

Angus Storytelling

Angus juniors use writing to tell stories of NJAS memories, future plans or beef's benefits.

compiled by **Kasey Brown**, associate editor

CREATIVE WRITING



► Winning the junior division are (from left) **Stuart Lastovica**, Salado, Texas, first; and **Cammie Rone**, Courtland, Miss., second. Not pictured is James Voight, Fredricksburg, Pa., third.



► Winning the intermediate division are (from left) **Nicholas Pohlman**, Prairie Grove, Ark., second; and **Alexandria Cozzitorto**, Lawrence, Kan., first. Not pictured is Austin Pillars, Martin, Mich., third.



► Winning the senior division are (from left) **Chris Kahlenbeck**, Union, Mo., third; **Will Pohlman**, Prairie Grove, Ark., first; and **Kendra Merri-man**, Lowell, Mich., second.

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 Stuart Lastovica, Salado, Texas, junior division; Alexandria Cozzitorto, Lawrence, Kan., intermediate division; and Will Pohlman, Prairie Grove, Ark., senior division. See the photos with this story for those placing second and third in their respective divisions.

Here are the winning entries.

Flashback

by **Stuart Lastovica**, junior winner

Flashback: Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2007.

Although I was not old enough as a “real” member of the National Junior Angus Association, no one could convince me otherwise. I was 5 years old, attending with family as my sister, Stephanie, was exhibiting heifers. I was a showman, or so I thought. Helping take care of our cattle, I was sure I was there to exhibit as well.

A cow-calf pair was stalled across from us, and the owner encouraged my friend, Abby Geye, and me to help her with the calf. When haltered, we would take turns letting her nurse, then slowly inched our way into walking, grooming and fitting. As the days went on, we decided that this calf was just our size, and surely meant to be shown by someone! So, we gathered all of our grooming materials, as it was time to make her a champion. I still remember the fun we had spraying, blowing and combing our new little friend, and when the calf looked perfect, it was apparent that it was time to show.

The only fair thing to do was to take

turns. As the first judge, I tucked in my shirt, adjusted my cap and slowly evaluated this animal. The audience was silent; the showman intense. Even in flip-flops, she set her heifer perfectly, making exceptional eye contact with me, the Association-approved judge. There was only one thing left to do: with a slight slap, and a gentlemanly tip of my cap, she was the winner! Of course, the proper handshake sealed the deal.

Now, my heart was racing and my palms were sweaty. It was my turn to be the exhibitor. Would Abby Geye, esteemed, well-known cattle judge, pick me? Would she like my heifer? Would she notice me in the showring, also known as the aisle in front of our showbox?

I held her head up correctly, adjusted feet with my mini show stick, and gave the fiercest competitor look I could muster. My supporters held their breath as Judge Geye circled my heifer; she asked me her birthdate, and my answer was, “She is very little.” Would that crush my chances of winning? Suddenly, the judge smiled

and put out her hand for a handshake! I won! What an exciting feeling with my first win at a National Junior Angus Show!

I can prove this isn't a tall-tale from Texas, because we were surprised to see our adventure chronicled in the article "We're Old Enough" in

the *Angus Journal* later that year (which can be viewed at www.angusjournal.com/ArticlePDF/wereoldenough.pdf). I was thrilled to have pictures of the judges and exhibitors, even in our pretend show. As this will be my first year to really compete at a National Junior Angus

Show, I will still hold the fun memories of that first time with me and know that, no matter what, we had a wonderful time and made great friends. Now, I am ready to make more memories in Tulsa in 2015. This time, I am old enough!

Where I See Angus in My Future

by *Alexandria Cozzitorto*, intermediate winner

'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord ..." is part of the scripture verse from Jeremiah 29:11 that perfectly embodies where I see Angus in my life. Thanks to the blessing of having a dad who possesses passion for and knowledge of the Angus breed, I look forward to the many future opportunities to prosper in the Angus industry.

I am a third-generation Angus breeder, so I guess you could say Angus runs deep in my veins. As a result of his constant guidance and faith in my abilities, my dad is "handing me the reins" for what will someday be an Angus operation of my own. I am an only child, and although there are days I wish for a sibling, I know how very blessed I am. Being able to learn about the breed from the man you admire most in this world is a privilege and a gift.

A question I am asked more often than not is, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Most expect a generic answer like, "I want to be an astronaut, a veterinarian or a doctor." My answer, however, seems to catch everyone by surprise. It has been my goal since I was 9 years old to advocate for Angus and the agriculture industry. I truly believe I fell in love with advocating for the agriculture industry because of my involvement in the Angus breed.

I have actively participated in my state Angus association, the American Angus Association and the National Junior Angus Association beginning in 2010. The 2010 National Junior Angus Show was the first time I had ever researched, written and given a prepared speech. From that day on, I loved standing up in front of people to share my agriculture story. Speaking to Angus breeders and farmers was the beginning for me. Today, I feel it is my duty as an agriculture industry advocate to tell the truth of our story and our way of life to those outside of the agriculture world, as well.

I attend a school in an area I like to refer to as "suburbia." It is a much different landscape than the place I call home, and let me be the

first to tell you, there surely are not any Angus cows grazing or farmers planting corn outside of our classroom windows. Sadly, many of my peers have never thought about how that hamburger ends up on their school lunch tray.

So, with the support of school administration, I decided to gather everything I have learned from my dad about Angus and agriculture; from my mom about faith, confidence and presentation skills; and from the NJAA my own, personal Angus experiences, and I embraced my mission to step up and share my Angus and agriculture story with my peers from all walks of life.

Through the years, I have given presentations to each grade in my school called "What is Agriculture?" As a result of sharing my Angus story and providing facts and accurate information about the agriculture industry as a whole, I am making a difference by getting this important conversation started.

As for my future plans, I hope to continue this conversation. First, by embracing opportunities for higher education, I plan to pursue a career in agriculture law so that I can continue to make a difference in the agriculture industry by defending it, advocating for it and sharing its truths. The farmer and rancher are the backbone of the agriculture industry,

doing their job of providing for us all, so I plan to be the agriculture advocate who has their backs. Together, we will do our jobs with integrity, communicating by action and by word the facts and the truths of our industry to everyone, including organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and government officials and policy-makers.

Secondly, I see myself continuing my family's legacy as an Angus breeder, assuming my role as farmer and rancher in my own purebred Angus operation. By combining my career in agriculture law with my desire to run my own Angus cattle, I will establish credibility for my clients that I practice what I preach. It may seem difficult to imagine being completely devoted to both careers, but they go hand-in-hand and will provide me with the knowledge and common sense for advocating for the agriculture industry.

By choosing to blend my passion for agriculture and love for the Angus industry in both my personal and professional life, I believe the second part of Jeremiah 29:11 to be God's plan for me, "... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Consumer Conversations

by *Will Pohlman*, senior winner

'Ma'am, would you like to try a sample of beef?"

"No thanks, my family tries to eat more chicken."

There it was. The dreaded C-word that grinds a series of positive consumer

interactions to a halt. No beef producer or ambassador ever wants to hear this taboo uttered at a consumer event, but all too often consumers will use it. Moms in particular seem to love the C-word and usually mention

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it with three others: cheap, convenient and healthy. Any one of these words can provide ample reason for many mothers to shy away from beef, but also provides reason to discuss with them why beef is a great option for any diet.

The most crucial component of any conversation with a consumer is to genuinely listen to the concerns they express. Every mom is different and may have her own reason for purchasing or not purchasing beef for her family, and it is vital to understand these motives. Listening and participating in an authentic conversation produces a more powerful impact than fact-spewing and will consistently yield better results.

Ask questions like, “Why do you feel that way?” or “What is it you like about chicken?” to draw an interested consumer into a conversation and gauge what matters most to them. More than likely health, convenience, cost or a combination will likely be mentioned, and it’s important to both follow up and empathize with their concerns.

Statements like, “So I’m hearing that chicken is more convenient for you to make at home. As a busy college student, I can definitely relate . . .” both establishes a commonality from which trust can be built and reaffirms that you understand what matters most to a consumer.

Overcoming barriers to beef

Cost is a major concern for many mothers, especially with a recovering economy and beef prices at record highs. Many moms are struck by sticker shock of beef and believe that it should be reserved for special occasions. However, there are easy tips to share about economizing with beef that will catch the ear of almost any mom.

The best tips, though, are ones that you personally employ because these lead to personal conversations and allow you to share what you’ve learned. Share how you love to buy in bulk or purchase an entire roast to cut your own steaks at home and where the best deals are in town. You could also discuss how that, even with high beef prices, ground beef at \$4 per pound (lb.) comes out to a dollar per 3-ounce (oz.) cooked serving, and even

pricier whole-muscle cuts at \$7-\$10 per lb. can feed a family of four for around \$2 per serving.

Maybe you have an amazing recipe that you tried last week for a cheaper cut from the round or chuck, and you think it would be perfect for a mom to try at home. Quick tips, especially ones with personal experience, are effective methods for communicating simple ways any mom can enjoy beef on a budget.

Perhaps convenience is a deterrent for a mother, especially one on the go. Between juggling work and kids and everything else, burgers or steak just isn’t as efficient as microwavable chicken strips for some families, and to some degree everyone can relate to such a situation. All too often many families don’t decide what’s for dinner until after work, and by then it’s too late

to thaw out steaks or a roast, but cooking chicken from frozen or quickly thawing it seems to have much more widespread consumer acceptance.

No matter the reason, personal experience and narratives provide the strongest responses to concerns of convenience, because we’ve all been in these situations. Share your classic slow-cooker recipe that’s super simple to throw together in the morning and enjoy at the end of the day. You can also provide information on where to find quick and easy 30-minute meals such as www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com or Pinterest and talk about which ones are your personal favorites. Being relatable and providing personal examples shows any mom that beef really can be a convenient protein to prepare for their families.

The most challenging reason a mom may avoid beef or any red meat is health concerns. This can be difficult because personal experience is almost impossible to inject, and many concerns are established on years of poor science and recommendations that are hard to reverse. Listening to a mom’s specific concerns is most crucial in the area of health, simply because the category is so broad.

Maybe her husband is watching his cholesterol or their family doctor recommends eating less red meat. Perhaps they’re wary of dietary fat or believe that

beef causes cancer. Whatever their primary concern, it is crucial to identify it so that it can be addressed directly rather than rambling about general beef nutrition.

Luckily, science supports the role of beef in a healthy diet and familiarity with key facts and studies is vital to a successful conversation about the health of beef. Often, hearing these facts is enough for many moms to be more comfortable with consuming beef, especially within the context of shared concerns.

Comments such as, “I completely understand because my dad has to be careful with his cholesterol too, but studies such as the BOLD study (Beef in an Optimal Lean Diet) actually show that beef in a daily diet helps improve cholesterol levels,” provide an empathetic yet knowledgeable response that more times than not is exactly what a concerned mom wants to hear.

No matter the reason a mom may prefer other proteins to beef, listening and understanding her particular concerns and providing a tailored response that includes personal experiences, as well as facts is the most effective way to approach the conversation. It’s crucial to place yourself in similar situations, because it’s easy to trust people that are relatable.

More importantly, beef producers are ultimately beef consumers too, and it’s vital to establish that we’re all in this together. The food we produce is the food we eat and we understand the challenges that consumers can face. This empathy coupled with the trust that’s associated with farmers are powerful tools that we have to impact consumers and assuage any fears they may have about consuming beef. Being a real person to whom consumers can talk is a powerful asset.

Any facts or studies that we share are always one Google search away, but the experience of talking with a relatable beef producer in particular or talking to a beef consumer in general provides a pathological appeal to which almost anyone can latch onto. This is the key to a successful interaction with a mom who has concerns about eating beef and one that producers should keep in mind.

While it’s easy to hide behind scientific studies, consumers want to talk with real people, and we should be open to such a conversation. With any luck, such a conversation could turn, “No thanks, my family tries to eat chicken,” into, “Wow! I definitely have to start eating beef more often.”

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