

CALL HIM CHARLIE

McPeake spent a lifetime devoted to cattle, people.

by Briley Richard, American Angus Association

There always seems to be those people who have been everywhere, know everyone and have done everything. Those who enjoy every ounce of life, give more than they take and make everybody feel like somebody.

That description paints the perfect picture of the late Charles Arthur McPeake. While he studied and worked at universities across the country, each adventure led to the development of a one-of-a-kind man, with a devotion to beef cattle and endearment for people.

“Charles knew everybody far and near, and people far and near knew him,” says Sandra H. McPeake, Charles’ wife. “He had a genuine love for people, and he had a genuine love for black-headed animals.”

With degrees and a professional career in animal breeding and genetics and years as an extension agent in his repertoire, Charles dedicated his life to cattle. In reality, he loved the people and cultivating relationships — the cattle simply served as the cherry on top.

The McPeake family lost Charles Dec. 18, 2020, after a hard-fought battle with cancer. Tears still come freely but are quickly followed by a smile as Sandra describes how fond people were of her beloved husband.



Charles Arthur McPeake

“If people called him Charles, which was his name, that was fine, and he always acknowledged it; but if anyone called him Charlie, they were true friends,” Sandra says. “You’d be surprised at the number of messages that we got talking about Charlie when he passed.”

WHERE THE ROAD BEGINS

After marrying Sandra in early 1972, Charles finished his master’s degree at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The newlyweds then headed north for Charles to

obtain a doctorate in animal breeding from Michigan State University, where they also welcomed two children, Andrea and Andrew.

Charles accepted his first career position at South Dakota State University in 1977. From there, he pursued a new role at Oklahoma State University where he served as the beef cattle breeding specialist and manager of Oklahoma Beef, Inc. In 1990 the family moved to Georgia for Charles to take a leadership role in the animal science department at the University of Georgia.

During this time, Andrew



pursued his own higher education, and his parents began probing, asking about his plans in life. After years of schooling, it came as quite a shock when he said he simply wanted to manage Angus cows. After Charles retired in 2005, Andrew's desires became a reality.

"His real life started in 2005 when he retired and we went to work," Andrew says.

In his retirement, Charles got to focus on two things he was passionate about — Angus cattle and his family.

"Our relationship changed at that point," Andrew says. "Before, it was very much son and father — he told me what to do, and expected me to do it. At that point, he figured out that I knew what I was doing and we had a lot more fun then."

TAKING ON A NEW ROLE

Together, the duo operated CAM Ranches and embraced the opportunity to tap into their

individual expertise. For Charles, the people became his focus.

"He enjoyed talking to people and lived for sale day and the month leading up to a sale," Andrew says. "He'd call his buddies and say, 'Hey, what do you think about this?' That's what he lived for. He was a people person — very gregarious."

Although Charles enjoyed the social aspect of the business, He also appreciated the mundane work. Long days ultrasounding cattle, pages and pages of data, evaluating EPD (expected progeny difference) updates — and understood the connection between

data collection and improvement.

"I remember growing up in Stillwater, Oklahoma, Dad always sat in a recliner to turn in performance data," Andrew says. "He lived for breed improvement, he enjoyed every Friday getting up in modern days, checking the internet to see what numbers changed."

With Charles' interests in data and Andrew's background in meat science and ruminant nutrition, the two worked to make strides in herd improvement. By combining the fundamentals of a quality cow with swift decision-making, the duo reached desired advancements at a quicker pace.

"He would tell me, 'Son, if you're going to make genetic improvement,



Sandra and son Andrew McPeake

"He would tell me, 'Son, if you're going to make genetic improvement, you have to turn generations faster!'"

— Andrew McPeake,
on his late father



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you have to turn generations faster,” Andrew says. “He kept everything basic — they have to be a great cow to start with, but he knew that in order to turn generations, you have to do it at a younger age.”

THE CHARLIE FACTOR

No one would argue about the mark Charles left on the beef industry.

“Even if you didn’t know him, he always treated people the same,” Andrew says. “I don’t care if he just met them, he treated them with a 100% respect.”

Charles understood the value of networking and making connections far beyond just the professional sense. He viewed communication as a tool for education, method of befriending and way to puncture through surface-level interactions.

“What set my dad apart was his ability to communicate,” Andrew says. “He was a beef cattle breeding

specialist, which doesn’t sound very interesting to a lot of people, but his occupation was a communicator. He was able to disseminate information that was very technical at the time to where normal people could understand it.”

In addition to his communication skills, Charles also understood his weaknesses. Rather than throwing in the towel when faced with perplexing questions, he read about it, contacted experts and found solutions to help others.

“If people had questions, they could ask him and he could come up with an answer,” Andrew says. “He never made people feel

A beacon of kindness, a people person, a fountain of knowledge, a dedicated family man, a cattleman through and through.


*Charles A. McPeake,
2021 Angus Heritage Foundation Recipient.*

uncomfortable, and I think that’s the key to being an effective communicator.”

Charles’ demeanor and his interactions with people were a testament to his character. Being able to adapt, listen, think from various perspectives and uphold patience led to more meaningful interactions. Charles instilled the same principles in Andrew.

“You have to be malleable, and you have to be willing to listen,” Andrew says. “Just because someone thinks critically of an idea you might have doesn’t necessarily make them wrong; you just have to be patient, hear everything out and make the best decision that you can.”

Charles will be remembered as much more than an academic or an Angus breeder. The way he treated people and his fondness for improving everything around him will be his legacy.

2021 Angus Heritage Foundation inductee Charles A. McPeake made a difference in the lives of others through the vessel of Angus cattle. If you were lucky enough to know him, that’s what made him “Charlie.” 




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