

# Not Your Ordinary Show Heifer

An Illinois family goes to great lengths to save a bred-and-owned female.

by *Lynsey Meharg, intern*

For many junior Angus members, showing cattle is a family tradition they have gladly carried on through many years of hard work, dedication and perseverance. Though perseverance may be found through many avenues, for one Illinois junior the word takes on a special meaning.

"I just wanted to show so bad!" says Brooke Haas, a National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) member from Downs, Ill. Like many junior Angus members who grew up in families familiar with the breed, Brooke longed to show Angus cattle just as her father, uncle, aunt and older siblings had done before her. That longing became particularly strong when she was diagnosed with scoliosis. After having the severe case corrected with surgery, Brooke was no longer able to play sports and made the decision with her family to become involved with the NJAA at the age of 12.

This year, the project came full circle when Brooke exhibited the champion bred-and-owned (B&O) female at the Illinois Junior Angus Preview. The feat would never have happened without a lot of perseverance from the whole family. The champion female, HA PVF Missie 2129, the daughter of Brooke's first show heifer, is very special to the Haas family, but the fondness has nothing to do with her ability to win. The relationship between showman and show heifer goes deeper than that.

## The accident

Like any other afternoon, when Brooke arrived at the barn last October, the two heifers she planned to show that year



PHOTO BY CHLOE GEYE COURTESY OF SURECHAMP

**"We've always treated our show heifers like divas, but this heifer goes above and beyond that."**

**— Teresa Haas**

bounded toward the barn. As the family watched, the heifer running in front of her kicked Brooke's B&O heifer squarely in the jaw.

"She was just in the wrong place at the wrong time," Bryan Haas, Brooke's father, states. "We saw it happen, but we had no idea where she was hurt."

After the impact, the heifer stopped and began shaking her head, revealing to the Haases that the blow did more than just bruise. After rushing her to the local vet, the family learned that the only hope to save her was to pursue treatment at the University of Illinois. Upon arriving at the university, the heifer was given painkillers for 48 hours

before veterinarians Edgar Garrett and Matthew Stewart were able to wire the female's broken jaw together.

"They had never experienced a cow with a broken jaw," Bryan explains, but they were confident after performing the operation that the heifer would make a full recovery, which proved to be a relief for the family. Because the heifer's jaw was broken with a clean break, the jaw could be repaired. Had the jawbone shattered, nothing could have been done for her.

"It would have been heartbreaking," Brooke says of the possibility of losing the special female. "She's a sweetheart for what she's been through."

"By the grace of God she's still here," was a popular statement amongst the family immediately after the event, and the nickname stuck. Gracie's recovery became a family effort that the Haases would pride themselves upon.

## Road to recovery

Months of recovery followed, and the Haases went to extraordinary lengths to ensure Gracie's full

recovery. For the next two months, the Haases guided Gracie from her stall into a chute without the aid of a halter. The routine was the same each time: Hold Gracie's tongue, pull her damaged lip out and flush the wound free of feedstuffs and other harmful materials.

"It took three of us, twice a day, to put her in the chute and treat her," says Teresa, Brooke's mother.

Astonishingly, the heifer never lost her appetite. In the beginning, the family fed Gracie a goat and llama pellet that was soaked so that it would not have to be chewed, but by the end of one week, the heifer was once again eating her normal ration — though it too was soaked to allow for easier feeding. Drylotted for 40 days, Gracie was restricted from eating grass for



PHOTO BY LYNSEY MEHARG

► Brooke Haas (right), along with parents Bryan and Teresa, went to extraordinary measures to ensure the recovery of her bred-and-owned female, Gracie.

fear that chewing would hinder the healing of the jaw. Instead, they offered her a finely ground hay.

Almost completely healed after the first three months, Gracie appears to be a normal female with two tiny exceptions.

Four weeks into recovery, the Haases noticed something wasn't quite right. Part of Gracie's jawbone wasn't mending. After making the decision to remove that part of the right jawbone, including her teeth, Gracie's real recovery began, but it left her with some unique features.

"Her tongue can hang out 4 to 5 inches in the showring," Brooke says, adding that she's never had a judge ask her what happened to Gracie. The other exception is that Gracie takes an hour to eat her feed. Using her tongue to scoop the feed toward her mouth, Brooke says Gracie looks a bit like a giraffe when she eats her show feed.

### Successful journey

While these attributes make Gracie unique, they have not hindered her show career. Eight months after the injury, Brooke exhibited Gracie at the Illinois Junior Angus Preview, where she was named grand champion B&O heifer. A traveling memorial award given to the champion B&O female, the Linda Dameron Memorial award, was presented to Brooke.

It was an emotional victory. Not only was Brooke's name added to a list of Dameron

Award winners that included her uncle in 1984, but she won her very first champion title with the heifer she fought so hard to save.

Following the preview, Brooke exhibited Gracie at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Kansas City, Mo.

"We're so proud of her, and to be able to display her here was special," Teresa says. "We've been blessed."

Bred to calve in March, Gracie is headed back to the Haases' home to begin life as a treasured female. As for the heifer that caused Gracie's injury? Brooke showed her before retiring her back to the farm. Though the

females are allowed to be barn mates, each one resides in her own stall and run so no other mishaps occur.

"She doesn't have to share a run anymore!" Brooke says, adding that when the females are both safely bred they may be allowed to share space.

Though Brooke and her family did what they had to do in order to save Gracie, they never expected any accolades. Expected or not, people are noticing the devotion between this family and the heifer to which they have devoted so much time and effort to rehabilitate.

"When I think of a hard-working, dedicated junior committed to her show cattle, I think of Brooke. What the Haas family has endured with their bred-and-owned heifer this year is truly a remarkable story," says Jerry Cassady, regional manager for region nine, which covers Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin. "Brooke has demonstrated determination, passion and an intensity not often found in today's youth and, without knowing it, has been a very positive role model for other junior members in our area."

The story of Gracie is one that the Haases will surely treasure for a lifetime. Brooke describes the experience as one that is very humbling. Her own struggles and that of her heifer go hand in hand. Understandably, exhibiting Gracie at NJAS had a special meaning to Brooke.

"She's not your ordinary show heifer. She's not just another cow," Brooke says proudly. "She kept going. For what she's been through and overcame, it feels pretty good."



► University of Illinois veterinarians told the Haas family that the kick from the other heifer had broken Gracie's jaw. Gracie now appears to be a normal female with just a few exceptions.