

Confessions of a Cattle Show Junkie

Every time I see that cigarette ad "You've come a long way, baby!", I have to smile. I guess I have. From Ohio to New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Maryland. From wife and mother, to secretary for a couple of Angus associations and to an ag journalist. And it's all because of Angus cattle.

Of course, I don't know what would have happened if my date (who I later married) hadn't taken me to the county fair and I hadn't seen that lone string of black cattle tied along the outside of the barn. That started a lifelong love affair with the breed. Who knows? Pavoroti might be serenading me on a stage somewhere. And I might have missed all the fun!

I'm a livestock show junkie. I've been one for 30 years and I'm not about to quit. I have tanbark in my boots, spray adhesive under my fingernails and hair oil in my veins. The mere whiff of the show ring can give me a high that lasts from April through January (our show season), at which time I usually never want to see another show ring or sale

ring again—for at least a month.

It all started at the Northeastern Ohio Angus Show at the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds in Berea, Ohio. The show circuit has taken me from the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield, Mass., to the National Western in Denver, with numerous stops in between.

It's been excitement, heartaches, exhilaration, disappointments, cold feet, an aching back, bruised shins, tired arms, crushed toes—you name it. But it's been FUN!

I've seen fads come and go. Fat, dumpy little teddybears changed to the tall, leggy shot-gun type and finally to massive "meat wagons" like I had only seen in pictures taken before the 1930s.

I've seen the family fad come and go, and Scottish cattle and Canadian cattle. White halters, black halters, brown halters, shave-their-heads, don't-shave-their-heads, shave-all-but-the-nose. Full-blown tails, teased tails, balled tails, false tails and false tailheads. Brush 'em up, brush 'em down. Bone 'em up, bone 'em down.

I've seen the cowboys wear cowboy hats, flat caps, peaked caps, steer jock hats, embroidered shirts that made the show ring look like an advertising competition, and when the Scotch-thing was big, I saw show ring officials try to enforce the wearing of little white jackets. (Does that tell you something?)

We've been through breeder judges, Argentine judges, college judges, packer judges and judges who were so "out of it" they didn't know a jump-muscle from a neck-vein. Sound like a three-ring circus? Well, maybe that's what's kept me at ringside all these years, marking catalogs and second-guessing judges.

When my five children were small, I only got to county fairs and the state fair, plus a trip to Chicago (which was only five hours by car) now and then. The rest of the time, I stayed home with the kids and mixed feed, thawed water and checked cows while my husband went to all those exotic places like Denver, Timonium, West Springfield, Harrisburg, Athens, Rhinebeck and Orangeburg, S.C.!

Chicago was, for me, like the academy awards to a stagestruck kid from Kansas or Ohio. I was awestruck the first time I went there and saw all the people and cattle I'd been reading about in the *ANGUS JOURNAL*. The first time I saw my husband lead an animal into that hallowed ring was incredible. I'm amazed at how blasé I've become since.

In the name of my addiction I once spent two days in a truck pulling a load of bulls, with a gearshift staring me in the stomach while we drove through Illinois and Missouri during the most fearsome of ice-storms, complete with the terrifying spectre of overturned tractor-trailers every few miles and a jack-knife on an off-ramp. All to spend 10 days in January in a barn full of cattle where the ammonia was so thick I thought I was going to die! Ten fantastic days, and then a return trip through dense fog and 20-car pile-ups. I'd do it again to see the National Western. Anytime.

I've washed cattle in the men's washroom at Ohio State fairgrounds in February when the outside water was frozen by below-zero temperatures, chased a show steer who was headed back to Connecticut, through half the underbrush in northeastern Ohio, alternately frozen and broiled while sitting on some of the hardest seats in the world.

I did not heed Willie Nelson. My babies grew up to be cowboys, so now I must watch them go through much of the same things I did while I try to keep up with the laundry between shows.

I've stood at ringside with a president of the United States, sat at dinner with the head of one of the largest department store chains on earth, rubbed elbows with celebrities of varying degree and met some of the nicest people in the whole world—Angus people. I've traveled and seen places I might never have seen otherwise.

I wouldn't change any of it—except maybe a placing now and then. When's the next show?

