

Art of Storytelling

Angus juniors use writing to tell stories of farm memories, NJAA experiences or food concerns.

compiled by **Kasey Brown**, senior associate editor

CREATIVE WRITING



► Winning the junior division are (from left) **Elia Jordan**, Saint Joseph, Mo., third; **Blake Pillars**, Martin, Mich., second; and **Alexis Knapp**, Bloomfield, Iowa, first.



► Winning the intermediate division are (from left) **Nicholas Pohlman**, Prairie Grove, Ark., first; **Madison Weaver**, Ephrata, Pa., and **Lindsey Decker**, Philo, Ill., tied for third; and **Mattie Harward**, Richfield, N.C., second.



► Winning the senior division are (from left) **Chris Kahlenbeck**, Union, Mo., first; and **Cooper Sadowsky**, Eagleville, Mo., second. Not pictured is **Renae Tokach**, Saint Anthony, N.D., third.

The best writers are those who can combine facts with effective storytelling. Journalists are taught that the story takes precedence to flowery writing, and National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members are learning the same thing. Three NJAA members combined storytelling, writing skill and Angus cattle to win the NJAA Creative Writing Contest at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Tulsa, Okla., July 12-18.

Co-sponsored by the NJAA and the Junior Activities Department of the American Angus Association, the writing contest is designed to encourage the enhancement of written communication skills while providing another opportunity for NJAA members to compete prior to the NJAS. Entries were due May 15 and evaluated before the NJAS.

Junior entrants were asked to write an essay between 300 and 500 words describing their most memorable moment in the NJAA. Intermediate entries used 600-800 words to explain where they see Angus cattle in their future.

Senior entrants used 1,000-1,200 words to answer the prompt: Being approached by a mom from an urban area, how do you convince her to prepare beef for her family over alternative protein sources?

Contest victors were Alexis Knapp, Bloomfield, Iowa, junior division; Nicholas Pohlman, Prairie Grove, Ark., intermediate division; and Chris Kahlenbeck, Union, Mo., senior division. See the photos with this story for those placing second and third in their respective divisions.

Here are the winning entries.

The Moment

by **Alexis Knapp**, junior winner

I remember like it was yesterday, from the look in her eyes, to the dew on her soft hide.

She was not like the other heifers; she was different. I would name her Hazel, because of the color of those eyes. I hopped into the truck that day, not knowing what incredible things we would accomplish over the next few years.

That next day, I began combing. I glanced over at my baby fall heifer and noticed that she was looking at me very curiously. I decided to try to get closer to her head, and she sniffed me for a while. Once she had finished, I leaned towards her and she did not back away.

Considering this was the first day we'd officially met, she was rather calm. As I looked into those eyes, I told her, "We can do this; we're a team."

Throughout the first and second years, we had so much practice in the showing, I did not have to worry about looking at her feet. She did it all, purely out of habit.

She got so good at placing her feet that all I had to do was look at the judge. I ended up winning almost every showmanship contest with her. Toward the end of the second year, I realized that Hazel's time was about up. She only had about a month before she was going to be too old to be shown. At that moment I broke into tears, because I wanted to show Hazel forever.

Hazel and I walked into the ring at the Iowa State Fair knowing that this would be her last outing. We placed toward the top of the class, but we were hoping to end the year with a class winner. I was nearly in tears when we got home from the fair. Dad sent me to the house because he knew it would be hard for me to see Hazel turned out to grass. As I walked out of the barn again, I noticed that Hazel was not only turned out, but across the road from our house, where I could see her. Then she noticed me, standing there watching her. She gave me that same look that she had given me when she was a young calf.

I walked out to her and she was still giving me that look of curiosity. She was covered in a thick dew, since she was no longer in front of fans or in the shelter of the barn. In that moment, with that look, I

realized something that I had not realized before. I discovered that I love, and am very passionate about, the Angus breed, and all that it has to offer. If I had the chance to change one thing those two years, I wouldn't

change a thing, because those two years of my life have shaped me into the person I am today. It was that moment that changed my life forever.

NJAA: The Best Experience

by *Nicholas Pohlman*, intermediate winner

There are plenty of experiences throughout my years of being an active National Junior Angus Association member, but some of the most beneficial would have to be the educational contests, especially the speeches, prepared and extemporaneous. Additional beneficial experiences are all the friends that I have met from around the country and the opportunity to compete with, as well as against, these friends.

The prepared speech is a contest that the participants work diligently on for many weeks or even months. I have to be able to not only memorize my speech, but practice on delivery for the best possible speech. In addition, I also need to speak my words clearly and with a loud, bold voice.

In my first year of eligibility at nationals, I was beyond scared as I gave my speech. I stood there giving it just as I had practiced so many times. After reviewing the score sheets on the way home, I was able to work in word pronunciation and volume and pitch of my speech.

Through this contest I have learned that no matter how much I prefer not to give a speech, I *can* do it! Now I can get up to speak in front of consumers at a grocery store beef-promotion event, give a brief beef demonstration at a trade show, or even speak at local or state cattlemen's groups. I have gained a new level of confidence each and every time.

The extemporaneous speech contest has not only helped me with giving a speech in front of people, but has helped me think on my feet. With such a limited amount of preparation time, I have to be able to work quickly and efficiently, and yet not cut any corners.

I remember in my first Angus junior nationals at Denver, Colo., I was in the

preparation room and I fell asleep for the last two-thirds of the allocated time. When I came into the room to give the speech, I gave a good opening, but I quickly felt like I had hit a brick wall as my thoughts just disappeared from my mind. I stood there almost in tears because I didn't know what to do or say.

All I could do was stand there and keep a straight face before one of the judges asked me to pull up a chair and talk. They asked what my topic was that I had chosen. We sat there

and discussed everything that I had planned on saying in my speech. Once I finished and shook each of the judge's hands, I left the room.

Much to my surprise, the judges sent the board member to find me to ask if I would like to try again. I went back to the room

and thanked the judges for allowing me the chance to try again, but I felt that I was not ready and would practice over the next year and would definitely try again.

This is the greatest lesson I have been fortunate enough to learn — to make the most of the time you are given. Without that lesson at the young age of 9, I would not have known to make the best of my time. The best lessons you learn are from your mistakes.

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— *Nicholas Pohlman*

Perhaps the most valuable experience I've gotten from all of my years in the National Junior Angus Association is the ability to talk to people in a crowd. With the world being based on social media so heavily now, it's wonderful to have the skills to talk to people in person and also to get the opportunities to talk to people. With so many people reaching from Oregon to Florida and New York to California, I can reach out to people from all over the United States and talk to them.

In addition, we all have one thing in common: Angus. I have met many friends this way and have found that I can regularly talk to them, even when we are back home. The most important thing I have gained from being with all of the people is getting over my shyness to talk to people that I wouldn't otherwise talk with. Not only has this taught me to be social, it has taught me to get out of my comfort zone and to have fun with others.

The National Junior Angus Association has been a guide, helping me by giving me the chance to be able to work on the communication skills for giving speeches or just everyday socialization. The National Junior Angus Association is the common thread that through educational contests, livestock shows and leadership conferences, brings Angus kids together and allows us to talk, connect and gain lifelong friendships.

Beef: It's Safe for Dinner!

by *Chris Kahlenbeck*, senior winner

Antibiotics and the use of hormones in the beef industry is a hot topic today. People are becoming more health-conscious and need the facts to make informed decisions. During my most recent trip to the grocery store, I was drawn into a conversation while

choosing the steak that I planned to grill that night with my family. Another customer approached me as I picked up my package of steak. She wanted to know if I thought that steak was safe to eat as it wasn't labeled organic, and therefore was probably full of

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antibiotics and hormones. Knowing that I wouldn't have much time to educate her while standing in the aisle, I tried to briefly explain antibiotics and hormones in beef.

Antibiotics

The beef industry uses antibiotics in two basic ways: therapeutic and subtherapeutic. Just as you do for your children, beef producers treat an animal with antibiotics when the animal shows clinical signs of an illness, such as a respiratory infection. The doctor prescribes an antibiotic for your children; the veterinarian prescribes for cattle. Beef producers work hard to ensure the health of their cattle, the same as you do your children.

Treatment is necessary to prevent the illness from progressing and keep the animal from potentially fatal results of an untreated infection or disease.

The second type of antibiotic usage is considered subtherapeutic, which refers to the use of antibiotics in a preventative manner. Although my inquisitive shopper had seemed ok with the use of antibiotics therapeutically, I can see the look of dismay on her face as I begin to talk about preventative use.

Now, I know that this isn't common practice with people, but let's consider how cattle live in herds, share water and feed sources. At different stages of their lives, cattle will experience stressors, such as when they are weaned, that cause them to be vulnerable to diseases that can kill them quickly, maybe in less than 24 hours.

So under the supervision of a veterinarian, some producers will give a group of cattle an antibiotic in their feed to prevent an outbreak. This helps make sure that the entire herd is not at jeopardy. Although this is more costly to the producer, they want to provide the best possible care for the animal that is going to produce the meat that I plan to eat tonight.

My steak doesn't have to be labeled as organic or hormone-free to be safe to eat. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the use of antibiotics in cattle for more than 40 years, which might be a sign that they are at least not an immediate threat to your health. Antibiotics are prescribed and given by veterinarians.

So, just as your doctor would not prescribe something to you that would not be necessary or would be detrimental to your health, veterinarians would not do so for cattle.

The FDA has extensive guidelines and all antibiotics used to keep animals healthy have been evaluated through an approval process. These antibiotics have been shown to be safe and have been tested extensively to ensure that they have no potential to cause increased antibiotic resistance.

Furthermore, any antibiotic product given must follow guidelines on a withdrawal period. This period is the amount of time necessary for the residues of the product to

leave the animal's system. This is meant to prevent any beef from entering the market while it still contains residual traces of antibiotics. The USDA closely monitors products to ensure that there are no antibiotic-residue levels deemed unsafe by the FDA.

The good news is that today beef producers are educated about antibiotics from a young age. For example, the Beef Quality Assurance program is a nationally coordinated, state-implemented program whose guidelines are designed to make certain all beef consumers can trust and have confidence in the entire beef industry. Why, even FFA and 4-H members must complete a program before they can raise and sell a market animal. To further ensure the safest products possible, the USDA has implemented a veterinary feed directive regulation that will require veterinarians to issue feed directives to producers as needed for use of antibiotics in feed.

Hormones

So, let's talk about the second concern that you mentioned: hormones. Each year, U.S. farmers raise some 36 million beef cattle. Farmers fatten up two-thirds of these animals by using implanted hormones, which adds small amounts of hormones to help boost calves' growth. Since the 1950s, the FDA has approved a number of steroid hormone drugs for use in beef cattle, including natural estrogen, progesterone, testosterone and their synthetic versions. These drugs increase the animals' growth rate and the efficiency by which they convert

the feed they eat into meat, which also helps lower the cost of these steaks that I plan to purchase.

I know that it is a common myth surrounding beef produced with additional hormones that it is unsafe to consume. In fact, the FDA approved hormone use only after studies have shown that the food from the treated animals is safe for people to eat. The labeling for each hormone product provides all instructions for safe and effective use and is approved by FDA. Some of the approved drugs are naturally produced throughout life in people and cattle, such as testosterone. These natural hormones are necessary for normal development, growth and reproduction.

My steaks are safe to eat because the amount of additional hormones is very small compared with the amount of natural hormones that are normally found in the meat of untreated animals. The natural hormones used are not even tested since they are not different than those naturally produced by the animal. So essentially, you can't buy "hormone-free" meat, as hormones are naturally found in beef.

In fact, you may not be aware that other common foods, including eggs and milk, are naturally much higher in hormones such as estrogen than implanted beef. A 3-ounce (oz.) serving of beef that was given hormones contains less than a few nanograms of estrogen, whereas soybean flour contains over 1,000 times more nanograms of estrogen. Tofu, pinto beans and white bread also have much higher levels than found in beef. Essentially, the choices that people often consider healthy choices are actually higher in hormone levels. I hope this helps clear things up for you.

The bottom line is that you don't need to fear either antibiotics or hormones in the beef you eat. Farmers care about preventing antibiotic resistance, too. After all, they want to make sure these important, life-saving medicines will work for their own families.

Producers follow guidelines set by the USDA and FDA, which have studied antibiotic and hormone use for many years. There are many quality assurance programs that promote judicious and proper use of antibiotics so that everyone from 4-H members to producers understands the guidelines. Beef is a safe and healthy food option for my family, and I can't wait to get these steaks on the grill!

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—Chris Kahlenbeck

