

People Helping People

The “Hereford family” is always willing to lend a hand to those in need.

by *Sara Gugelmeyer*

It was the most terrifying moment of my life. My husband was hurt and there was nothing I could do. I watched as EMTs cut him loose from the barbed wire and loaded him in the helicopter for the flight to the hospital. May 6, 2009, changed my life forever. He survived and his recovery tested us personally but ultimately strengthened our marriage. And now, more than two years later, as we prepare for the birth of our first child, I know it was that experience that changed how I look at so many things — including giving me a new perspective on lending a hand to those in need.

Helping people is something the Hereford industry does so well. Whether it's a phone call during a troubling time, a fund-raiser for a sick friend with bills piling up, an extra pair of hands and pliers helping to rebuild a fence destroyed by fire or a shoulder to cry on when a loved one is lost, the Hereford industry acts like a family to those lucky enough to be a part.

Although my husband and I don't have any purebred Herefords, we got a bye into the family through employment. And I was blessed with phone calls and e-mails of support from the Hereford family during that troubling time for us.

The Moore family

Similarly, Darla Moore of Modoc, Kan., found herself in a nasty predicament last April. Darla and her husband, Charlie, along with their son, Kevin,

operate Bar H Ranch, a Hereford seedstock and farming operation in western Kansas. Darla was hurrying to finish for the day and meet Charlie to celebrate their 32nd wedding anniversary when the all-terrain vehicle (ATV) she was driving overturned.

Darla explains, “I was in a hurry, of course, and going way too fast, and a little thunderstorm was trying to brew, so the wind was blowing horribly. The wind was pushing me toward the ditch and I over-corrected, cranked the steering wheel too hard and laid it over on me.”

Although she was by herself and isn't sure, she says, she believes the accident knocked her out, but miraculously, when she came to, her cell phone was within reach. That was lucky considering she was pinned under the large side-by-side Polaris Ranger.

A quick phone call brought Darla's daughter Dana Pieper, who farms and ranches nearby, running to her aid. Dana was able to lift the ATV off of her mother, and a passerby dragged it off the road. Stitches and ankle surgery repaired Darla's body, but it was months before she could walk on her own again.

Darla's other daughter, Shellie Collins, left the cattle operation she and her husband own in Oklahoma to help Dana care for their mother. Charlie, who works in town, helped son Kevin care for the cattle until Darla was once again able.

Darla endured months in a wheelchair and grueling physical

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PHOTO BY BETH MACKENZIE

Branding is a great example of how those in the cattle industry are often willing to lend a hand.

therapy to regain her strength, during which her neighbors and family pitched in a great deal. “People were good to me; I had a lot of prayers. I live in a great area; I had neighborly help. I could have called them anytime for anything. I know I received prayers from Hereford breeders and I did appreciate it.”

The Breeding family

It’s not just personal injury that requires the help of Hereford family either. In 2006 wildfires ravaged the parched prairie of the Texas Panhandle, leaving hundreds of thousands of acres in complete devastation. B&C Cattle Co., of Miami, Texas, didn’t escape the wrath. The Breeding family’s 1,400-acre ranch was scorched, sparing nary a fence post or blade of grass. About 80 cows were killed, and many of those that survived suffered burns, plus there were orphaned calves to care for.

Many responded to help the Breedings through this crisis. “We had an outpouring of support from all over the country,” Chad

Breeding says. “We had donations from everyone, from the Farm Bureau to our church.”

Texas Farm Bureau organized hay donations, and many companies donated other types of feed to help those affected throughout the Panhandle. Supply companies sold fencing to the families at cost to help them rebuild.

“All I know is that there is a tremendous amount of goodhearted people out there,” Chad says. “We couldn’t do it without them.”

The Breedings’ Hereford family stepped up in kind. C&M Herefords, owned by the Perez family of northeastern New Mexico, donated a heifer to be auctioned with the proceeds benefiting panhandle Hereford breeders who were affected by the fires.

The youth joined in as well. The Texas Junior Hereford Association (TJHA) board of directors decided they wanted to help fellow ranchers who had lost fence and cattle due to the wildfires. The TJHA called the project “Please Fence Me In —

Panhandle Rebuild,” and gathered more than 300 T-posts, 30 rolls of barbed wire and gloves to help mend the fences that were destroyed. Mike Fuston, Turkey, Texas, volunteered to take the supplies to several breeders in the Texas Panhandle. The TJHA decided to support Hereford breeders in need first and then other breeders who had lost a great deal. “Our main goal was to help anyone in need. We lost a great deal to the wildfires in Texas,” says Ilissa Nolan, then TJHA president.

The Gandy family

Although fire is a constant worry for those in the West, flooding typically endangers cattle operations in the East. Hurricane Katrina devastated cattlemen in 2005. Punkin Ridge Farm, Beaumont, Miss., suffered when Katrina proved to be much more severe than anticipated.

Brook (Herring) Gandy says she and her family tried to prepare as best they could beforehand. Luckily

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they lost only three of their 300 cows, but the aftermath took its toll. “It took us a day and a half to get out of the driveway because of the debris that was all over,” Brook says. “There was even a 52-inch tree in the middle of my grandma’s house. We were also without electricity for three weeks, and we had to haul water to our cattle every day to make sure they’d survive.”

The Hereford family once again stepped up to help. After Hurricane Katrina, the Tennessee Hereford Association donated fuel to help Punkin Ridge Farm and the Herring family. “Neighbors stepped in to help neighbors,” says Gandy. “If one of us needed something from town and couldn’t get there, a neighbor would go to town.”

The Firestine family, fellow Hereford breeders from Womelsdorf, Pa., donated a heifer to be auctioned off to benefit Hurricane Katrina victims in October 2005.

Hereford breeder and then National Junior Hereford Association member Jessica Lester of Covington, La., says her home was used as a staging area for supplies from the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) for Katrina victims. NCBA sent supplies to rebuild fences and feed to the Lester’s home (which also suffered considerable destruction from the hurricane), and Lester helped deliver tons of feed to area cattlemen. “I had to deliver feed in 2-3 feet of water,” she says.

But when someone is in need, 3 feet of water does little to slow Hereford breeders — and, usually, cattlemen in general — from lending a hand. Spring 2011 has been especially tough for cattle producers facing natural disasters. Record-breaking drought followed by wildfires has destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres of rangeland

in Texas; tornados have devastated Alabama and much of the South; and flooding has wreaked havoc along river valleys in the East. Hereford producers continue to help out those in need and inspired us to examine the strength of the “Hereford family.” The Moores, Gandys and Breedings are just a few examples of ways we, as a breed, help one another. In this issue we take a closer look at other Hereford families who have faced adversity and experienced the strength of family.

Although it’s troubling to learn about others’ times of adversity, pain and grief, these situations remind us all to count our blessings and help others when we can, because, although hardships are aplenty, the scars left behind (both emotionally and physically) remind us to give thanks for what we have and help those who are less fortunate. **HW**