



F R I E D A ' S S T R E N G T H

"We Must Go On"

by Nancy Klemens



Mother and daughter-in-law look at a montage of photos of Frieda's earlier life.

You fell in love with them all," Frieda Sitz says, referring to the first time she saw Angus cattle in the early 1920s. It was the cattle's disposition and conformation that appealed to the young Nebraska farm woman.

She and her husband, William, followed up this love, purchasing a registered cow-calf pair and a heifer in 1924 from Will Williams, Clarkson, Neb. They went back again in 1929 to buy two more Angus heifers. That cancelled check still exists, showing the young Sitzes paid \$265 for their second pair of heifers. So began the Sitz Angus legacy, spanning 60-some years and three states.

To know Frieda Sitz is to know the young woman hiding inside her 94-year-old frame. Frieda is active, witty and independent enough to grab a hammer and tend to odd jobs in her little house.

The elderly woman has experienced her share of tragedy, outliving three of her own children. Yet a strong sense of life and its goodness shines through her blue eyes. Daughter-in-law Donna says that when she and daughter Sherrie went over to relate the sad news of Bobs death, after some silence, Frieda's first words were, "We must go on."

Frieda's life began in Stanton County, Neb., July 13, 1896. Her parents came over from Germany on a cattle freight ship to New York. A train brought them to Nebraska, where in 1904, they purchased 160 acres in Buffalo County. There, Frieda and her siblings were raised.

Looking back, Frieda remembers many hours herding the family's beef and dairy cattle. She also well recalls the first car her father brought home, a Dodge touring car. That was around 1915 and it replaced the horse-drawn carriage they had taken to church. The only time she ever came close to driving that precious automobile was "gripping the steering wheel tightly and putting my foot on the brake when told' as the car was rolled out of the garage to be washed.

Frieda took to the wheel later on and, in fact, was driving up until last year.

After marrying William in 1918, the couple began farming in Buffalo County. While living in Kearney, the two began to

build their Angus herd. They also ran chickens, geese, horses, mules and Hampshire hogs that they raised for market.

Frieda loved to show at the county fair and took several firsts. Each year the energetic woman hauled everything into town — from tomatoes and potatoes to the best of every animal on the farm. One year the Sitzes entered their horses and mules in a pulling contest and handily won a six-sided hog house.

In 1937 Will and Frieda took their children and moved to the great cattle country of western Nebraska, making their home in the Sand Hills of Holt County. By that time they had close to 40 head of Angus cows. From then on, Angus became the sole income for the Sitz family.

Frieda recalls there weren't many black cattle then. In fact, she only knew of three other Angus breeders in the state. Herefords were, of course, predominant and there were some Shorthorn.

"They were all black," Frieda said of their cattle herd. "They had to be. Had to watch where the white was too," she chuckles, alluding to the neighbor's Hereford bulls across the fence.

As for raising black cattle in a sea of red and white, Frieda scoffs, "We just liked it. They didn't like it; it was all right." The Sitzes sold their calves as feeders. Frieda always felt they got treated fairly at market and were not docked for calves of a different color.

"They were the best mothers we ever had," she says proudly of her Angus cows. Frieda never wavered in her conviction that Angus were the best cattle she and Will could raise. The couple appreciated the lack of horns, burnt bags and pink eye.

For the 15 years the Sitzes lived in Holt County, they sold bulls through private treaty. Ten to 15 bulls sold annually to buyers from across Nebraska and into Colorado and other states. Fred Knop, Ida Grove, Iowa, was one of the many prominent Angus breeders to get his start from Sitz.

In their years of ranching, Will and Frieda often travelled to livestock shows

Editor's note: Sitz Angus Ranch, Harrison, Mont., is world-renowned. Bob Sitz and his wife, Donna, began an Angus operation in 1960 that would grow to be one of the largest and most well-respected in the business.

Tragically, in January 1989, Bob was killed in a tractor accident. Sitz Angus continues on, however, and so does one 94-year-old woman, Frieda Sitz, Bob's mother. Following is her story.

Frieda Sitz enjoys a quieter moment in her Bozeman home.

such as the Chicago World Exposition and the Denver Stock Show. There, they were privileged to become acquainted with J.C. Penney who also raised the new breed of cattle.

Frieda encouraged the involvement of her three children with cattle in 4H. She was a driving force in the 4-H program in Holt County, urging others to become a leader like herself.

"If I hadn't started then, probably nobody would have started," she reflects.

The young Sitzes did well in the show ring. One year Bob raised and showed the champion heifer at Ak-Sar-Ben.

The Sitzes left the Sand Hills in 1952, buying a farm just outside Denver. They took 55 black heifers with them. The rest of the large herd was sold.

By then Bob had Angus in his blood and had started up his own herd in Colorado. He graduated from a Denver high school and went on to Colorado State University. Frieda would feed Bobs cows Monday through Friday, then he'd drive down on the weekends to tend to the cattle. College for Bob lasted one year. As his wife, Donna, puts it, he attended long enough to know exactly what he wanted to do.

"He wanted to be a rancher and raise his own Angus cattle," his mother proclaims, "and that's what he did. He lived Angus cattle."

The place to do that, Bob decided, was Montana. "He didn't care much for the dust of the farming because of his asthma attacks," Frieda adds, further spurring Bob's desire to leave Colorado.

In 1958, the search began for that special ranch. A year later, Ken Conzelman, Stock Show auctioneer and part-time realtor, came to the rescue.

"I've got a ranch for you," Frieda recalls Ken saying on a trip to Montana. "Come on, I'll show it to you. It was getting towards evening. The minute Bob saw it he said, 'that's what I want.'"

On January 1, 1960, in a snowstorm, Bob, a pregnant Donna and their small Angus herd implanted themselves on that scenic property. Coming north with them were five special cows who originated from William and Frieda's herd.



Sitz Angus Ranch is located at the foot of the Tobacco Root Range in southwestern Montana. There isn't a visitor to the place today who isn't impressed with its beauty, as Bob was 31 years ago.

Always there to help, Frieda provided the downpayment on the ranch. She has long since been paid back. Following from Denver in 1963, Frieda settled in nearby Bozeman.

"I wanted to be close to the kids," she says, "and get away from the city traffic."

Her son and his growing family and business reaped the benefits of Frieda's care. She's logged countless miles running tractor parts back and forth, and put in time cooking for brandings and bull sales. The vital woman is all a good grandmother should be.

"You sit around all the time, you get lousy," the 94-year-old says.

Mrs. Sitz will never get "lousy."

Today she is proud of the progress Bob, Donna and their four children made with Sitz Angus. Her daughter-in-law and Sherrie, Bob and Jim Sitz carry on steadily now with what Bob began.

Last year the ranch had the largest herd of registered cows in the nation, with the second highest amount of Pathfinder Cows, 57. This year 350 bulls will walk through the Sitz sale ring, making it the most purebred Angus bulls offered at one time. The Sitz name is synonymous with Angus cattle at their best.

"I'm proud that we were on top of the breed," Grandmother Sitz says, "and we still are today."