

## Preface

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the 2018 American Hereford Association (AHA) Annual Meeting, I was fortunate enough to meet Hereford breeder Bill Ashe of Selmer, Tenn. "I have a great story to share with you," he told me — and indeed he did.

Last January, the *Illinois Beef* magazine ran a story on Hereford breeder Arlyn Rabideau, a close friend of Bill's. "He has been a perfect customer and we've developed a good friendship. He has one of the best attitudes of anybody that I've ever met," Bill shares. "He's as honest a person that you could ever hope to come in contact with. I think he is one of the worthiest people you could put in an article in the *Hereford World*."

Arlyn and Bill have been friends for more than 65 years, and it is evident through Bill's kind words their friendship is one of trust and loyalty, as are all of Arlyn's connections.

"You'll find he's one of the most class acts that you'll ever meet," Bill

says. "When you meet him you'll say, 'Everything you told me about him was correct.'"

Bill's praise is echoed by many, including Joe Rickabaugh, AHA director of field management and seedstock marketing. "Each year while selecting cattle for the Iowa Beef Expo sale, I get the privilege of selecting cattle at Arlyn Rabideau's. He is one of the really good guys in the breed. He loves the cattle, studies pedigrees and is simply a great person to have in the Hereford industry," Joe says.

I hope to meet Arlyn one day, and I have no doubt he is every bit the incredible man described by so many. In the meantime, this wonderfully crafted story by Jill Johnson, executive vice president of the Illinois Beef Association, makes me feel like I have known him for years. It is with great pleasure we share the story of Arlyn Rabideau.

— **Diane Meyer**, *Hereford World* editor



# Creating Connections

**In life, our connections often times help define our ability. The cattle business is a massive system that depends on our participation as a community. Without those connections to each other, the system would be unable to function; something long-time Illinois Hereford breeder Arlyn Rabideau recognized early on.**

by **Jill Johnson**

**F**ew individuals greet each day with the same tenacity and passion as Arlyn. Rarely without a smile, some of his greatest joys are being part of the cattle business and connecting with people.

Those who know Arlyn best would agree his zealous personality makes him a go-to guy for bringing people together in the Hereford breed.

Fellow Hereford breeder Andrew Garnhart described Arlyn as an incredible asset not only to the Illinois Hereford Association (IHA), but to the Illinois Beef Association (IBA) and cattle industry in general.

"He is an excellent promoter of the industry, doing things the right way and leading by example. I have experienced his leadership and drive first-hand with our time

together on the IHA board. For a number of years, he was instrumental in organizing and executing our annual state Hereford tour, in addition to presiding over the organization," Andrew says. "To top it off, he has an extremely warm and approachable personality, complimented with a positive attitude and can-do spirit. Arlyn has never met a stranger and always has a way to make you laugh. I'm pleased to call him my friend."

Growing up on a farm in rural Clifton, Ill., Arlyn always thought his career would keep him in agriculture. He attended the University of Illinois (U of I) to study agriculture and animal science. He recalls his time spent on the livestock judging team and a couple of key individuals that made a lasting impression on him and his interest in Hereford cattle.

"My dad always had Hereford cows and he would go to Nebraska every year to get a pot load of Hereford feeder calves. I was raised with the breed, but my time as a student at U of I really helped me realize that Herefords were to stay in my life," he says. "My judging coach was Waco Albert — a Hereford guy all the way. I also met a tall, lanky kid named George Tjardes my freshman year and his family was doing well in the Hereford business. Both of those guys made me a Hereford believer."

Arlyn wanted to start his own small Hereford herd while in college and his dad offered to take care of four Hereford heifers until he graduated. He also credits fellow Hereford breeders for helping him get started.

“People like George and other families in the Hereford business would own bulls in partnership with me in those early days because I wasn’t able to buy one on my own and we certainly didn’t AI [artificially inseminate] everything back then,” he recalls. “A lot of people helped me along the way and my first interest was always Hereford cattle.”

George and Arlyn would go on to become lifelong friends and share moments that bring a smile to fellow cattlemen. One such experience was a time George and Arlyn drove to a sale in Missouri and made the trip back home in blizzard conditions. A stop near the state line for a quick cup of coffee would end up sending them in the complete wrong direction, literally. They were back on the road and it took a few minutes for them to realize they were headed back to Missouri.

Stories like that are often what people in the cattle business will tell you they enjoy the most about raising livestock — the people and shared experiences that make life a little lighter. It is no different for Arlyn and the connections he created early on are impacting younger generations; specifically with George’s grandson, Jeremy Tjardes.

“One thing that people who know Arlyn well know to be true is that if he raises a polled Hereford heifer that is good, he can’t bring himself to sell it to anyone. So, I started showing a few heifers for him. Arlyn and my grandpa always did stuff like that — help each other out and go to shows and look at cattle together. So it was fun when I became a part of it too,” Jeremy says.

### Teaching

Following graduation from U of I, Arlyn’s life took an interesting turn when a small school near his hometown needed capable educators and called on him to help. What was only supposed to be a year of teaching ended up being his career. Two advanced degrees later and several decades spent in education, mostly as a high school principal, Arlyn ended up fulfilling his calling working with people.

“I never intended on being in education. I went to St. Pat’s for a year just to help them out, and ended up staying 14 years. Somehow I just never got back out and I decided if I was going to do this teaching thing I should probably know more about it, so I went back to school and got my masters. Then I had this idea that maybe I should be qualified to be a superintendent, just in case, even though I really had no desire to do that. I found myself back on the U of I campus to get my doctorate in education. That was hard — going to so many night classes in Champaign

while working and taking care of cattle. But I set out to do something and had to finish it,” he says.

Arlyn reflects on his time as an educator and says it was building relationships with students and other teachers that he enjoyed the most.

“Students teach you humility. They taught me how much difference you can make just by caring about people, taking a personal interest in their success. I always worked at being able to name every kid in the hallway. If you show people that you’re interested in them they will respond positively most of the time,” he says.

The nature of Arlyn’s role in education also made him the disciplinarian in many cases, which taught him a lot about consistency and the acceptance of rules.

“In a school environment, the rules have to be the same for everyone and the same every day. I tried to never get angry and always made sure I was being fair — you can’t send people mixed messages,” he says.

That mentality, while realized in the school system, applies to how Arlyn approaches the cattle business and is recognized by others.

“I’ve learned a lot from Arlyn, especially when it comes to working with and understanding people. He is always playing the devil’s advocate and always has a great perspective on any situation; he’ll give everyone a chance,” Jeremy says. “He’s a strong believer in data, but really wants it to be accurate. He’s always telling me that if you’re lying to everyone else then you’re lying to yourself too. Arlyn is as honest as they come.”

Arlyn’s experience raising cattle mirrors what a lot of producers go through today: Working full-time jobs while still trying to realize their dream and live out their passion of caring for livestock. While it can be challenging to have several irons in the fire, Arlyn eventually found a balance and cattle became a sort of coping mechanism.

“Any job can be stressful and in a school environment you find yourself with a lot of little hardships. Cattle helped me keep my sanity,” he says. “Once I got home, I spent time with my cows and didn’t think about school again until the next morning.”

Another life lesson Arlyn learned as an educator is the importance of involvement. He says to be successful in any business you have to be present. During his time in school systems, Arlyn was ever present — attending almost every school event making sure students knew he cared.

He has transitioned that mentality to the cattle business. Arlyn is known for attending as many events as possible and served the Hereford

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— Arlyn Rabideau

breed in multiple ways through leadership and involvement with the state association.

“I go to a lot of events and talk to a lot of people, and they’re interested in talking to me for whatever reason. I think it’s important to show people that you’re interested in them — not just yourself,” he says.

Arlyn equates attending shows and sales to a family or class reunion. He sees some friends just once or twice a year, but really finds value in creating connections with people and encourages young producers to do the same.

“Getting out and talking to people is the best way to learn about the cattle business and gauge where you’re at as a producer — how do breeding decisions compare, what kind of cattle are selling well. Questions like that are always good to ask others,” he says. “You will also meet a lot of interesting people and it will help you get headed down the path to find more customers and sell some cattle.”

Aside from simply attending beef industry events, Arlyn also participates by consigning cattle to different sales throughout the Midwest. He has been a mainstay in the Illinois Performance Tested (IPT) Bull Sale at the Illinois Beef Expo consigning Hereford bulls for the last 16 years and will make an appearance again in 2018. He feels it is important to be part of the IPT Bull Sale and to represent his breed with quality seedstock. The criterion of the sale also meets his passions with raising cattle: A data-driven mindset for cattle with performance and balanced traits that can work for commercial producers or seedstock breeders alike.

IPT Bull Sale manager Travis Meteer has gotten to know Arlyn over the last several years and appreciates his commitment to Hereford cattle and his guidance as a member of the sale’s advisory committee.

“Arlyn is a hard guy to put into words, mostly because he’s an all-around great guy and has countless admirable qualities. His passion for Hereford cattle is unrivaled. His can-do attitude and common sense approach is always refreshing. He is one of those people a person should just shut up and listen to,” Meteer says.

Arlyn’s commitment to Hereford cattle and personality are certainly recognized by others and is what led his peers to place him in the Illinois Polled Hereford Association Hall of Fame, elect him to lead the breed as the state association president three times and nominate him to attend the (AHA) Annual Meeting as a delegate.

While he enjoys spending time with people and attending events, he is also happy at home with his small cow herd. He AIs all of his cows himself and breeds for docility and performance, while paying close attention to milk and calving ease. His favorite part of raising cattle is calving season.

“I like manageable, cooperative cattle and spend a lot of time with my cows. I try to AI to bulls that are respected and complement my herd. Calving season is enjoyable because I get a kick out of the next calf crop and seeing if I bought wisely on the semen market. Sometimes I make good decisions and occasionally I’ll wonder what I was thinking, but that’s part of the fun,” he says.

No matter where you might run into him next, Arlyn is a man of positive impact and remains an extremely humble, kindhearted and service-oriented person. **HW**

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