

They Are Off and Writing

National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members took advantage of the second annual Creative Writing Contest. The contest left the starting gate at the 2002 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) and is building momentum as it rounds out its second year, doubling in entries. Forty-nine talented juniors from across the country tapped their creative sides to produce these clever narrations. The essays were judged on grammar, spelling, organization and content. The following are the top essays from each division.

Junior Division Ladies First

by **Zachary Wells**, Hamilton, Texas

Here I was with a group of showmanship exhibitors on a hot evening in San Angelo, Texas. The strong, West Texas wind was still. The setting sun crept under the west side of the arena, exposing exhibitors to its heat. Senior showmanship was underway, and nobody looked happy. Sweat dripped off foreheads, and the heifers seemed uncomfortable.

I was sweat-soaked and nervous as a cat, ready for the intermediate class to start. I'd always done well with my cattle; however, showmanship was my weakness. In fact, the last contest I was in, I was second — second to last that is!

My heifer could sense the excitement, so she acted doubly bad, jumping at everything. Even talking in a low voice and scratching didn't help. Her attitude was catching, and I was getting edgy.

Earlier, on our way to the ring, Dad gave me last-minute instructions. "Keep Queen under control. Don't hold her back. Let her walk out. Watch the judge. Pay attention!"

A crowd gathered at the ring, everyone trying to be first. My friend Travis and I were middle of the pack. Dad stood beside me. As the leaders entered the ring I moved forward, trying to get ahead.

I felt a tap on my shoulder. Turning, I looked at Dad. He gave me one of those looks and said, "Ladies first," waving to the

girls behind to pass.

I stood my ground, ready to bolt ahead, but knowing not to disobey. Travis fell into step behind a girl with a Simmental heifer followed by one with a Brahman.

I waited anxiously as everyone passed. Finally, Dad gave me the nod to enter.

Robbie Burns, the TCCA showmanship leader, was late and brought up the rear. I didn't realize then, but fate and Dad had put me in a good position.

As the class began, I concentrated on calming Queen and watching the judge. But Travis had his hands full between two bad heifers.

Every time he started to get his heifer set, the Simmental in front backed into him, or the Brahman behind, who was in heat, would try to jump. I was between two

heifers that never moved. Queen relaxed, and so did I. When the judge looked our way, Queen was right — head up, back straight, front feet even, back feet staggered.

As he placed the class, bottom to top, Travis got pulled early — not his usual. One by one the judge waved contestants into line, until there was me, and the girls on either side. He began his comments.

"We have three outstanding showmen left. They all worked hard, had their heifers set up and presented themselves well. However, there's one showman who stands out; that's the young man in the middle with the Angus heifer!

I couldn't believe it. He was talking about

"When the judge looked our way, Queen was right — head up, back straight, front feet even, back feet staggered."

me! I looked at Dad in amazement, and he had that look on his face. You know the one. "I told you so," it seemed to say. "Ladies first!"

Intermediate Division How Will Your NJAA Involvement Affect Your Future?

by **Jordan Davis**, Foss, Okla.

W. Somerset Maugham said, "It is a funny thing about life; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you often get it." This statement can be associated to the National Junior Angus Association's (NJAA) three levels of recognition: Bronze, Silver and Gold. To achieve the Gold level is to strive for the best.

Through my membership in the NJAA, I have learned to set goals in my life. The many people whom I have met in the organization have encouraged me to set these goals. Their stories of failure and overcoming obstacles to achieve success have provided me with the encouragement to develop my confidence and acquire knowledge to attain the best in myself. The goals that I have set for myself include: (1) winning a blue ribbon at an NJAA show, (2) competing and winning an NJAA showmanship contest, (3) playing and winning a state softball championship game, and (4) graduating from high school and attending pharmacy school.

As I filled out my Bronze and Silver applications, I was surprised to realize that the skills that I have acquired through my involvement in the NJAA are essential skills for achieving success in my other goals. Showing cattle, playing softball and doing well in school are accomplished by practicing and working hard. Tedious chores, such as washing heifers, setting up



► Winning top honors in the creative writing junior division are (from left) **Zachary Wells**, Hamilton, Texas, first; **Callie Smith**, Lebanon, Tenn., second; and **Stephanie Hymel**, Vacherie, La., third.



► Winning top honors in the creative writing intermediate division are (from left) **Jordan Davis**, Foss, Okla., first; **Haley Rieff**, Bentonville, Ark., second; and **Ben Greene**, Covington, La., third.

heifers, practicing batting and catching, and studying for tests, are tasks that must be done in order to prepare for success. Waiting until the show or ballgame begins is not the time to prepare for becoming a champion. By that time, it is too little, too late and only failure has been procured.

I have discovered that choices have to be made on a daily basis. Should I get that extra hour of sleep, or should I feed and take care of my heifers? Do I go home after softball practice or spend an extra hour on batting practice and getting that one play just right? Do I watch television and pray for a multiple-choice test in history class tomorrow, or do I turn off the television, pull out the books and really study for the test? Some of my decisions are very inconsequential, while others will have an impact on my life goals. The impact of each of these choices will determine if I accept just anything in my life or if I will accept only the best in my life.

Success for me is turning the stumbling blocks into stepping-stones. My first experience in the NJAA was an example of this philosophy. In 1999 the NJAA was held in Tulsa, Okla. My family and I were feeling quite confident that I

would do well because I had won the Angus show at the Washita County Fair. I discovered that I was not prepared for a national show by placing last and not receiving a ribbon, even if it had been an “off-colored” ribbon. This was an experience I will never forget.

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I was still sulking when the show was over because I had not received a ribbon. Then someone in a green jacket took the time to stop and talk with me. That someone, whom I later learned was a junior officer for the NJAA, encouraged me to try again the next year. During our conversation, I came to the realization that it is not important what color the ribbon is that I bring home, or in my case, the ribbon I did not bring home. It is about trying and the people I meet and what I can learn from them.

If the junior officer had not taken the time to provide words of encouragement, I might not have attended another NJAA show and would have missed countless opportunities and friendships. As a result, I learned that preparation, dedication, responsibility and associations with people who have knowledge to share are fundamental in reaching for the gold in my life.

The friends and leaders in the NJAA are the people who have supported and will continue to support me by providing me with the confidence that I can achieve my goals. Since the first national show, my cattle program has improved, and my room décor has changed from toys and stuffed animals to trophies, plaques, ribbons, banners and anything associated with Angus cattle. Because of the NJAA I have had the opportunity to travel many miles and cultivate a multitude of friendships. Although I am not sure what the future holds for me, I am confident that I will not accept anything but the best in my Angus cattle and life.

Senior Division **Landi's Legacy**

by **Landi McFarland**, Ellston, Iowa

“... and Landi's most memorable characteristic was her cheerful, positive attitude.

As I talked with her grieving family and friends, I heard over and over how she could always bring a smile to the faces around her, even during tough times. During the floods of 1993 that struck her family farm, she kept her family and friends afloat by bringing out the positives in life. Her mom recalled her saying, “Well, one thing about the flood is that it is bringing our neighbors and friends even closer together than ever before. We are supporting each other and putting aside our differences for mutual benefit.”

“Everything in life is diminished without a positive attitude.”

Yes, she really did have a message for all of us. Don't we wish there were more people like her with bright, sparkling attitudes? She gave off a radiance wherever she went.

“Landi always had a smile on her face. When she didn't win champion with her favorite

Angus heifer, she went up to the young man who had beaten her, shook his hand and congratulated him. She always seemed to have a compliment in store for everyone she met. Landi wanted others to feel good about themselves, and she did this quite well with her cheerful, positive attitude.

“Landi's glass was always half full rather than half empty. Someone might tell her that her glass was half empty, but I think this made her stronger, not weaker. A pulsation inside her kept her positive like no person I have ever known. I am sure she would want us to be positive at this time also.”

Landi was placed in the black hearse that would carry her to her final resting place. The dark-oak casket and flowers on it were not nearly as beautiful as her attitude toward life. The hearse door was slammed, and to her family and friends, this felt like someone just slammed the back cover of the book to Landi's life. The chapters in it were large, but few in number.

Five years later. The grass had grown to cover what used to be a large brown mound of earth beside Landi's headstone. A white iris with delicate purple edges was blossoming beside her stone. This was her favorite flower, and it illustrated her perfectly. The white symbolized the pureness and simplicity of her life, while the purple

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► Winning top honors in the creative writing senior division are (from left) **Landi McFarland**, Ellston, Iowa, first; **Emily McCurry**, Burrton, Kan., second; and **Wravenna Phipps**, Kearney, Neb., third.

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edges symbolized the cheerful, positive things she did for all of those with whom she associated.

This is the legacy I want to fulfill; these are the words I want spoken at my funeral; these are the colors of my personality I want to represent me. I want people to think of me as the person with the cheerful, positive attitude who could always find the

“good” in a challenging situation.

Everything in life is diminished without a positive attitude. A positive mind-set about life is the true key to happiness, success, making a difference for others and making this one trip called “living” the best experience possible. The Little Engine That Could always kept a positive attitude, and this is what led to conquering obstacles. My positive attitude will hopefully lead me to

success and a satisfying life legacy.

I try to encourage others to have a positive attitude also. Think how much better our world would be if people said, “I can” rather than “I cannot.”

“The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world’s problems.” This quote by Gandhi shows that with a positive attitude we can accomplish much, but

without it, who knows what we can accomplish?

Why is a positive attitude the most important thing I want to be remembered for? When I am gone, I want people to be able to look back at my life and smile. I want people to remember my ready smile and cheerful attitude. If they can recall this about my life, it will bring back specific incidences of interaction between us. Anyone can be

remembered, but I want to be remembered in a special, positive light.

Of course I would like to be remembered for my contributions to the Angus breed and dedication to our cattle, but this comes secondary to my attitude toward life. For if I didn't have a positive attitude toward life, what would I accomplish in our herd or in our breed?

In my everyday dealings, I strive to be the

most positive person I can be. This might mean talking with the class outcast in the library or holding open a door for a stranger. Whatever it may be, these cheerful mannerisms not only help me feel better about myself, but help others feel good as well. And the best thing about a positive attitude — anyone can have one; it's free. Maybe the best things in life really are free! In fact, I'm positive they are!

