

After-Hour Hobbies

What people do in their spare time for plain ol' personal pleasure makes for interesting conversation and reading.

To curb our curiosity of the kind of hobbies Angus breeders participate in after their chores are done and cattle fed, we did a little investigating. It wasn't long before we uncovered three Angus breeders who possess special skills and hidden talents.

Our first featured breeder pursues photography with a passion. Photography is Les Fearrien's way of communicating with people; his camera a friendly eye that people respond to with delight.

We found Mel Melsheimer, an Indiana breeder with quite an adventurous streak. This Midwest flatlander transforms into a mountain climber and treks off to the Rockies or Cascades during his summer vacation.

On the plains of Nebraska we uncovered the hidden talents of the Harl Family. Rex and Tracy whittle away their free hours on woodworking projects, a craft handed down from Rex's father.

Discover these breeders' stories for yourself on the pages that follow. Down the road, we hope to reveal a few more Angus breeders with interesting or exciting hobbies. Let us know if you or a fellow breeder has a hidden talent to share with the rest of the Angus world.

— Jerilyn Johnson

An Angus Shutter Bug

Who was that enthusiastic guy behind the camera clicking away during the 1993 World Angus Forum and Angus Across America Tour?

It was 76-year-old Les Fearrien. He's been raising cattle and taking photographs for 64 years.

He and his wife, Jean, work side by side on their ranch located near the beautiful coastal community of Hydesville in northern California. They have lived in their turn-of-the-century Victorian house for 42 years. They never tire of the pristine splendor their 800-acre ranch manifests. Their misty blue skies and copious hills, dotted with the blackest of Angus cattle, are truly utopia.

From the time he was a child, Les has attempted to capture images of the beauty he sees around him. Often the results of his early efforts were not satisfactory. Still, he kept on trying and improving over the years.

Today, with the help of a Pentax zoom 70R camera and Kodak film, his work has graced covers of the *Angus Journal* and been used in his agricultural media advertisements.

The highlight of Fearrien's photography career had to be when his August 1992 *Angus Journal* cover photo was taken aboard the space shuttle Endeavour by NASA astronaut and fellow Angus breeder Mark Lee. The Endeavour



Les & Jean Fearrien make good photo subjects, too.

and Les' cover photo completed 126 orbits of the Earth, traveling 3.3 million miles from Sept. 12 to Sept. 20, 1992.

A year later, at the World Angus Forum, Les enjoyed meeting Col. Lee in person and focusing in on the Forum and tour's enthusiastic entourage. He clicked his way through 29 rolls of film and sent pictures to 43 participants.

During quiet mornings at his California ranch, he eagerly awaits the first brilliance of day to fill the skies. Armed with his camera, he patiently watches the sunrise as colors change with each passing second. He clicks at just the right moment and smiles with hope that it will be as beautiful on film as it was to him.

Les finds the only things harder to photograph than

sunrises and sunsets are Angus cattle. He says when several head of Angus bunch together, it is easy to get a "black blob with ears sprouting in all directions."

Taking pictures is his way of communicating. "It gives me a reason to build relationships with people," Les says. "Everybody needs strokes. Pictures are my means of letting people know that they are important."

Les not only shares his photographs with those in the Angus world, he shares them on visits with many elderly, house-bound friends. Because they cannot walk out in the fields to see the sunrise, Les opens his world to them through images he has been capturing for 64 years.

— **Barbara LaBarbara**



This scenic Angus photo made the August 1992 Angus Journal cover. That fall it was launched into orbit with Col. Mark Lee on the space shuttle Endeavour.

Mel the Mountain Climber

Indiana Angus breeder Melvin "Mel" Melsheimer, climbs mountains when he isn't climbing into haymows or a project with one of his high school agriculture students.

"In mountain climbing, as well as in cattle breeding, trust is really important," Mel says.

Mel and high school pal, David Dillon, now living in Montana, decided to climb to rarer air when Mel confided that skydiving was not an exciting enough hobby for him.

Far from the pressures of school responsibilities, farming and cattle shows, Mel and David climb glaciers and snow-covered mountains once a year.

Mel has scaled the heights of both the Rockies and the

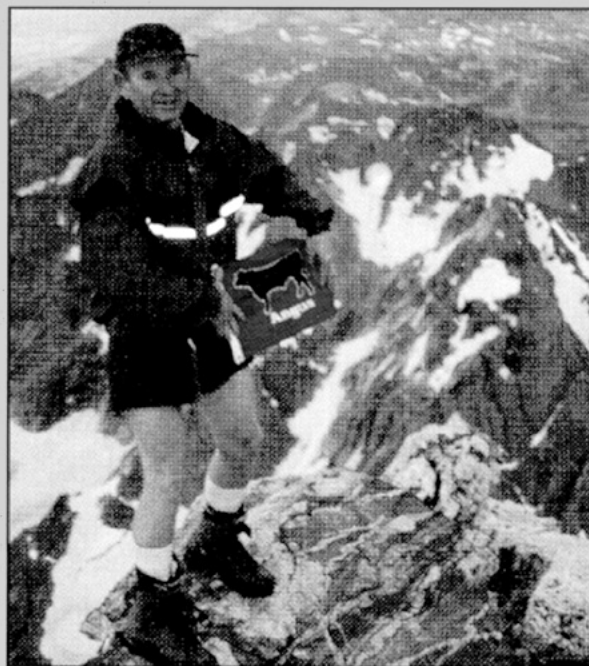
Cascade Mountains. Mountain climbing requires careful preparation, courage and skill.

Proclaiming safety and conservative decisions to be his hallmarks, Mel uses only the best in ice axes, foot crampons, 9,000-pound-test nylon ropes, and the very latest in weather-beater clothing.

"If the weather closes in, we quit; there's no sense in taking a chance with our lives," says Mel.

His most challenging climb was an ascent of Mount Rainier in Washington last July. This mountain is 14,410 feet high.

"Our party of three mountain climbers faced crevasses, wind, cold and altitude sickness," Mel says. "We completed the climb in 28 hours."



Mel Melsheimer plants an Angus flag atop the Grand Teton Mountain near Jackson, Wyo. This mountaineer says he would prefer taking a box of Certified Angus Beef™ strip steaks on his expeditions, but they are too much weight. Instead, he saves a box for the celebration at the finish of a climb.

Harls Keep Hands in Wood

Since the days of his youth, Rex Harl's time and considerable energy have been consumed by the cattle business. "Angus cattle have been my life," he says, admitting that his many years of breeding, showing and marketing Angus seedstock have not been without some frustration.

For Rex, escape from work-a-day stress has been found in the wood shop where the Nebraska cattleman takes therapeutic doses of the smell of wood and the look and touch of its grain.

If Rex acquired his love for cattle from his father, it was the senior Harl, an Iowa farmer, carpenter and building contractor, who also passed on an appreciation for woodworking. Skill in the craft came from time spent at his father's

side, but wood took a back seat to cattle when Rex was grown and struck out on his own. Along with his wife, Norma, Rex farmed and raised cattle in their native Iowa as Rex gained something of a reputation as a cattle fitter. That expertise led to several years of fitting show cattle for some of the era's notable Angus firms.

"In 1965 I went to Ankony Angus in New York and had the opportunity to fit and show Ankonian Projector," says Rex. "Those were exciting times and Ankony was riding high. But after their dispersion, in '67, I went to Walbridge Farms and then to Arkansas and the Fourch River Ranch."

In 1970 Rex returned to Ankony, managing their Iowa

farm. He also spent some time on Colorado's western slope, managing the Triple L Ranch before coming back to Ankony Angus for a third time.

"It was exciting, but it was a hectic lifestyle with long workdays. It was hard on family life," adds Rex. "Norma bore most of the responsibility for raising our four kids and she did a mighty good job."

In 1976 Rex met John Quirk who was seeking Angus females to establish a registered herd near Hastings, Neb. Rex then joined Quirk Land & Cattle Company, managing the Nebraska cattle interests which, for a time, included registered cattle representing four different breeds.

"We showed Angus cattle aggressively from 1976, through '83," recalls Rex. "We

went hard and that final year we hit a total of 18 shows. The show ring was good to us but it was frustrating. Besides getting tired of the hassle, we saw that show-type cattle were becoming less functional.

"We could see it in our own cattle, and could see buyer acceptance slipping. So we pretty much abandoned the show ring to concentrate on breeding cattle to satisfy the needs of our commercial customers. We wanted to concentrate on practical, functional cattle, but finding some Angus cattle with real muscle was tough. It's been hard to do, but we're now producing the functional cattle we wanted and with some uniformity and consistency. Our bull trade is growing steadily so I think it was the right thing to do."

Mel's favorite climb, so far, was the Colombian Ice Field in Jasper National Park. "The surroundings were pristine, with no people, trees or animals," he says. "I plan more trips to this area."

Mel is quick to mention his back-up team and support staff who make it possible for him to pursue his mountain climbing hobby. Wife Joan; her brother Bruce Cissna and his son, Seth; Seth's cousin, Michelle; and neighbors all pitch in to chore and manage his Angus herd and farm while he's gone.

Mel and Joan trace their Angus roots to the 1944 start of Joan's grandfather's herd. Edmund Cissna Sr. bought four Angus heifers for his Wonderland Farm at Chrissney, Ind.

That farm was assumed by Joan's dad, Edmund Jr., and later sold. Joan and Mel mar-

ried in 1971 and began using Mel's expertise as a vocational agriculture teacher and FFA sponsor to establish Mirror Lake Angus at Tennyson, Ind.

The lake that mirrors Melshheimers' farm home, also bubbles with the exuberant splashing of hordes of young people from nearby Heritage Hills High School, where Mel is a faculty member and FFA sponsor.

"The main focus of the Mirror Lake herd," explains Joan, "is not so much to turn a big profit. Our cattle provide a way of giving young people a chance to experience using their talents at grooming and showing. Traveling this great country with us to regional and national shows gives these kids a look at life outside this small town."

Mel and Joan have no biological children, however, their surrogate family includes Pam Schaefer, of St. Mainrad, Ind.;



(l to r) Mel and Joan Melshheimer and their surrogate kids, Seth Cissna and Michelle Braun.

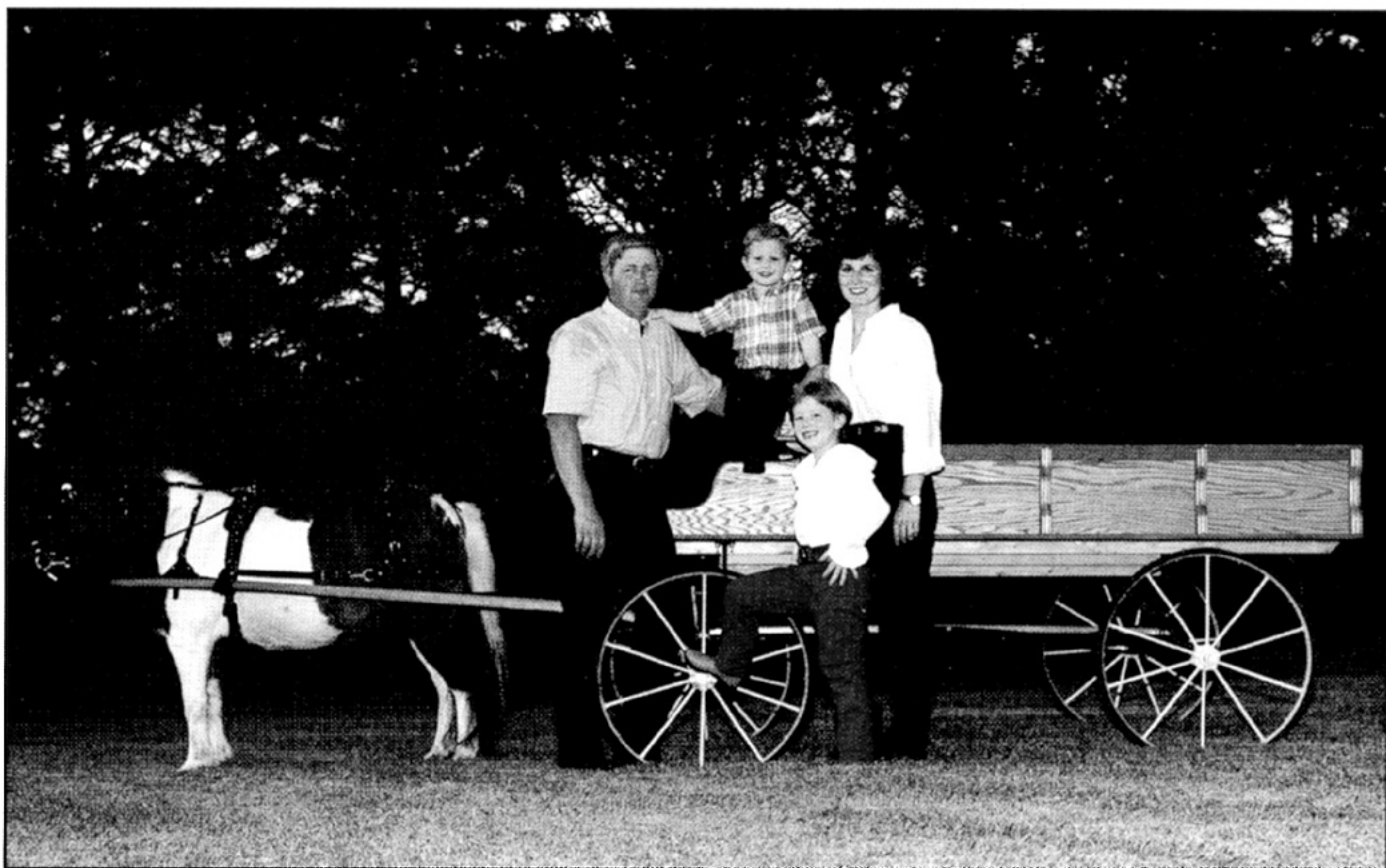
Seth Cissna, of Dale, Ind.; and Michelle Braun, of Grandview, Ind.

Trim of build, with a reddish-tint to his hair, Mel rubs his chin as he ponders reasons for his passion for the mountains.

"I find mountain climbing to be more of a good physical

exertion. I know I feel much better when I return home. Some people talk of an inner expansion — an opening of new insights. Exercise is too boring to do with no incentive. My annual mountain climb is my personal incentive to stay in shape."

—Joey Kubesch



Pictured with an oak wagon Tracy Harl crafted are (l to r) "Popcorn" the pony, Tracy, Lucas, Samantha and Carrie Harl.

Coming to grips with his program's frailties and redirecting its focus was a stressful process that drove Rex to seek a release for mounting tension. Golf provided some relief, but a return to wood-working proved to be the most successful outlet. The fact that young grandchildren were now on the scene saw Rex turn to the making of children's toys.

Wooden trains, doll cradles and hobby horses became gifts from Granddad. And there have been doll houses with cut-away backs to accommodate tiny furniture. Little red barns have shingled roofs and sliding doors that open for toy farm animals.

"It's no big deal," says Rex. "It's something I work at only sporadically. But it can be a good escape from the everyday things. Tracy has helped with

some of my little projects but he has made some big ones, too. He could make anything he set his mind to."

Tracy Harl is Rex's son, who lives in nearby Trumbull, Neb., with his wife, Carrie, and two children. Tracy developed an early interest in cattle through 4-H work, but did not pursue cattle production. Opting for a career in marketing, he is an auctioneer specializing in registered seedstock sales.

Tracy attended auctioneer school when he was just 16 years old, and while still in high school started working for a family friend who operated a real estate and auction business. He gained experience by calling bids for farm sales before moving into cattle merchandising.

Tracy now cries for about 50

Angus sales each year and as many more sales for other breeds. For clients requesting additional help with their marketing program, Tracy and Carrie also provide assistance with cattle photography, advertising and catalog production.

Like his father, Tracy finds some measure of escape in woodworking, but he has undertaken some projects of greater scale. From helping with doll cradles for his nieces, he moved to building a crib for his own newborn daughter.

"I thought it would be neat to make a crib instead of buying one, so I found a set of plans and decided to make it from cherry wood," explains Tracy. "The cherry was hard to find and I really didn't have a lot of fancy tools to work it with. But I bought a table saw

and a small lathe. I ruined several pieces on that lathe before getting all the pieces ready. I finally finished it, just before Samantha was born." Next, Tracy built a cedar chest as a gift for Carrie and has since completed projects including an oak gun case and fern stand. But the grandest project so far has been a horse-drawn wagon. Taking a steel-wheeled running gear, Tracy built new wooden parts, adding an oak box and spring seat. The wagon was completed by the last day of school when Tracy and the family pony treated Samantha's first-grade class to rides around the school yard.

"I've learned you can build some decent projects without a lot of really expensive tools," says Tracy. "And except for the sanding, it's fun."

—Troy Smith