

**M**y reaction to the interview practice interview: "Oh, sure, that might be really helpful." Then, I learned it would be with the *Angus Journal* editor, Jim Cotton. Oh my, second thoughts—most of them in the nature of—"seasoned expert, highly critical, intimidating."

But, I was assured my subject



## Assignment: The Interview... Exercise #1

wasn't from what he called "the jugular vein school" and that I should relax. It might be fun for both of us.

So, I did my research of news releases and back issues of the *Journal*. That preparation plus some guidelines suggested by my subject helped me over the first hurdle: getting started.

We decided I should approach the material in two ways. One, a straight narrative, and the second as a question-answer format. What you're reading here is a blending of the two.

(Theory: If you're confident of your research and comfortable with your material on both the subject and the subject's area of interest, you will convey that impression to the subject and help him or her relax as the interview begins.)

With this in mind, I reach for some reaction he might have toward the *Angus Journal* and his arrival here from another breed magazine, the *Simmental Shield*.

"Well..." (Good, he relaxes) "this is a step of growth for me and quite exciting to get back into something strictly editorial. It's stimulating, too, to learn a new breed and get acquainted with new people—nice to be part of what I think most agree is one of the most professional ag organizations in the country today.

"And, there's great tradition here to back up the innovative spirit. I think that's quite unusual, commendable."

(Tactic: Be alert to any comment, facial expression, hesitation or in-

By Shelley Hall, King City, Mo.

*Editor's note: Shelley Hall, a junior at Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, is completing a winter internship with the American Angus Association. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in public relations, she plans to obtain a job and study foreign language.*

*Shelley and her husband reside in King City, Mo. She was raised on a farm with her parents and sister. She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gary Townsend.*

*During her pre-holiday orientation, she confided she hadn't that much experience interviewing. So, it was determined an interview situation might be a worthwhile experience. As it developed, the intern gained and the interviewee sampled what it's like to be on the receiving end.*

nuendo that might provide a lively quote. Attack those statements that need clarifying or which might prompt a more revealing remark.)

**SH** "Let's... talk about the role of the *Journal*. I notice some changes made in its appearance. What do you expect or should the readers expect from it?"

"Yes, good. There have been a lot of fine things done with the magazine, particularly since '79. It's been a leader, and in that spirit, I think it's

important to constantly challenge perceptions and the impressions we have. We need to test these to make sure we're presenting something useful and comfortable for our readers.

(Tactic: Always be prepared with the old standby: "Could you be more specific?")

"Any breed journal needs a mix to lure the breeder in, to take him or her away for a few minutes from the media blitz we have out there today. So, we want the magazine to be as appealing as we can make it, one where advertisers feel comfortable in placing their ads.

"Now, it's been proven farm readers pay more attention to ads than any other class of reader, particularly breeder ads as they present information on that cow or bull. But it's editorial's function to provide a framework or foundation for those ads."

(Theory: Don't avoid controversial areas. Be prepared to throw out "feelers" which might signal new areas of discussion. Take precautions, however, in your preparation should the main thrust of the interview veer off in new or unanticipated directions.)

**SH** "What do you think of the arrangement between the American Angus Assn. and the *Journal*? Do you feel it's an advantage for the magazine?"

"At this point, I'm impressed how many resources we can draw from both here at the headquarters and out in the field. There are so many talented and knowledgeable people who

make regular contributions to the magazine. It's helpful."

(Tactic: Keep pressing for a sensitive or controversial quote. Try to elicit an "eyebrow-raiser" when you sense the subject is warming up to the topic under discussion.)

**SH** "Anything about the Angus breed you find disappointing? Were there any surprises?"

"Ah, yes... I thought we'd have to learn a lot about established cow families and such. I expected more emphasis on that from a breed that's been around as long as Angus have. Instead, I find breed activities and interest clustered around quite a number of young, but exciting new bulls. I guess that's just turning the genetic crank.

"Now with the Simmental breed, there seems to be some reluctance to move off the older bulls that were the breed's pillars. As a consequence, it's been a struggle proving some of these younger bulls, the grandsons and so on. Kind of ironic when you contrast the two breeds."

(Tactic: Press on.)

**SH** "What do you really think of Angus cattle? Anything you'd change if you could?"

"I've always respected this breed. It will continue to be a basic component of America's beef cow herd. It just has so many practical and efficient qualities. And, too, many of the old traditional ranching operations in the country still appreciate the breed for its ease of calving. Regardless of what new directions the breed may take, in that old-timer's mind, it's Angus for ease of calving and mothering ability. Those are hallmarks to cherish, I think."

**SH** "What directions are you speaking of?"

"Well, in the broadest sense, there's something here for everyone. If one's a carcass enthusiast, there's nothing to be ashamed of with traditional Angus beef. Look at the CAB program. Lean beef? There's no question we have the genetics for impressive ribeyes and thin backfat within the breed. Of course, there are worlds of performance information for those people. We have a highly competitive show ring, an enviable youth program, investors have always been attracted to the blacks, and there's the social and personal satisfactions the breed provides. There's a niche for everyone here."

**SH** "What challenges do you see ahead for the Angus breed?"

"I'm not fond of coined words, but I might as well advance this one before the next guy does. I think the breed should 'strategize' toward the shrinking U.S. bull market and catch those commercial breeders on the rebound from bad breeding decisions.

"The challenge will be to help them shore up their programs, get some directions, re-tool their cow factories, weed out the experiments, and get back on a footing that emphasizes soundness and efficiency. One task will likely be helping the commercial breeder discriminate between hybrid vigor and predictable performance. Most commercial programs only get a taste of hybrid vigor on the first go-around, I suspect. After that, it becomes pretty elusive. Then, we're down to doing our homework with sire evaluations, records, and the like.

"Too, the commercial people I respect consider the steers as the dividends. They're more concerned with re-investing in the hard assets, that cow factory. They simply must not gamble with its health or productivity. That's where predictable genetics come in."

(Tactic: Make an observation your subject might challenge or elaborate upon.)

**SH** "Would it be fair to say you favor commercial producers? I know from my reading you came from that background."

"My sympathies lie there, yes, that would be fair to say. It's important to recognize buying that new herd bull or even a set of range bulls is almost an act of indecent exposure. 'What will the neighbors think? Gee, I can't use the old bull anymore—I've got too many daughters now. And, I don't like the looks of his sons. Records, EPDs—I'm not sure I understand them and I don't want to show my ignorance. What will this registered breeder think if I pick that cheap bull—I can only spend so much.'

"These are the conflicts the producer is wrestling with when he comes to your sale or place. Those buyers are revealing more than they care to, yet they want to pick the best bull for them. Challenge for the Angus breeder today is to be sensitive to those needs and follow the sale. Change that bull out if he's not working."

(Tactic: Raise a difficult topic and

see if the subject tries to duck or steer around. Take your cues from his or her answer. Pursue directly or get your answer by an oblique maneuver.)

**SH** "Do you think the commercial man respects the show ring or is it irrelevant to his purpose?"

"There's probably not a more durable or resilient target in the beef industry today than the show ring. You know, displaying your product and making contacts... friends... customers—to me, those should remain the chief benefits. I sometimes wonder if we let the competitive aspects overwhelm these other areas.

"It's nice to have a contest, no mistake, but we are likely the most competitive society on earth in many areas, sometimes at the expense of good will and a sense of perspective. And, the American livestock breeder is a most peculiar character. He'll take backfat, or spottedness, or tail setting, or frame size, and take it and take it until he just can't take it any farther and unsoundness sets in. Same with competition. It takes a real statesman to back off for the good of the breed.

"Maybe I shouldn't allow it, but I get concerned we limit participation when we place all the animals in a class. Who wouldn't be discouraged or embarrassed standing eighth on that one day under that one man's opinion? Animals have off days too, we should recognize.

"I do think the critique needs to be extended through the class for the juniors, sure. But, maybe we can sweeten the pot for the first, second, third places and give those who place lower the satisfaction of showing in the big time without being humbled. Their cattle are not judged, then, as being less attractive or less useful. We've all heard the yarns about the national champion that proved sterile.

"And, while we're on the subject, wouldn't it be fun to have one show a year perhaps, where we show a generation?"

"My wife has a mare in Idaho that's all of 28 years old. I get more pleasure seeing her and her remarkable youthfulness than I do the freshest filly around. I know her faithfulness to the family, the kids she's endured, the colts she's produced—I just think it would be exciting to have a 'generational tribute' show with four, five, or six generations towing behind a matriarch of the breed. Say, we have four

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signs are not that reliable as indicators, he says, pointing out the method of harvesting and weather conditions at time of baling are more influential.

Studies conducted at the state's experiment station revealed baling at 15 percent moisture level minimizes leaf loss and shortens curing time of alfalfa hay without affecting quality. Nutritional value was maintained over a nine-month period despite a slight visual deterioration.

Rain on the windrows and raking exert greater damage on hay by decreasing both crude protein and digestibility, researchers found. Leaf loss by both raking and mower-conditioning were greater than the conventional swather-windrower. Mower conditioner harvested alfalfa caused leaf loss through the mechanical action and exposed more hay surface to weather.

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Those cows coming back in heat may have more difficulty giving birth to second and third calves than those herd mates cycling regularly every year. This, from a study on infertility conducted at the Roman L. Hruska U.S. Meat Animal Research Center,

Clay Center, Neb. Hormonal and anatomical abnormalities play a role in the study. **AJ**

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## Shelley Hall Interview...

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or five entries in the class.

"Now, that may be a logistical nightmare, and the whole idea may be cockeyed, but think of the public relations mileage the breed could milk from that effort. There's something that would be meaningful to the commercial producer—since you asked—the Angus breed doing what it's always done best."

"And really, what good is a tradition if it can't withstand a challenge? The show is where some of the most exciting, informative things could happen in the future."

(Theory: With practice, the interviewer will learn to recognize when the interview is proceeding to a conclusion. Develop a manner or language that signals "we're almost through," then watch your subject's reaction. He may be susceptible to the most provocative question of the day at that point.)

**SH** "If you were to sum up in one word the purpose of a breed journal, what would it be?"

Thoughtful, then finally—"Vitality! The breed magazine must both record and stimulate that breed's vitality."

**SH** "We haven't mentioned your other interests and hobbies. I know you have a family of four boys. I suppose they consume a lot of time."

"Well, yes. I guess I must be interested in woodworking—there's always some carpentry project around. My oldest son badgered me into buying a radial arm saw and we finished off a room for him last summer. I enjoy photography, other writing, and tennis is my sport which I wish I could improve. Music? Bluegrass, Scottish and Irish folk tunes, classical. I'd like to devote more time to Western Americana and art, wildlife photography, collecting antique guns."

**SH** "And what about your sons? Are they ornery?"

(Laughs). "They have their moments. You talk about vitality. And there's plenty of competition there, I'll be telling you. That's a delightful question, Shelley." **AJ**