

# Journey to the Top



**Setting goals and dreaming big led Melissa Grimmel to be honored as grand champion senior showman.**

by Julie Mais



Melissa Grimmel attended her first Junior National Hereford Expo in 2005 hosted in Milwaukee, Wis.

After dressing the hind legs of her Hereford heifer, she peeks over the calf to see nine other showmen putting the finishing touches on their heifers' toplines and tails. A little uneasy that she may be behind schedule in the fitting portion of the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) senior showmanship final drive, she assures herself that she spent time where needed.

After she quickly waters the heifer and backs her out of the chute, the pair joins the other showmen vying for the top spot.

Melissa Grimmel, Jarrettsville, Md., then leads her heifer into the next portion of the contest — exhibiting the calf one last time for the showmanship judges. She looks around at her peers, many she would call close friends, and admires their skill and technique and is, most of all, just thankful to be one among them that afternoon.

"When the judge walked over to me to shake my hand and give me a hug, the past 12 years flashed before my eyes," Melissa says. "With my show stick in hand, I remember covering my mouth and thinking, 'You just won, hold it together, hold it together.' Well of course I did not hold it together, but a showman's dream became reality at that point."

That dream, and a common goal for many young Hereford showmen, is to be selected champion senior showman at the JNHE.

## A decade-old dream

Melissa first aspired to this achievement 12 years ago at the 2005 JNHE in Milwaukee, Wis. — her first junior national — but she didn't begin her show career as a champion showman.

Though a fifth-generation grain farmer, Melissa is a first-generation Hereford breeder. Melissa's father showed some livestock in his younger years, but it was more dairy-focused. Her mother is a city girl and now a nurse. The five Grimmel sisters' interest in Hereford cattle is organic, not inherited.

Melissa's three older sisters began showing Herefords on the county and state levels with Melissa helping

to wash and brush when she could. "I was brought up into the Hereford breed through them," Melissa says. "My parents have a very busy schedule so you'll rarely see them at a national show with me. It's always my sisters and my brother-in-law with me. It's cool having siblings travel around with me, and it's what makes us different. That's where Grimmel Girls Show Cattle began."

After a few county and state fairs, Melissa and her oldest sister, Michelle, who attends every show with Melissa, decided to try a junior national. They took one heifer to Milwaukee, and their goal was simple — to not stand last in class.

Melissa laughs, "I think I got second to last in class and we were so happy. It was so much fun having the Maryland crew take us under their wing and for me and my sister to see what it was like to show outside our county and state. Michelle and I decided we had to keep on going." And so they did.

## Reaching goals

Setting small, attainable goals, and a lot of hard work, is what Melissa says brought her to the top this year.

When reflecting on her first years showing Herefords, Melissa says, "We thought we were working hard then, but I look back and kind of chuckle. We have learned so much. Most nights we don't even eat dinner and if we do, it's at 10 p.m."

After Melissa got a few JNHEs under her belt, she placed in the middle of her class one year. "Then I placed in the upper half and then I won my class," she says. "My goal each year is to solely win my class. Even if I'm in the top half I'm happy. The best cattle in the country are there. You have to set goals that are within reach. Small goals will later set the path to bigger goals. So looking back, that's exactly what we did."

When Melissa was interested in showing at the National Western Stock Show, she and Michelle traveled to Denver to watch the show for a few years before the opportunity presented itself for them to exhibit. "We got third in class our first year exhibiting and were thrilled. The next year we won our class and we were like 'wow!' And



In the fitting portion of the senior showmanship finals, Melissa Grimmel follows her game plan and dresses the back legs first.



Melissa Grimmel says her favorite part about showmanship is the challenge of presenting her calf's best attributes.

then last year we won Grand Champion Polled Heifer. I'm really glad I was brought up that way — it makes me appreciate every success."

Melissa says she's a firm believer in the saying, "Dreams do not work unless you do." She says she's been fortunate that while in college at Kansas State University (K-State), she's had internships that allowed her to work from home in the summer so she can work on her cattle. She doesn't skip a day, and if she has to miss, she makes sure someone can fill her place.

"Putting in the time will pay off," Melissa says. "It may not at every show, but it will eventually whether that's in class or showmanship. You have to put in those hours, keep working hard and keep pushing yourself."

The showmanship contest has always been a favorite for Melissa, and the hard work over the years paid off for at her final JNHE.

"Showmanship has always been my thing, especially when we first started showing," she says. "We didn't always have the best cattle, and so we couldn't count on doing that great in the heifer show. But showmanship is all you — whether the judge likes your style or not. I had a better chance doing well in showmanship than the heifer show."

However, her favorite thing is presenting the calves' best attributes while masking their weaknesses. "I love that challenge and not everyone can accomplish it," she says.

### The final drive

Thinking back to that Tuesday afternoon in Madison, Wis., Melissa

remembers walking into the showing following the fitting portion — her heart was racing in her chest.

"After that it's kind of a blur because I was so nervous. You spend all those hours and now you want to give it your all but it's out of your hands. Before going in my sister was telling me to put my shoulders down, relax — 'you've done this a hundred times.'"

As the judge went down the line placing the senior showman starting from 10th, Melissa, though nervous, says she was at peace regardless of the outcome. "It's a huge honor in itself to make it to the top 10," she says. "I was lucky to be in that spot because not everyone gets that chance."

It was down to the top two, and Melissa took a chance to look behind

her to see fellow showman Taryn Adcock. "I've shown with her all these years and it seems like we've always been in the same heat," she says. "I honestly couldn't think of a better person to get into the top two with and being able to share that moment with."

### Backed by family

Melissa attributes her success to her support team — her family. She says her brother-in-law, Jacob, who is married to Michelle, has taught her tremendously and made it possible for her to pursue a degree at K-State and to remain involved with the operation back in Maryland.

"He does things the right way," she says. "Our motto is 'we don't do things the easy way, we do it the right



Pictured with her family after being named champion showman is Melissa Grimmel, Jacob and Michelle Wolfrey and Melissa's niece Ella Deford.

way.' When I think I'm putting out my greatest effort in the barn, he's still pushing me to be better. He's so knowledgeable, he includes me in important decisions and I think we're a great team. I hope to be half the stockman he is one day. I've learned a lot from him."

Melissa is grateful for her "show mom" and oldest sister, Michelle, who has traveled across the country with her attending shows. "She has made a lot of sacrifices for us and puts in many hours for this lifestyle," Melissa says. "She's always making sure entries are sent on time, and we aren't late for our class. She's truly my best friend and my backbone."

Though they cannot attend many of the shows, Melissa appreciates her parents for their love and support. "They're always just a phone call away and I know I have them there no matter what. They are there by watching the show online and without them we wouldn't be able to do this crazy thing we call showing cattle."

She also acknowledges her other sisters and nieces, thanking them for their support throughout the years.

### Future with Hereford

Melissa may have wrapped up her JNHE career, but Herefords are still in her future. Grimmel Girls Show Cattle has around 40 cows and is utilizing embryo transfer (ET) to multiply the operation's genetics and to enhance quality.

This October will be a milestone for the sisters because they are hosting

their first online sale. "We used to hope to just win our class at county fair and then just being able to work up to almost the top within the first generation of breeders is awesome to us. We're really excited to offer our calves to juniors so we can continue the tradition."

Junior programs are not in her rearview mirror. "I was one of them. I always had questions and was watching older juniors and wondering what to do better, how to show better and how to make my calves look better. I'm always willing to answer questions because it takes a lot of courage for kids to ask a question. I want to return the favor and help younger members."

In addition to her showmanship honors, Melissa notes another achievement at her final JNHE — exhibiting the grand champion cow-calf pair, which first won champion bred-and-owned. "I also won the pair show in 2014," she says, explaining another proud piece to the puzzle. "The calf that was in the 2014 champion pair, was the cow that won this year. We also took seven head total with five having the Grimmel Girls prefix. Being able to exhibit that many head that we bred and raised was very cool because it's all on you — you make the breeding decisions, you calve them out, you raise them, you treat them, you keep them safe and you get them ready, so to have that many there made me so proud."

Melissa, a recent graduate of K-State, is currently living in eastern Colorado and will soon be getting



Champion senior showman, Melissa Grimmel, is overcome with emotion after being selected.

married. She and her fiancé, Shane Schaake, have full intentions of remaining Hereford cattlemen. "Shane and his family raise Simmentals, but he is extremely willing to incorporate my love for Herefords into their program."

"Looking back at the past champion showmen is incredible," Melissa reflects. "Most of those individuals are today's industry leaders, and to be at the level they once were is indescribable. I am thankful for the amount of advice and support I have received along the way from fellow breeders. I want to thank them for believing in me and for taking the time to help me be a better person, a better showman and a better Hereford cattlemaster." **HW**



## A champion's advice

*Grand champion showman Melissa Grimmel gives a few tips for Hereford youth.*

**Stay humble no matter what.** "Even if you reach those top goals, stay humble and remember where you came from."

**Keep learning.** "Watch older, more experienced exhibitors. Look for ways to better yourself and ask questions of the people you look up to."

**Turn disappointments into something positive.** "Things seem impossible until they become reality. Learn from failures and when you reach a goal, make another goal. Build them on top of each other."

**Make sacrifices.** "Put forth your best effort and make those sacrifices. It may not be easiest but it's needed to reach a dream."