

Dreams Do Come True

A Texas junior's lifelong dream of winning that familiar silver bowl comes true at the 2008 NJAS.

Story & photos by *Tosha Powell*

Standing in the center of the show pavilion, one of 15 vying for the title of the best showman at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), she stands with her head resting on her showstick. Eyes closed, heart racing and tears of fear, angst, hope and joy begin to form. Who will it be? Whose name will be called?

It seems to take forever to announce the

winners, starting with fifth place and slowly progressing to second. Finally, it's time to reveal this year's showmanship winner. The announcer calls: "Entry No. 162, from the state of Texas, Jennifer Ann Smith." Now, again as her heart races and tears of joy drop from her glistening eyes, she realizes, "Dreams do come true!"

Growin' up country

As long as she can remember, Jennifer Ann's family has raised cattle. Her parents, Bob and Jeannie Smith of Elysian Fields, Texas, bought their first Angus cow in 1991 and slowly built up a healthy-size herd. Her family's involvement in raising cattle and the Texas Angus Association left no doubt in her mind that she too would be a member one day.

"Daddy bought my first Angus heifer in 1995 from Belle Point Ranch," Jennifer Ann says. "My love for Angus cattle started with her and quickly progressed as I learned more about the breed and added to my herd."

Jennifer Ann gives thanks to her family for supporting her showing habit throughout her junior career.

"My daddy was always willing to haul me anywhere just so I had the opportunity to show my cattle," she says. "My mom has always wanted the best for me no matter what I was doing. She encouraged me to go the extra mile, while teaching me to be caring and compassionate about others."

With a tremendous interest in her family's Angus cattle, Bob encouraged his daughter to start showing. "I really got hooked on showing cattle after attending my first 'Be A Champ' cow camp in Warner, Okla.," Jennifer Ann says. "My mom says that a light bulb went off in my head after that camp, and it was obvious that I was a changed child."

Jennifer Ann says showing cattle is her way of therapy. The barn and showing are places she goes to have time by herself to think and ponder different things.

"I enjoy every minute I have with my cattle. More importantly," she says, "my livestock have taught me many life attributes that will travel with me the rest of my life."

The road to a championship

In high school, Jennifer Ann began her leadership training by participating in the National FFA Organization and 4-H. A 4-H member for nine years and an FFA member for two, she participated in many contests, received numerous awards and took away various memories of friendships and leadership opportunities.

"While in 4-H I had beef projects, food and nutrition projects, participated



► Jennifer Ann Smith, Elysian Fields, Texas, waits with hope to be named 2008 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest winner.

in farm and ranch economic method demonstrations, and competed on the consumer decision-making team,” Jennifer Ann says. “I also served as a club and county council officer and served as council president for three years.”

She participated in livestock judging, job interview and public relations contests and served as her chapter’s secretary while involved in the FFA.

Outside the showring, Jennifer Ann’s involvement with the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) includes contests such as cook-off, team sales and being a member of *The Scoop* newspaper.

“I have thoroughly enjoyed these contests because they give you an opportunity to interact with other exhibitors in a whole new way,” she says. “These contests have taught me teamwork and public speaking skills that I would not have learned in other venues.”

“The newspaper has really been a great experience,” Jennifer Ann continues. “I have met some great industry leaders in the field of communications and feel very fortunate to have been able to work with some great people.”

But it was Jennifer Ann’s first NJAS in 2003 in Louisville, Ky., that made one of the biggest impressions on her. She says she can clearly remember watching her first showmanship contest.

“After it was over, I looked over at a family friend and told her that I hoped I could win that contest one day,” she says. “She looked at me and reminded me that those kids out there were very ‘seasoned.’ She said they had lots of experience and maturity.”

Her friend then told her she would have to work hard and gain lots of experience to be able to compete on that level. That challenge has driven Jennifer Ann’s passion for showing even further.

“I took her statements to heart and began working toward the goal of winning showmanship at the national level that very instant,” she says. “I have been very blessed to have people work with my family in the past that have taught me a lot about showing.”

Jennifer Ann’s mother, Jeannie, says that when she was little, Jennifer Ann right away had a special way with her cattle. “In the barns when Jennifer was little she used to sing to her cattle,” Jeannie says. “She has such a way with them and a natural presence and posture. And she really wanted to know more about showing and do her best, so



► Judged primarily on showmanship skills, Jennifer Ann pays close attention while setting up her heifer.

she took to heart things friends and family members told her about showing.”

Have you got what it takes?

Forty-six juniors from across the nation competed in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest, a contest that requires true strength and durability as a showman. Each junior is given an unfamiliar heifer, chosen at random before the contest, to show. Judges during the showmanship contest watch for the showman’s skill, ability to follow instructions, use of equipment, courtesy, sportsmanship and general

appearance. After four preliminary rounds, 15 finalists are chosen and awarded clippers provided by Andis.®

The 15 finalists then compete against each other for the final prize, the chance to be known as the best showman at the NJAS. Again with unfamiliar heifers, the showmen parade in front of the judges, vying for the title role. Midway through the judging, Jennifer Ann’s mother noticed the contestant’s heifer next to her daughter was getting a little fidgety.

“I just thought, that poor girl, and before

CONTINUED ON PAGE 180



► “In the barns when Jennifer was little she used to sing to her cattle,” says her mother, Jeannie. “She has such a way with them and a natural presence and posture.”

I knew it, the contestants had to switch cattle and Jennifer Ann got that squirmy heifer,” Jeannie says. “But I noticed that within minutes Jennifer had her calmed down. I said, ‘Oh, Lord, she’s singing to her heifer again.’”



► Jennifer Ann enjoys spending time with the younger members of the NJAA. Here she participates in an icebreaker during the Mentor Mixer.

Later, Jeannie found out that Jennifer Ann wasn’t singing to her heifer, she was talking to her. Jennifer told her, “Sister, we’re gonna be OK. We’re gonna make it.”

Jeannie says Jennifer Ann has always been a good Christian girl, and before the finals, their family gathered and said a prayer to God, asking Him to be with Jennifer that day. Jeannie says, “I reminded her that if it was God’s will for her to win that day she would. And she did!”

Jennifer Ann is grateful to the people who have helped her achieve her goal as showman.

“I feel very blessed to have won this contest,” Jennifer Ann says. “I am thankful to Jesus Christ, my parents and to my supportive Angus family.

“I have met many friends that have been an encouragement along the way,” she continues. “I hope junior members can look at me and my accomplishment of winning showmanship and know that it takes a lifetime of hard work, dedication and practice to be as fortunate as I was at the 2008 NJAS. Many great showmen come to the NJAS showmanship contest and do not get the opportunity I was given.”



► Jennifer Ann makes the most of her NJAS experience, competing in various contests and events. Here, she lends a friend a hand and helps show a cow-calf pair.

Continuing to be a leader

A sophomore at Texas A&M University (TAMU), Jennifer Ann is majoring in agricultural business. She plans to continue her education and attend graduate school with a focus in ag business and ag communications.

“I plan to work in the agricultural industry, working with people and cattle, two of my favorite things,” Jennifer Ann says. “I want to have a family who shares my love of Angus cattle and raise my kids in the NJAA, just as my parents raised me.”

While at TAMU Jennifer Ann is involved in many clubs and organizations, including Saddle and Sirloin, where she serves as reporter and co-chair of the spring banquet and senior reception. She also serves as one of TAMU’s Animal Science AggieReps (Aggies Recruiting Exceptional Prospective Students).

“As an AggieRep it is my responsibility to help out in any way possible with recruitment in the animal science department,” she says. “We help students make the transition between being a prospective student into becoming an Aggie.”

With big plans for her future and a big heart for others, Jennifer Ann hopes that other junior members can be inspired by her junior career. “I hope that I leave a legacy that is filled with compassion and love,” she says. “I have made many great contacts and cannot wait to make more in the years to come. Winning showmanship at the NJAS is definitely something to be remembered by, but I hope to go down in the books for that and my heart.”

Jeannie stands as a proud mother and says with tears in her eyes and a crack in her voice, “As a mother, you always hope for your child to get their heart’s desire. Jennifer Ann loves to show cattle. This was so important to her. And for me to see her out there, trying so hard and doing a great job — the fact that Jennifer was where she wanted to be, doing what she wanted to do — it takes your breath away. No matter what she does, I am proud of Jennifer.”

Bob taught his daughter that even if she did not win, it was important that she be respectable. “Dad taught me the motto I still live by, ‘If something is worth doing, it’s worth doing right,’” Jennifer Ann says. That something to Jennifer Ann was showing her Angus cattle. And the results of the showmanship contest showed Jennifer Ann it was something worth doing.

