

# Resilient

*Elizabeth Bryant has spent a century in the cattle business, coming full circle from young student to wise teacher.*

by Sara Gugelmeyer



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**E**lizabeth Bryant has always been eager to help and has never shied from a “man’s job.” As a youngster, Elizabeth helped her father with the cattle, horses, pigs and sheep raised on her parents’ farm. Even now, at 100 years young, she is the all-knowing matriarch of the Bryant family — keeping up with the Hereford herd and, of course, putting food on the table for the crew.

Her strong will and work ethic are not surprising, considering her upbringing. Always fearless, when she was only a child, her father would place her on an unbroken Belgian horse’s back to get him used to a rider. When she got older, she enjoyed standing up on the Belgians’ wide backs like a trick rider.

Elizabeth married Ermon Bryant, and they spent many years in the dairy business at Covington, Tenn., milking cows side by side. They had two sons, Elton and Ray, and a daughter, Margaret Ann.

In 1949 they bought a polled Hereford bull and bred him to their dairy cows, leaving the dairy industry for the beef cattle business. Ray wanted a registered Hereford heifer, and so in 1952 he made a deal with nearby Hereford breeder Bill Reeves of Howard and Reeves Polled Herefords at Stanton, Tenn. Ray explains the deal was

that he would pay for the bred heifer by giving Reeves every other calf until she was paid for.

And so the Bryants entered into the registered Hereford business. That first Hereford heifer, HR Helen Rollo, became a foundation cow for the EBS herd and produced for 17 years. Elizabeth was always active with the cows, helping with everything from feeding and breeding to bookkeeping.

When Ermon died in 1963, Elizabeth says she had no choice but to carry on. “I was raised working cattle and all kinds of animals. So it wasn’t much trouble; I just went on like I’d been going,” she says. Elizabeth was resilient; instead of selling out and moving to town, she managed the whole operation until her sons could return home to help.

Elton graduated from college in 1964 and worked for a neighbor with a purebred Angus herd so he could help his mother with her cows, he says. He later left that job and taught high school agriculture until his retirement five years ago.

After Ray completed his college education, he spent several years working with the U.S. Department



Elizabeth’s walker doesn’t roll well on grass, but she enjoys checking the cows in the Gator.

of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service in east Tennessee. In 1974 he transferred to west Tennessee and again became actively involved in the operation of the family herd.

Both sons agree that although they helped their mother, she was instrumental in every aspect of the operation. Elton says, “Mother participated in most every facet of the operation until she was about 90 years old. Then, we finally got her to quit feeding and messing with the cows.”

Elizabeth acquiesced the manager role but still enjoys helping in any way she can from the house, because her walker “doesn’t work too good on the grass,” she says. “Well, I just look out the back door and watch what’s going on. I read the sale catalogs and keep up with the sales.”

The Bryant herd now consists of 35 brood cows, which are bred using a combination of artificial insemination and natural service. The Bryants market their calves mostly through consignment sales and stress quality over numbers. They also raise some hay and crops.

In celebration of her 100th birthday in August, her family hosted a centennial celebration for Elizabeth in Covington, with food and plenty of fellowship. About 200 guests joined in the celebration, many of whom were fellow Hereford breeders, customers and longtime friends of the family.

The Bryant tradition of raising Herefords may continue as Elizabeth now has five grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren. And as for Elizabeth, as long as she’s able, she can be found watching intently out the back door while fixing lunch. **HW**



Pictured at Elizabeth Bryant’s 100th birthday party (front row, l to r) are: Ray Bryant, Elizabeth Bryant, Margaret Ann (Bryant) Gillhan and Elton Bryant. Hereford friends pictured in the back row (l to r) are: Jimmy and Tissie Reeves, Arvis and Ada Fletcher, Lisa Matlock, Ronald and Jane Bain, Glenda Rickman, and Joyce and Billy Ashe.

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