

A Lesson for the Books

School days during 2020.

It was our 12-year-old son's, Nolan's, "remote learning" day for the week, just as every Wednesday has been for our district's middle school and high school students since the beginning of the school year. Nolan opened his Chromebook for the day and then headed out to the barn for morning chores. My husband, Craig, was on the road for work. I was working at the middle school, teaching remote students for the day. And Nolan and our 15-year-old son, Waylon, were on their own for the day.

On his own

I had barely fired up my computer when my phone rang. "Mom, Ellie is calving." Ellie, his first-calf show heifer from last year, whom we thought was a few days from calving, was going to make this remote learning day one to remember. While Nolan FaceTimed my brother, Willy, for some guidance, I phoned our neighbor and cattleman, Schulyer, to see if he might be able to swing by our barn to provide our young herdsman some encouragement and advice. Both Willy and Schulyer pulled through in incredible ways.

Willy, always the calm presence, assured Nolan it was best to let nature take its course for a bit, while Nolan observed from a distance. Once Schulyer arrived, he explained a few things that were happening, calming Nolan's



Nolan Lee admires his brand-new bred-and-owned heifer calf that he helped his first-calf show heifer, Ellie, deliver.

nerves about anything being out of the ordinary. And when Schulyer needed to take care of his own business for a bit — reassuring Nolan he was returning soon — Nolan was left in charge.

Nolan understood the time frame for allowing a first-calf heifer to try on her own after having assisted Craig through the years, and Nolan knew Ellie was approaching that point of needing someone to step in to help. Schulyer hadn't quite made it back to

our place yet. But Nolan decided it was time. And our 12-year-old took matters into his own hands — literally — and assisted Ellie with delivering her heifer calf. All alone. Without an adult around.

When Nolan called me to proudly announce a brand-new bred-and-owned heifer calf was in his herd — one that he helped bring into the world all on his own — I could feel the pride radiating through the phone. And I'll admit, this momma got pretty teary eyed, too.

Yes, it was a school day in this crazy 2020 world. Sure, he had plenty of assignments and work to do inside on his Chromebook. The lessons he learned on this day weren't found on a computer screen, but I can guarantee they will stick with him throughout his life: the day he delivered his first calf, all on his own.

It's pretty incredible to think about the real-life knowledge, the innovation and the literal life-and-death decision-making our children in the cattle industry are learning each and every day. Our young men and young women are years ahead of many of their counterparts in terms of maturity, responsibility and confidence. Others their age are responsible for only schoolwork, extracurriculars and possibly jobs, for those in high school. But our young cattlemen and

cattlemen? They're balancing all of these responsibilities — plus handling responsibilities many adults could never comprehend.

We're doing good work, Moms and Dads. The hours may seem long. The expenses may seem astronomical, at times. We are often sacrificing our already limited time, resources and, sometimes, sanity to haul our children to the shows and events at which they dream of competing. But to see a glimpse of your young man or young woman growing into that adult you've always hoped he or she would become? Well, you simply can't put a price on that.

It was a remote learning day intended to include hours on the computer, learning about the topics of English, history and math. And, yes, those are important. Nolan may not have completed his assignments to the best of his abilities that day, and normally, this momma would be all over that.

However, this time, I'm letting it slide. Because, truly, this remote learning day was the most educational day our son has experienced. And I'm so very thankful for the lessons learned on an anything-but-normal distance-learning day. **HW**

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