



People's Jewel

Miniature Hereford cow BHF Jewel of the Valley warms hearts everywhere she goes.

by **Sara Gugelmeyer**

BHF Jewel of the Valley is not your average cow. She's really not even your average miniature Hereford cow. Her job isn't to raise calves or make beef; she is a therapy and educational animal. Her owner, Gina Moore, uses her for pet therapy at nursing homes and hospitals and to educate children through a non-profit petting zoo.

Her story started March 31, 2006, at Bryan Hill Farm, Broadway, Va. Debbie Bryan says, "She became our first bottle calf; little did we know this cow would become such a big part of our family. Our then 3-year-old daughter, Rachel, named her and we let Rachel help a lot with

the bottle-feeding. This sparked her interest in cattle."

When "Jewel" was 5 months old, she and Rachel made their showring debut in the peewee class at the county fair. The duo continued to be a success at the county fair for the next three years.

Debbie explains, "The relationship was built, and we had no intentions of selling her until Gina called."

Gina Moore, a legal secretary in Princeton, W.Va., already had a llama, sheep, goats, a miniature donkey and a miniature horse in her barn. She had gotten started with pet therapy using dogs, and it

quickly expanded to include all of her animals.

"A lot of people were saying I needed a cow," Gina explains. "But it's hard to find a cow that's tame enough. I called (Bryan Hill Farm), looking for a cow that was just broke to lead."

She explained what she wanted the cow for and was thrilled when Tim Bryan said they might have the perfect one for her but the family would have to discuss it first.

Jewel had also bonded closely with Allison, Rachel's sister, and both were very attached to the cow. Plus, the Bryans had a young son, Landon, now 3, who would

likely enjoy her as well. The Bryan family spent a week discussing the possibility of parting with Jewel and then called Gina.

“Our daughters decided they had six happy years with Jewel and if she could bring happiness to many other people through Gina’s pet therapy, then we could sell her,” Debbie says.

Gina and her husband, John, made the three-hour drive to Bryan Hill Farm.

“I knew the cow was special when the whole family turned out to say goodbye,” Gina says. “They all took pictures with her, the kids, their grandfather, their mom and dad. They were all crying and the kids were so upset. It was heart wrenching for me when they each got in the trailer and said their goodbyes. I assured them I would take good care of her.”

Gina has done just that, and Jewel has helped others as well. “She has the cutest personality,” Gina says. “She’s made friends with all the cats and other animals.”

Jewel went to “work” right away.

“The first place we took her was a horse show for handicapped and ill children. A lot of them can’t walk,” Gina explains. “One little girl with cancer said she wanted to sit on the cow’s back so we let her. Jewel didn’t mind at all.”

She continues, “I wasn’t sure how she would react around wheelchairs and hospital beds, but she was perfectly fine with it. She wasn’t scared at all.”

That quality is especially important when Gina and her animals visit nursing homes. Since the animals can’t go inside, the patients are wheeled into the yard however the aides can manage.

“She’s very special,” Gina says. “She holds very still and lets the elderly people pet her. She will stick her head right into their lap.”

In fact, Gina says, nursing homes are where Jewel has been the biggest hit.

“The older people are the ones most impressed with the cow because a lot of them grew up on a farm. Alzheimer’s patients are especially affected by Jewel. They start remembering when they had cattle and talk about their cattle while petting her. You can just see them come alive when they start stroking her.”

For more able bodies, the Moores have a trailer to house the animals; then the people, or usually children, are able to walk through it and spend time with each animal.

Jewel and her “petting zoo” trailer are often used as fundraisers.

“Our church advocates Bibles in schools, so the church will have fundraisers to buy Bibles for classrooms,” Gina says. “The church will charge \$1 to go through the petting zoo. We never charge anything; we always take our animals for free because we just love doing it.”

Jewel is a jack-of-all-trades. This past Christmas, Gina provided the animals for a live nativity scene at her church. And Jewel has even helped the local Girl Scout troop earn badges.

In the winter, they stay home more, Gina says, but during the summer, Jewel is on the road at least once a month.

“We have these animals as our private pets, but we just like sharing them with everybody,” Gina says. “With the nursing homes, it’s strictly

pet therapy, and the cow gets the most attention, I think, because they associate that with their childhood. But with the kids, we try to advocate our animals, because a lot of kids have never been around livestock. They have no idea where their food comes from. We have a chicken, we have a goat and a sheep and the cow now. It helps people, and especially little kids, who don’t know what they’re eating. They need to know this is where their food comes from.”

Debbie says, “It warms our hearts to see the things Gina and her family continue to do with Jewel. We know Jewel is at a wonderful farm, being taken care of and putting hoof prints on other people’s hearts, just like she did with our family. Gina keeps in touch with us and sends us photos of all the things Jewel is doing and places Jewel visits.” **HW**

