



Bill Couch entered the showing showcasing his custom-built showstick hand carved by his uncle, Wayne.



Christy Couch Lee stands by her father, Bill, holding her showstick built by her great-uncle, Wayne.



Bill Couch leaves behind legacy and a cherished custom built showstick for future generations to enjoy.



Nolan Lee carries the same showstick built for his grandpa, Bill, around the ring just as Bill had done countless times before.

That Old Wooden Stick

There's something to be said about the legacy cattlemen leave to their children and grandchildren.

It was hand carved by my great-uncle, Wayne, in his woodshop behind his southern Indiana farmhouse decades ago. He carefully ensured it was just the right length, custom built the tip and used his wood-burning pen to etch "Bill Couch" near the leather-wrapped handle.

The history behind it

That one-of-a-kind show stick became one of my dad's trademarks in the showings from Denver to Louisville and everywhere in between. Some families have diamonds or priceless artwork to hand down through the generations. Not our family. But that old wooden stick? It's one of our family's greatest treasures.

My brother, Willy, inherited that showstick when Dad passed away nearly two years ago. Rightfully so. He and Dad had made many memories in the showing. I was thankful Uncle Wayne had made similar, shorter showsticks for me and Willy when we were young, too.

This summer, our 12-year-old son, Nolan, asked if he could take my version out of storage and put it to use again. He loved the feel and the history behind it. And when we got to the Junior National Hereford Expo in Kansas City, Mo., this summer, Willy did something I couldn't have expected — he passed Dad's showstick down to Nolan. Willy said his nephew was ready to use his "Papaw's" stick. And the symbolism and meaning weren't lost on our son.

He carried that stick into the American Royal's Hale Arena, just as his Papaw had done for decades before, with pride. And he'll carry it into many rings in the future,

too. My guess is, Nolan will possibly one day encounter a showmanship judge who doesn't care for the look of that showstick in the ring. There's nothing fancy about it. It's far from flashy, but it definitely stands out. However, so far, the comments he's received have been positive ones. Adults ringside have shared their memories of seeing Nolan's Papaw in the ring with that very stick. Nolan simply beams. And, yes, this mom simply holds back a few tears.

There's something to be said about the legacy cattlemen leave to their children and grandchildren. And there's also something to be said for the way in which those cattlemen live on, even after they're gone, in the memories and in the stories shared by those who knew and loved them, too.

No one makes it out of this world alive. It's the simple truth.

However, we can keep the spirit of our loved ones alive by remembering them. By sharing stories and laughs — and, yes, a few tears — about their lives and crazy adventures. By passing down the simple items that they held dear. The items that made them who they were.

Nolan will forever cherish that old wooden showstick and the history made when it was in his Papaw's hands. He's told me he looks forward to passing it on to his own kids, someday. Many new memories will be made around that stick, and the old ones will always remain, too. And that's just how it should be. **HW**

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