

# CATTLE CULTURE

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

## Connecting at Congress

*New perspectives, same love for the industry for a former NJAA member.*

Every morning started with Starbucks. With my vanilla bean Frappuccino® in hand, the next stop would be the barn. From there, my 9-year-old self would juggle feed supplies with that plastic cup with the green logo, suffer through the rogue sprays of the washrack and hustle to get my heifers ready for their moment in the show ring. Through it all, the widest of smiles stayed consistently on my face.

Some of my favorite childhood memories consisted of those early mornings following that same routine. Since I aged out of junior programs, I can't begin to express how much I miss the happy chaos of cattle shows.

When I was given the chance to attend Cattlemen's Congress in Oklahoma City, Okla., in January, it was all I could do to stop myself from jumping up and down. While the excitement of attending a show feels the same as I did when I was younger, the experience has changed.

I no longer spend every waking moment in the barn, ready to meet every need of a spoiled show heifer. I now spend my time wandering through the barns, stalls and grandstands, chatting with the members of *the Business Breed* on behalf of the *Angus Journal* or snapping an image for future use.

Truthfully, I love this new role




just as much as I loved my time as a member of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). When I was younger, I was guilty of being focused solely on the livestock.

Your day revolves around preparing your animal and then studying others that you'll be competing against. Nowadays, I can spend my morning not only admiring the quality cattle, but I also can truly focus on the faces behind those livestock.

One of my favorite parts is actually watching the crowd rather than the NJAA exhibitors when the judge names a new division champion. If you've ever been to a livestock show, you know it takes a team to bring home a banner. These teams come in all shapes and sizes. From mentors and fitters to siblings and parents, there's always a cheering section from the sidelines that receives a special glance from the exhibitor after the champ slap is awarded. It's these moments behind the scenes that I've truly come to appreciate.

So much happens beyond the show ring at events like Congress, and I hope you enjoy these images I captured during my time braving the cold alongside my peers in Oklahoma. Though my focus while at cattle shows has shifted since I exhibited my own cattle, I can appreciate some things about my experience will never change.

I still start every morning of a cattle show with Starbucks — though my drink of choice has upgraded to include caffeine. I still juggle the cup with the green logo, though now it fights for balance with a heavy purse on my shoulder and a camera in my hand. I no longer have to dodge icy water in the washrack, but I still get to hustle to the show ring to watch other Angus enthusiasts with their heifers, ready for their moment in the show ring. Through it all, the widest of smiles stays consistently on my face. 

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