

## Town Boys Crash the 4-H Show

I tied my Shorthorn 4-H steer in between two 1000-pound Hereford steers in the long white barns at the Lacombe Research Station Pavilion. With no partition between the stalls, I had to keep him safe and attended to. I placed the tack box close to the aisle of the barn, behind him. Across the aisle there was a similar pattern of steers and tack boxes with 4-H members busy combing, watering and providing their feed.

I wasn't sure if my 800-pound steer would be well-behaved because he lacked training early in the spring. The 4-H project for the Beef Club included feeding, cleaning out stalls, and training a six-month-old calf to lead. At six months my calf weighed 400 pounds, so training would have been easy. When I was fourteen, I seemed to have different priorities and my older brother, Harry, was willing to feed him for me during his nightly chores. On tour day in March, members from the club visited each farm to see the calves. A few days before the tour, I started to train my calf. It was icy, treacherous and mucky in the barnyard. The calf pulled on the rope, and I lost my footing, ending up in the slush as I watched my calf running away to freedom across the barnyard.

Now it was the June Achievement Day Show and Sale. My steer needed to know how to lead, stand in a show ring and follow my commands. I had a cattle show stick to move his feet and to calm him by rubbing under his belly.

I had to wash my calf to get him ready for the competition. I gathered my brush, comb, and soap from the tack box, and placed them outside the barn on near the wash racks. Then I went back to the barn and untied him. He was stubborn at first and I had to pull hard, but he relented and I managed to get him outside to tie him. I used a special knot I learned from my dad to make sure he was secure. He shied away from the water at first, but soon was used to it as I rubbed the soap onto his wide back with the brush. I paid particular attention to underneath his belly and his rump, noting any manure that may have stuck. I made sure I didn't make the same mistake my sister, Julie, had two years ago, then she was brushing her steer. She was too close behind him, and when she bent over to brush under its legs, he let go with an explosive discharge of manure that covered her long brown hair. With just ½ hour before the show, I saw her in the pavilion bathroom in tears while she washed her hair in the tiny bathroom sink.

'I am going to get through this without a mishap', I said to myself. As I was washing, four boys I didn't know came up to me. They started asking me questions.

"Why do you have to wash him?" One very good-looking boy asked.

"Because his hair looks clean and fluffy for showing," I replied, feeling confident.

"What soap are you using?" Another boy said.

"I don't know, soap my dad told me to use," I said, getting annoyed.

It was like listening to four-year-olds asking questions randomly.

Once I finished washing, to my satisfaction, I had to take him back to the barn because other 4-Hers needed the washing rack.

The boys didn't go away. Although I initially liked the attention, I wasn't ready for them to follow me and my calf back to the barn. One boy touched my calf's rump. I felt hot and embarrassed, hoping my calf wouldn't take off on the run. As I entered the barn, I quickly found the stall and tied him up to the ring.

"What are these?" one boy said, pointing at my calf's testicles. I blushed and did not respond. Then the boy bent down and touched the testicle. I was hoping the steer would kick him, but he stood still.

"Leave him alone," I said, now becoming more protective of my steer. I hadn't really bonded to any of my steers in 4-H because I knew they ended up on someone's dinner plate, but this was too much. How dare these boys bully my steer and me.

"I have to change for the show," I said, hoping they would leave him alone. I grabbed my white shirt, black pants and cowboy hat from my tack box and walked out of the barn.

As I disappeared to the pavilion to change, I looked back to see them moving on to the other stalls in the barn. I hoped they wouldn't recognize me after I had changed into my outfit for the show.

They must have gone somewhere else more exciting because I didn't see them again. My steer behaved in the show ring. He didn't even kick the judge, as my first steer had done two years ago. He didn't place for the championship, but I hadn't him expected to.

I handled him well in the sales ring, even with the auctioneer blaring out prices. Later, I sat on the fence and watched as the buyers put the steers in the pens and loaded them up to take them to market.

Janice, my friend from my 4-H club, was behind the barn crying because they took her pet calf away. I tried to console her, but she was too upset. She just had to work it out with time. Next year would be the same. I was glad I wasn't in that position. I had kept an emotional distance from my calves and had no expectations of creating a bond.