthes Disease.

The fires of this adversity sparked a love for horses that Mary has had as long as she can remember. She learned some very valuable lessons early in life: that she could overcome adversity, and that she had a talent to train a horse. The bond she developed with Ginger taught her the importance of bonding, which became a signature part of her horse training abilities.

Mary joined 4-H and trained her next horse, Rusty, to win seven consecutive Grand Championships. The events that she competed in to win these championships were: gaming events, pleasure riding, and halter. From that point on, Mary knew she had a God-given talent

to train horses. Rusty was only the beginning of what would grow to be a long list of Champions she trained, and that list is still being added to six decades later. What started out in the 4-H arena evolved into the arenas of the AQHA, IPRA Rodeos, Futurities, and Professional WPRA Rodeos.

"I have always been my own person," Mary said. "I never really had a mentor. My dad and mother were my big supporters. They hauled me to the 4-H shows. I believe I was born to compete and train horses because I just never got enough of it. I learned everything I know from trial and error. I've always had this bond with my horses that gives me an edge. I believe that God gave me this talent and love to train horses for a reason. It was my destiny. God is my leader and tells me what to do."

Moving Forward

Mary had a desire to learn all she could about horses, including how horses were shod and she did some shoeing herself. Her love of horses led her to a boy she knew who was raised in the same town. His name was Kerry Burger, and he would ride his bicycle to any farm in the country that would let him ride a horse. Just as Mary was drawn to horses, she was also drawn to Kerry. They shared a love for horses and for each other and they became a great team. Mary and Kerry were married in 1968. Kerry not only rode horses, but he was also learning how to shoe them from a good friend, Phil Adams. Just as Mary discovered early in her life that she wanted to train horses, Kerry discovered that his calling in life was going to be that of a farrier. Kerry became a professional farrier by age 20. And, he became Mary's driver and constant traveling companion. Mary never had to shoe her horses again. "I could not do any of the things I have done without Kerry," Mary stated.

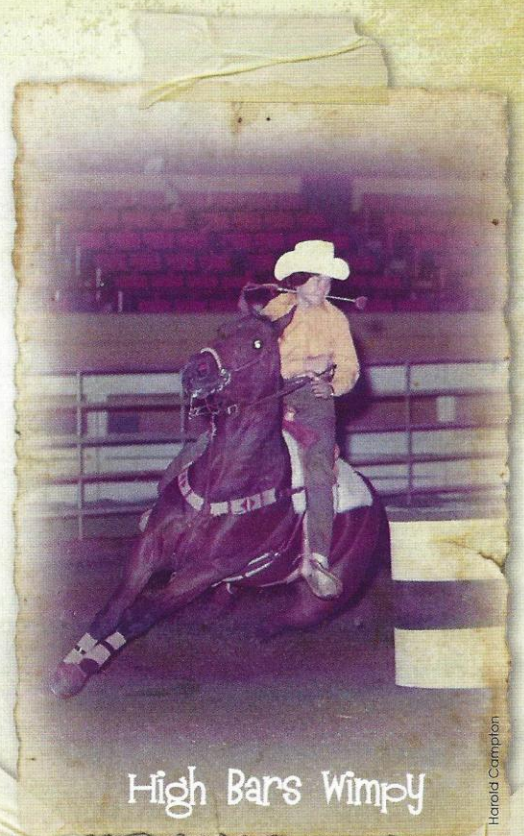
One of the first horses Kerry and Mary purchased was Peppy Bars Chick, a young stallion by a son of Triple Chick, and the duo trained for gymkhana. Mary competed on him and Kerry rode him in pleasure events.

The next horse they acquired was High Bars Wimpy, by a grandson of Three Bars TB,

and he would carry Mary to her first World Championship. In 1974, she qualified him for a position at the inaugural AQHA World show in both Jr. Barrels and Jr. Pole Bending. Mary had already won the Quarter Horse Congress on him in both of these events and repeated this double win at the world show, winning her first two AQHA World Championships in Louisville, Kentucky in 1974.

On the way to these championships, Mary earned enough points for High Bars Wimpy to become her first Superior point earner in both Barrel Racing and Pole Bending. To be awarded a superior rating requires earning 50 AQHA points in the event. (High Bars Wimpy was later sold to Ron and Louise McIntire.)

Along the way, Mary and Kerry met Kenneth Winters and his family. (Kenneth ran the Ada sale barn for 27 years in Oklahoma.) Race purses were not as good in those days, and often two-year-old race horses wouldn't have a future of big purses to run for so the owners would sell them. Kenneth would purchase the race horses and sell them, both privately and at the sale barn. A lot of race horses at this time had foundation breeding mixed in with race, and many of Kenneth's sale horses became winners in the barrel racing arena.



High Bars Wimpy

Harold Compton

Mary won her first two World Championships in Jr. Barrel Racing and Jr. Pole Bending in 1974 with High Bars Wimpy, shown together here winning that year's AQHA World Championship Jr. Barrel Racing. High Bars Wimpy was also her first Superior point earner in both Barrel Racing and Pole Bending.



MacLean Photo Service

Mary and one of her very first horses, Rusty, that she trained to win seven consecutive Grand Championships in gaming events, pleasure riding, and halter. Rusty was the horse that made Mary believe she had a God-given talent to train horses.



Kenneth Winters (2nd from left) sold many great horses to Mary Burger, including Showum The Gold shown here together after winning the 1986 AQHA World Championships in Jr. & Sr. Barrel Racing.

"I believe that God gave me this talent and love to train horses for a reason."

On To Oklahoma

Mary and Kerry bought Bar Cee Bar from Kenneth, and he was Mary's next winner to qualify to the AQHA World in barrels and poles. At the same time, Kerry trained a stallion named Hy Bracket and qualified him for AQHA World in pole bending, and they hauled these two horses together. Mary suffered her first big loss when Bar Cee Bar died from a form of spinal meningitis.

Mary then bought Leo Dixie Dandy from Kenneth, finished training him, and qualified to the IPRA finals with the horse. Jim Ragland was her next winner. He was the 1987 All American Quarter Horse Congress Champion in Jr. Barrel Racing and repeated that win later as a Sr. horse. Mary also qualified Jim Ragland to the IPRA finals, as there were a lot of IPRA sanctioned rodeos in her area around Decatur, Indiana.

Several other of her horses became AQHA qualifiers along the way. She purchased one of her all-time favorites - Showum The Gold - from Kenneth. The gelding had a rough start when he was run into by a water truck at an IPRA rodeo. His hip was fractured and he was kept in a stall until he healed. He was an underdog, but he came to life after he healed. By this time, barrel racing futurities were in full swing and Mary and Showum The Gold won several of them. He was second in the Ft. Smith futurity; he won the derby the next year; he qualified to the AQHA World show three times; and in 1984, he won Reserve World Champion AQHA Jr. Barrel Racing Horse.

In 1985, Mary and Kerry stayed with Kenneth Winters and his family while looking for property in Oklahoma. This was to be a big career move for both of them. Kerry, who had been laid off from his job at International Harvester, would now go into full time farrier work. And Mary purchased a WPRA card to compete in professional rodeos, and she also expanded her career in training barrel horses.

That same year in 1985, Showum The Gold won two AQHA World Championships. And the next year in 1986, Showum The Gold won AQHA World Championships in Jr. and Sr. Barrel Racing. The gelding was making a great rodeo run at the Kemper Arena in

Kansas City when he fell dead after he turned the third barrel. He was diagnosed with an aneurism, which resulted in a heart attack. He was only seven years old. Mary remembers how devastating it was to lose this great horse. She considered him to be one of the family and said it was hard, but it made her realize it could have been one of her immediate family members, and her comfort was that it wasn't one of them and that she was able to walk away unharmed from the accident. Mary's ability to overcome was once again put to use.

A crisis causes some to break down and others to break records. Mary was soon on her way to making and breaking records.



Mary & Showum The Gold, purchased from Kenneth Winters, won the 1984 Champion of Champions Futurity. Mary and Showum The Gold also won two AQHA World Championships in both 1985 and 1986.

Their stay with the Winters family ended when the Burgers found a place to rent in Wynnewood, Oklahoma. They then bought 10 acres near Elmore City, which they outgrew and purchased 27 raw acres from their son, Todd, near Pauls Valley, where they built a house, a barn, and put up fences. It was a great move, and they still live there today.

While Kerry was shoeing for Jerry Wells, the legendary trainer, his wife Betty asked Mary to train and ride a horse for them. She wound up training and riding several winners for them, including their mare Miss Mergie. This mare was nervous and afraid in the trailer, but Mary had built a bond of trust with her and rode with her in the trailer to Ft. Smith to give her confidence and together they won the 1995 Ft. Smith futurity. Miss Mergie went on to become the 1996 AQHA World Champion Jr. Barrel Horse, and that same year Shesa Mergie was an AQHA World Champion finalist.

"Mary always did a fantastic job for us and her horses were very saleable and confident with their next riders," stated Betty Wells.

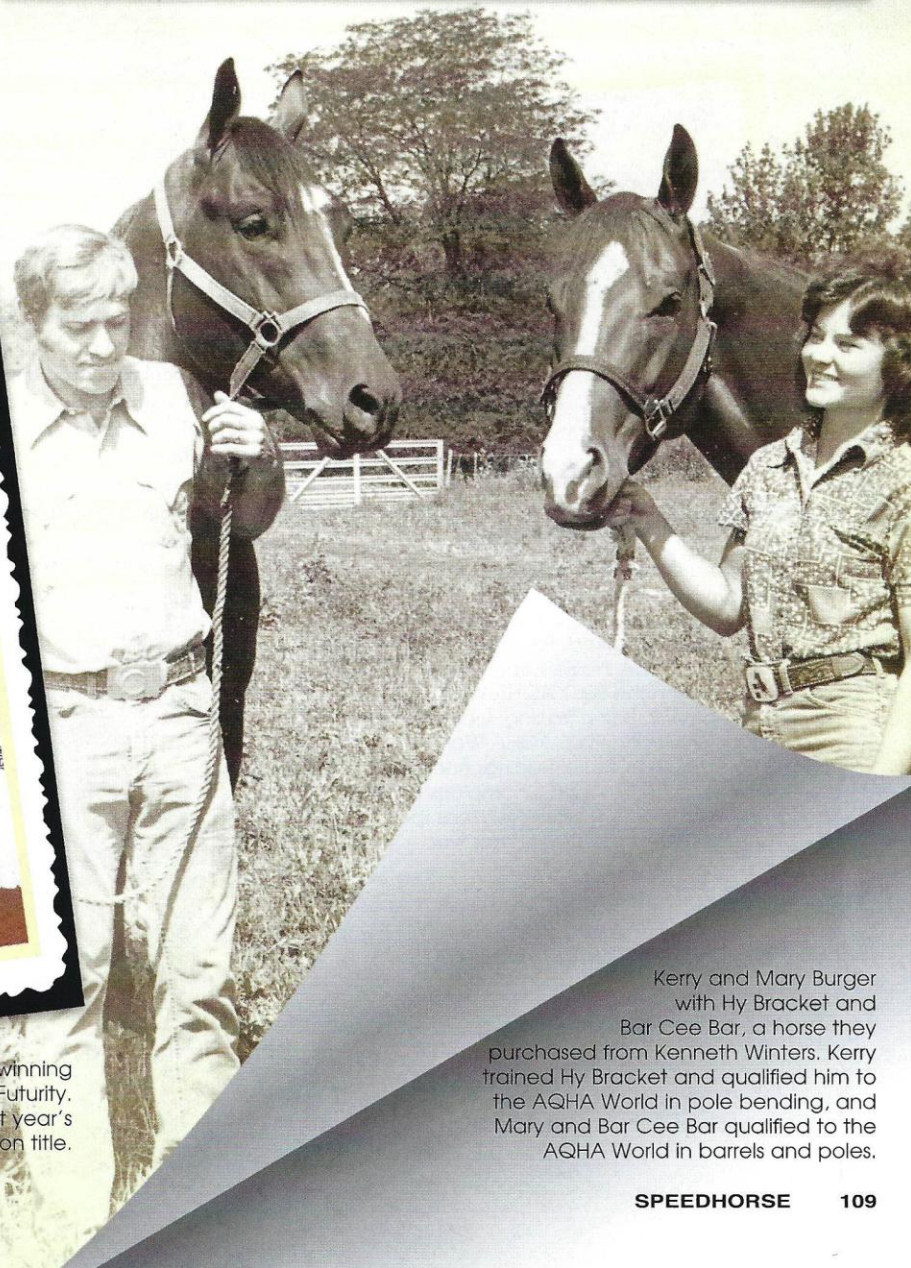
In 2000, Mary rode Cool Mergie, who was co-owned by Betty Wells and Frank Howell, and Maximus to second and fourth in the Ft. Smith futurity. If you go down to 21st place in 2000, you will find a dark horse that would leave his mark on the industry for years to come – his name was Rare Fred.



Mary Burger with 1996 AQHA World Show finalist Shesa Mergie and Betty Wells with 1996 AQHA World Show Champion Jr. Barrel Horse Miss Mergie, who also won the 1995 Ft. Smith Futurity with Burger.

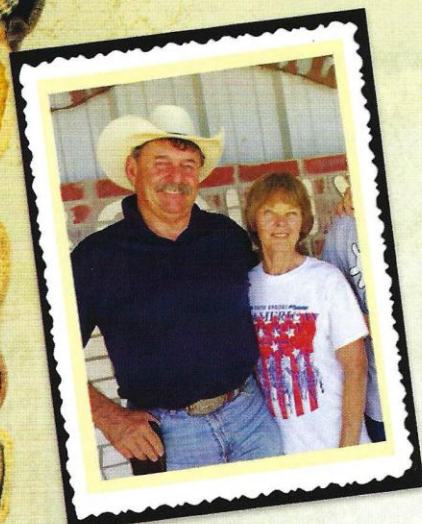


Mary Burger and Maximus winning the 2000 Old Fort Days Futurity. They also took that year's AQHA Reserve World Champion title.

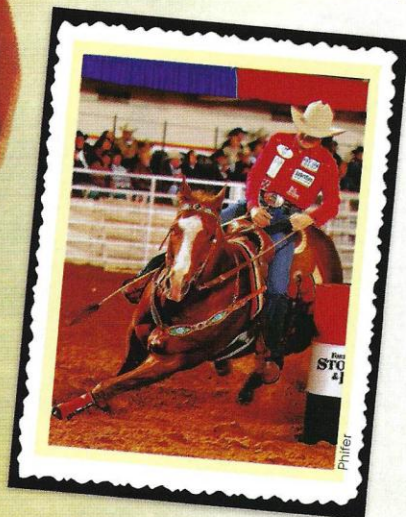


Kerry and Mary Burger with Hy Bracket and Bar Cee Bar, a horse they purchased from Kenneth Winters. Kerry trained Hy Bracket and qualified him to the AQHA World in pole bending, and Mary and Bar Cee Bar qualified to the AQHA World in barrels and poles.

The Rare Fred Era



Race horse trainer Verle Bohner and wife Jody had Rare Fred at his ranch, but the horse wasn't fast enough to race. Verle believed Rare Fred was extremely smart and athletic and would make a great horse, so he suggested him to the Burgers. His belief in Rare Fred came to fruition in the hands of Mary.



Mary and Rare Fred make one of their last runs at the 2010 Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo before the gelding was sold and retired. Together they won the PRCA Prairie Circuit three times; won the 2001 AQHA World Champion Jr. Barrel Racing; won the 2003, 2004 and 2005 AQHA World Champion Sr. Barrel Racing; and received a WPRA World Championship at the Wrangler NFR. Rare Fred was the AQHA/WPRA Horse of the Year twice.

Kerry, Mary, Todd and Joey Burger. The Burger's sons both competed in barrel events. Todd became a barrel futurity trainer and farrier, married P.J., who also qualified to the NFR, and they have a daughter Kaden, who now competes on barrels, poles, and other events. Joey moved from barrels to roping events and operates Burger Machine Shop on their ranch.

Mary and Kerry met Ron Martin around 1996 at the AQHA World Show. Martin was interested in purchasing a young horse for Mary to train, and Mary searched every lead she could to find him the right horse. In 1998, a friend told her about a 2 year old - his name was Rare Fred. He was a son of Jet Radar, was owned by Betty Shebester, and was at Verle and Jodi Bohner's barn in Wayne, Oklahoma. The Bohners had told Betty that Rare Fred was not quite fast enough to win stakes races, but that he was very smart and athletic and would make someone a great horse. Betty decided to sell him, and Mary and Kerry went to look at him. Mary said Rare Fred was a very personable horse and he immediately caught her eye.

"I have always favored race horse breeding, but I don't look as much at breeding as I do conformation and I don't have a preference in size," Mary said. "I have my favorites as far as breeding goes, but conformation and disposition are very important to me. I like the kind of horse that you can bond with - not the ones with negative characteristics. I believe you can achieve your goals quicker and better with sugar than you can with a hard hand. I look into their eyes to see what the horse tells me. I like to start out with two year olds."

Mary thought about buying Rare Fred herself, but he had a bubble on his knee that indicated he might have a chipped knee. So, Ron Martin decided to go ahead and purchase him. The bubble turned out to be nothing serious, and Rare Fred started out good. He made the finals to the Ft. Smith futurity as four year old, and to the Ft. Smith derby finals at five. Then, Mary began to introduce him to rodeos at age six.

The records began piling up for Mary and "Fred." He won the PRCA Prairie Circuit three times and qualified to the

2006, 2008 and 2009 National Finals in Las Vegas. He made his first of eight appearances in the AQHA World Show in 2000 and was back in 2001 to win his first World Championship in AQHA Jr. Barrel Racing. Fred repeated his World Championships in the AQHA Sr. Barrel Racing in 2003, 2004 and 2005, and the Reserve World Championship in 2006. Mary said Fred would get a little sloppy coming off his third barrel and wasn't snappy at times, so she switched him to the left barrel first. He's won Championships going to the left first as well as going to the right barrel first.

2006 was a record setting year for Mary and Rare Fred. Not only were they AQHA Reserve World Champions, but they also received a World Championship in WPRA at the Wrangler NFR in Las Vegas. With this, Mary became the oldest competitor to win the World Championship in WPRA history. She and Fred placed in nearly every round and came up the ranks to win the World Championship by just \$2,567 in one of the closest title races in WPRA history. Rare Fred was voted AQHA/WPRA Horse of the Year twice. Verle and Jodi Bohner's belief about Rare Fred came true - he made a great horse in the hands of Mary Burger.

Rare Fred and Mary qualified two more times to the NFR, but 2010 marked the end of their great partnership. Ron sold Rare Fred to a high school girl in Texas, and he is now retired. Mary says Fred is one of the best horses she has ever ridden and estimates that they won over \$820,000 together. She gives credit to God and to her family for her success, saying she would not have been able to travel as much as she did without their help. Kerry and their daughter-in-law P.J. Burger traveled with Mary, and P.J. made the NFR herself in 2009, while their boys held things together at home.



It's Just The Beginning

Little did the world know that Mary Burger was just getting a good start and what was to come would re-write the history books.

There was a 31-year gap between Mary joining the Pro ranks and her first trip to the National Finals Rodeo. This is because Mary's family has always come first, and family was the main reason she never hauled hard in the past. She wanted to be close to her family. Mary and Kerry had two sons – Todd and Joey, and both competed in barrel racing events. Todd trained futurity horses, worked with problem horses for clients, and became a professional farrier. He now lives in Texas, where he shoes horses and sells real estate. Joey switched from barrel racing to roping. He operates Burger Machine Shop on their ranch and ropes on the side. He and P.J. have a daughter, Kaden, who is now competing on barrels, poles, breakaway roping, and goat tying in Little Britches rodeo.

Mary was on the watch for that next special horse. Brad Leiblong, a futurity horse owner and horse trader who had sent horses to her in the past, contacted her about an open horse she had that he was interested in trading for. Brad had a two year old he wanted to trade with her for the horse. He sent her a picture of the two year old and, once she saw the photo, there was just something about him and she knew she wanted him. So, they made the trade. Sadiefamouslastwords, aka Mo, by Sadies Frosty Drift and out of Porky And Bess, a AAA running Dash Ta Fame mare, became Mary's.

"Mo was the best trade I ever made in my entire life!" Mary said of the 2009 gelding.

Mary trained Mo and took him to a few futurities, where he won with ease. The next year, she took him to some derbies and then branched out into the rodeo world. As he came along, he started making his mark in PRCA rodeos, winning the Prairie Circuit Finals in 2014 and 2015. Mary qualified him to the AQHA World Show in 2014 where he was a finalist. Mary and Mo's winnings are over \$400,000 now.

In 2016, Sadiefamouslastwords was seven and he was seasoning nicely. Although he had been a bit immature, he was settling in and taking things seriously. Mary planned on starting the year with the gelding to see how he did

and go on from there. Mary had won Houston in 2009 on Rare Fred and decided to enter the tournament-style rodeo with Mo, and she left Houston in March of 2016 with another Championship and \$54,750. This win propelled her to the top of the WPRA standings.

She and Kerry decided to pick and choose where they wanted to compete this year, as Kerry still has special clients he takes care of. In between winning at Houston (indoors) earning \$122,000 (of which \$72,000 counts toward WPRA standings), at Calgary, Canada, (outdoors), and a lot of checks in between, Mary has broken the record for money won by a barrel racer in a regular season. She broke that record on August 8, 2016, with roughly two more months to finish the season. She has not only broken that record, but will also break the record as the oldest qualifier to ever compete in the NFR at 68 years of age. She also holds the record for being the oldest Champion in WPRA history (at 58).

Mary Burger will enter the NFR wearing back "Number 1" – signifying that she is the highest money earning contestant of all events to qualify for the 2016 NFR (including team roping, bare backing, saddle broncs, calf roping, etc.). A barrel racer wearing back "Number 1" has only happened twice before in the history of the National Finals Rodeo. 🐾

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And The Story Continues

The National Finals Rodeo go round will pay a record \$26,231 for first place, down to \$4,231 for sixth place each night; and \$67,269 for winning the average, down to \$6,346 for eighth place. While Lindsay Sears holds the record for the highest single-year earnings in the WPRA with \$323,570, Mary surpassed Sears' regular season record in August. Mary's winnings for 2016 are at \$190,977 as of press time, and she is in position for a run at that year end record with the huge payout at the 2016 NFR.

The dynamic trio of Mary, Kerry and Mo are not finished writing in the history books quite yet. Mary and Kerry will be at the National Finals Rodeo at the Thomas and Mack Center in December in Las Vegas, Nevada, to make sure that Mo is well taken care of and ready to go. The combination of Kerry's care for Mo's feet, Mary's gift of knowing how a horse is feeling and figuring out what is best to keep them performing at their best, and Mo's natural ability is sure to be great watching at this year's NFR.

Mary received one standing ovation after another at the Calgary Stampede, and you can bet that the Thomas and Mack Center will roar when she and Mo come down the alley.

As Mary has said so many times, "If God wants me to have something, then I will have it!"

Nine AQHA World Championships, many futurity Championships, many rodeo qualifications and wins, and 1 WPRA World Championship are already in her history book. She has had a career of training one great horse after another and her lifetime winnings are still adding up.

"We are looking forward to the NFR in December 2016 and maybe keeping another barrel horse prospect on the side," Mary said. "Who knows what is to come as God is my Leader".

Something tells me that this story is far from over and that this lady has not applied for any retirement. There is more history to write. After all, she is only 68 and Mo is only seven and both are in their prime. Better get ready to drive, Kerry!

Mary and Sadiefamouslastwords, aka Mo, take the 2015 WPRA Card Holder Champion. Together they have won many barrel events and this year have broken the record for money won by a barrel racer in a regular season. Mary will be the oldest qualifier to compete in the NFR at 68 years of age, and she and Mo will likely enter the 2016 NFR Finals this December in Las Vegas wearing back "Number 1" – signifying that she is the highest money earning contestant of all NFR events.

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