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# A Product of Her Environment

*Years of preparation and encouragement help this California junior Angus breeder garner the Angus breed's top showmanship prize.*

*by Julie Grimes Albertson*

The tension was evident in their faces, the stakes were high. Stan and Jean Toledo were gazing at the huge show ring, its harsh lights magnifying the sweat on their daughter's thick brow. Heather Kalino was in the competition of her life.

The exhibitors walked the heifers, set them up, walked them again. Time seemed to pass slowly. But just when they thought Heather's tired arm would give out, the results were given. The competitors headed for the gate. Heather had a grin the size of her silver belt buckle. She placed last in class.

The setting was the Cow Palace, It was the beginning of Heather Kalino's show career.

"The first time I ever showed a heifer was the Junior Grand National, one of the biggest shows in California. My dad told me that it didn't matter where I placed as long as I held on to my heifer," Heather reminisces.

That was the last time Heather would be satisfied with last place.

Her most recent and impressive win yet came in July when the Manteca, Calif., native won top showman honors at the 1993 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest.

Anyone who talked with Heather before the competition would have been less than impressed with her self-confidence. "I was hoping for the best, but expected to do just okay," she says. "I see somebody else show and tell myself that I can't compare to them."

Contrary to her doubts, the first round proved successful for California as both of its representatives, Heather and John Solem, Los Olivos, finished in the top 15.

"I was very lucky. I got a really good heifer in the draw that was slow. We fit together well. Once I made top 15, I was satisfied. Whatever happened after that would just be icing," Heather says.

Heather's mother wanted her to wear



JULIE GRIMES ALBERTSON PHOTO

a different (clean) white shirt for the finals the next day. "I told her I couldn't because that was my lucky shirt," she says. "So she went to all the hotels in Wichita trying to find one that could dry clean it overnight. No luck.

"That's when I asked her to do what Cheramie Viator's mom did the night before the finals — wash it out in the bathtub. Well, she did and the rest is showmanship history."

**Day two of showmanship** proved to be competition at its best. Each state's two best showmen competed in the first round. The second round is boiled down to the top 15 competitors in the country.

Once the showmen were in the ring, Heather's confidence didn't improve. "They were working heifers on the other end. All I could see were heifers spinning around. I thought either they were ignoring me, or they already threw me out because I wasn't good enough."

Then the competitors were asked to switch heifers. "I got a heifer that was really acting up for someone else. I just flipped her around once and stuck her. She stood the rest of the time. I guess that was an advantage, getting a heifer that was giving someone else trouble. I found her soft spot. That was just luck."

That "luck" as she calls it had gotten her all the way from Manteca to one of the top 15 junior showmen in the breed. Heather was pretty sure that was where her luck would run out. She expected another exhibitor to win.

As they began announcing the top five places, Heather listened for her number, nine. When they got to fourth place and said entry 96, she heard the nine and started to step forward... she quickly backed up and then heard her fellow Californian announced for third place.

"I was expecting Jeff Dameron to win, so when he was awarded second I thought maybe the guy from Wyoming would win." To her disbelief number nine was called, and Heather became part of the showmanship elite.

"To do well in showmanship is an honor," Heather says. "I had some great role models. Previous winners such as John Toledo and Andra Janssen — I see them as so far ahead of me. I want to be a great role model for kids, too."

Like other winners before her, Heather gives much credit to people who have helped her prepare for the

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**— Heather Kalino**



competition. Michael Gonzales, who placed in the top 15 last year gave her many helpful tips. He also helped calm her down the day of competition by putting her on the wash rack scrubbing heifers to be shown that day.

Heather encourages other junior Angus members to get involved in showmanship because it's a contest that's not about money, only hard work and developing your talents. "You may not have the money to buy the best heifer, but in showmanship you can try your hardest and if something goes wrong, it's up to you to learn from it."

There was a time when she wasn't nearly as enthusiastic about showmanship contests. "My mom and dad would always make me compete in showmanship. I would do it just to get it out of the way." One such instance was her first time showing at the California State Fair. "I didn't want to go into showmanship because the week before I had the same judge who placed me dead last in class at our junior show."

Thanks to encouragement from her mom and her agriculture teacher,

Heather ended up winning the competition.

**Encouragement from her parents** has made the difference in this young woman's life. "My parents have always put me first and surrounded me with support."

Heather, an only child, has an especially close relationship with her mother, Jean, a retired school teacher. "We've been best friends since I was little. You know how you always have those little secrets from your dad that your mom always would keep, that's my mom."

Jean Toledo returned to her home state of Kansas this summer when the family made the journey to Wichita. However, she wouldn't be able to give a testimonial for the Sunflower State. Jean grew tired of Kansas snowstorms one long winter and just started driving west. She ended up in California and later met and married Stan Toledo, a native of Hawaii.

More recently, Stan has retired from Lockheed Missile Space and Command in Sunnyvale, Calif., which helps build space shuttles and missiles.

Although her father had never seen a cow until he came to California, Heather says he has been a quick study and gives her lots of support showing cattle.

Stan Toledo exhibited some of that support during his daughter's final year showing steers at the California State Fair. "Dad always said when it was my last year to compete at the state fair we would get two really good steers."

Their mission was accomplished as Heather's steer was awarded grand champion honors at their county fair and was reserve champion of its division at the state fair. The animal was also among only 12 steers to sell at the fair.

A group of California Angus breeders showed their support and appreciation for Heather by purchasing her steer in the sale. She was surprised only because the steer wasn't an Angus. "For them to support me by buying my red steer really touched me. And the people that first formed the syndicate had just had a death in the family. For them to have me on their minds was an honor."

California juniors, such as Heather, are fortunate to have a great support system that encourages them to participate at the national level. The

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junior organization gave both its showmanship delegates \$500 for travel expenses. The adult association contributed \$500 to the juniors to help with the cost of hauling 14 head to the National Junior Angus Show.

### Mind Set on the Future

Heather has made the transition from an excitement-filled summer to life as a challenge student. A sophomore at Modesto Junior College, Heather plans to transfer to a four-year university and study agriculture business next year. Her future plans include work as both a breed and industry spokesperson.

"Someday I'd like to work for the American Angus Association as their first female regional manager or perhaps work as a junior advisor."

One industry issue of great importance is dealing with animal rights activists, says Kalino. As breed and industry leaders I believe we need to confront the problem by communicating with and educating animal rights supporters. We also need to be educated about what they believe.

Promoting the Angus breed and its

juniors won't have to wait until after graduation, however. Heather will be crisscrossing the country as a newly-elected National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board director.

One thing is certain. Heather Kalino won't be involved in self-promotion. This unassuming young woman is interested only in revealing a piece of her world to

other young people in order to inspire and encourage them.

"More than anything, I want to pass on the excitement and all my great experiences to others, so they understand the chance is out there for them— if they put their minds to it."

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