

Starting out with nothing,





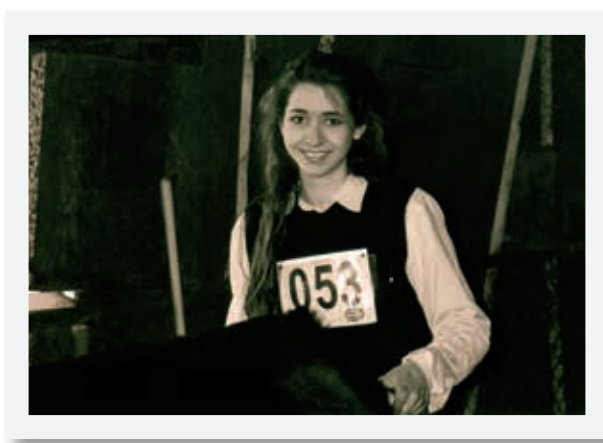
now she's here

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*Holding a feathered body close to her chest, Cortney Hill-Dukehart Cates, previously of Sykesville, Md., presented her first 4-H project to the judge in the poultry show. Her father, Robert Hill, never even had a dog growing up. Cortney was destined to have her very own zoo of sorts long before she was born.*

*by Lindsay King, assistant editor*



Marlene Dukehart, Cortney's mom, grew up showing horses, but had no experience with livestock. The Hill-Dukehart family dove headfirst into the livestock industry when Cortney started 4-H at 8 years old.

"My parents have been married for more than 40 years, but they still have different last names," Cortney explains. "Mom was ahead of her time I guess you could say."

Every year Cortney's parents would ask her what she wanted to show, and it was something new each time. She went from chickens to hogs then sheep and finally arrived at cattle at 10 years old. The first few years she led crossbred steers in the ring.

"I was judging livestock in 4-H, so I was beginning to understand what I needed to look for in cattle," Cortney says. "I felt comfortable selecting my own stuff instead of just whatever came out of the pasture at our house."

The Angus breed was suggested by a friend for its wide array of opportunities and contests available

to juniors. A Blackcap heifer from Virginia is what started it all. Cortney's herd can still be traced back to her.

"The first little show we went to she won it and the first big show, the Atlantic National, was just outside my backyard. I loved it," Cortney says. "After that first heifer, cattle were my main focus. I still did other projects, but as my heifer herd grew, so did my involvement with Angus."

### "Ag wasn't for me"

A strategically designed 17 acres held the Angus heifers. Cortney took pride in showing calves out of her own cows in the bred-and-owned (B&O) division, no matter the outcome. In 2002, she led the reserve champion B&O heifer at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) and the reserve champion bull at the Eastern Regional.

"This whole project cost a lot, so we could not afford to buy very expensive animals and still travel to compete," Cortney says. "We focused on breeding



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cattle good enough to show and be competitive. We did not have the numbers to sell very many to make money back, so whatever hit the ground is what my show cattle came from."

Glenelg High School was considered the farming school of the area, but Cortney was still one of very few showing cattle. A livestock judging scholarship to Butler Community College in Kansas tempted Cortney to leave her Angus herd behind. She decided teaching was the route for her and enrolled at Towson University in Maryland.

It was during her freshman year that Cortney traveled the country as Miss American Angus.

"It is something that I never imagined I would have the opportunity to do," Cortney says. "I will never forget being at the NJAS awards show in Denver. I was just hoping to make the top five in the scholarship contest to even have the opportunity to run for the title."

Cortney never dreamed she would eventually win the crown and the opportunity of a lifetime.

"I don't think anybody truly understands how special the title is until they get it," Cortney says. "The people you meet and the experiences are like nothing you have ever had in your whole life."

Many believe the crown is a symbol for handing out banners all year, but it gives these women an elevated platform to advocate for the industry to the public.

"It is such a great opportunity full of memories that few get the privilege to experience," Cortney says.

After aging out of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), Cortney continued showing in the open Angus shows. This ultimately led her to Tyler, her husband.

It was at the Keystone International Livestock Exposition in Pennsylvania, a show they had both exhibited at many times before, where they met. Tyler even judged Cortney's cattle on several occasions, but they had never spoken.

"He asked me on a date, and I turned him down," Cortney remembers. "Not because I did not like

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him, but because he said we were going to eat at my place. I thought that was too forward of him.”

As it turns out, there is a restaurant called “Your Place.” Tyler was not deterred, he got Cortney’s number and pursued her from Indiana.

At the time, Cortney was teaching high school freshman U.S. history and government at her alma mater. She had a show heifer on her screen saver and her students thought it was neat that she raised and showed cattle. She laughs at how things change.

“When Tyler and I got married in 2010, I quit teaching and started working on the farm in Indiana full time,” Cortney says. “I never thought my life would be in agriculture, that is part of the reason I did not end up going to Butler. I am very fortunate that is though.”

## Package deal

Tyler, a third-generation Shorthorn breeder, showed cattle growing up, turning it into his livelihood as an adult. Now raising approximately 200 head of Shorthorn cattle, Cortney brought Angus with her to the marriage and Modoc, Ind., where they now make their home. Cortney’s cattle were part of the deal when they tied the knot, and they now have well over 50 head, with more black calves hitting the ground every year.

“I told him my cows and I were a package deal,” Cortney jokes. “I don’t think he was interested in Angus cattle when we first started dating. I took him to Angus shows, and then a year after we were married we bought our first Angus heifer together.”

Combining Cortney’s original genetics with the new has sparked Tyler’s interest in pursuing the breed more fervently.

“We both just like raising and showing cattle,” Cortney says. “Everything we breed is geared toward the show cattle market. They all do not make the cut, but what we are shooting for is quality.”

Tyler’s Shorthorns fall under Cates Farms while

Cortney kept the name her Angus herd was built on: Sunrise Sunset Farm. The initial intention of the Angus operation was to simply dabble in building a herd by flushing donors and adding new genetics to the mix.

“It seemed like our numbers started spiraling out of control,” Cortney says. “We were flushing cows and got to the point with the Angus that we needed to have a production sale.”

## Quality over everything

Twenty-eight marks the third year Angus will be featured in the Labor Day Weekend sale

alongside the Shorthorns. The Cates family sells heifer prospects, cows and calves, as well as embryos and semen. They also have an online sale of show heifer prospects in the spring.

“The idea behind the sale was to make some money off our Angus herd, but also build our name and reputation by selling quality cattle,” Cortney says. “We try to follow where the show industry is going and produce for that.”

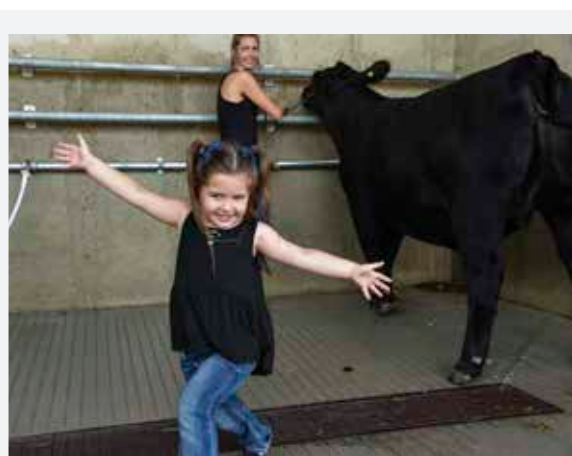
The first step in their program was to select for sound cattle, and then build on that first generation to infuse other desirable traits. Cortney says she is very happy with how their cattle are performing based on their selection decisions.

“We have built a solid customer base and now have returning customers,” Cortney says. “When we first started the sale, our numbers were small so we had to really decide what to sell and what to keep back as replacements.”

As the sale has grown, the Cates’ have worked vehemently to keep the quality high as they increase their total numbers.

“We don’t want to offer something we don’t consider high-quality,” Cortney adds.

Cortney has ramped up their use of Angus technologies in the last few years to make even more



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informed breeding decisions. They have started doing more DNA testing in addition to keeping their expected progeny differences (EPDs) current with the industry.

“We have started watching our numbers more than ever before on our bulls,” Cortney says.

Their main goal is to keep birth weights low while increasing weaning and yearling weights. A bull bought at Denver two years ago has contributed significantly to achieving this.

“He had a great show look and the numbers to keep the integrity of our cattle where we wanted them to be,” Cortney explains.

## Game changer

It was July 2014, the week after the NJAS when Cortney and Tyler’s game changer arrived. Born on July 15, Piper was strolling around Angus cattle only a few days before she was born.

“Tyler judged the bred-and-owned NJAS in Indianapolis,” Cortney says. “I encouraged him to do it even though it was right around my due date. I went to the show every day, even missing my final doctor’s appointment that week.”

One of their heifers showed on Friday, Cortney showed up to a doctor’s appointment on Monday, and Piper was born the next day.

“We enjoy having her at home with us, taking her to the barn and exposing her to different agricultural experiences,” Cortney says. “We take her to all of the shows with us.”

Cortney’s mom always travels with them as Piper’s personal chaperon for the shows so Tyler and Cortney can focus on the business of the cattle.

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Hitting all the major shows in the nation, Tyler

and Cortney balance showing two different breeds just about everywhere they go, taking the largest load to Louisville every year.

“We have taken both breeds to Denver, but it depends year-to-year because they do not go at the same time,” Cortney says. “We also go to Fort Worth and the KILE in Pennsylvania. We will always go to the NJAS; we love that show.”

## Go big, or go home

Longevity in the cattle industry is one of the toughest aspects of the business, especially when it comes to the showing side. Cortney’s biggest dream for her business, like anyone else, is for it to continue to grow, improve and be passed on to the next generation, their daughter.

“I hope that [our business] will withstand the test of time,” Cortney says. “A lot of people are in and out of the cattle industry. They are a whirlwind. I want our operation to not only be known and respected, but to last.”

These simple, yet realistic, goals are followed by the drive to win in the showing, something the Cates’ aspirations demand from them. Cortney

believes if they were not competitive, they would not be in the business of raising, showing and selling cattle.

“We not only sell cattle, but we also try to build relationships with people and I think that is pretty important in this business,” Cortney adds. “We feel like we are in it for the long haul.”

At the end of the day, Cortney has her parents to thank for the life she lives today. She is

thankful they never pushed her, they simply let her explore her interests.

“I was just a little kid with no cattle or livestock background that was extremely fortunate to have parents willing to support me in the things I loved,” Cortney says. “If my parents had not done those things, it would have never gotten to this point.” 