



Father and son cattlemen and physician duo, Dr. Albert "Al" Bonebrake (left) and Dr. McDonald "Mac" Bonebrake pose with their third generation Hereford herd in Springfield, Mo.

# Like Father, Like Son

The Bonebrake name has a long history of Hereford cattle and practicing physicians alike.

by **Grace Vehige**

**W**hen you want to do something, you find time," Dr. McDonald "Mac" Bonebrake says with a bright smile.

At 99 years old, this witty storyteller is still eager to hop out of the pickup and open a gate. The Missouri native currently resides in Springfield, Mo., but his story began 130 miles northeast.

Growing up in Salem, Mo., Mac was the son of a local storeowner. Despite his town upbringing, Mac's father, Albert, was passionate about agriculture, and the late Bonebrake sold the family-owned store to buy farmland when Mac was in fourth grade.

The Bonebrakes initially became interested in the livestock industry raising sheep. According to Mac, the family operation made their living, and their fun, selling bucks and attending local and state fairs.

While the family enjoyed raising sheep, Mac recounts, "[My father] was always more interested in cattle and gradually was able to get out of the sheep business and into the cattle business."

Thus, the Bonebrake legacy began.



### Sheep for a shotgun

If you ask Mac, the start of the Bonebrake family's ties to cattle began on a trip to Kentucky. The business transaction, while seemingly ordinary for the time, makes for quite the story today.

"He traded sheep for cattle, and he also got a shotgun," Mac laughs while recounting his father's tale.

The cattle purchased on that fateful Kentucky visit were Herefords, and like the shotgun, which remains in the family's care, Hereford cattle are part of the Bonebrake heritage.

The Bonebrake Herefords' logo notes its origin in 1936, though Albert registered their first Hereford in the family name in 1934. According to Mac, the Bonebrake herd was always a traditional, horned herd. Eventually, the operation introduced polled cattle and continues to utilize both horned and polled cattle to this day.

### Dr. Bonebrake

Mac eventually left Salem to attend college. As he describes, he took a course in pre-medicine and, "It went positively." With those results, he decided to attend medical school.

"My mother, particularly, was an influence on me becoming a physician," the doctor says. "I went to medical school and have been very happy that was a career I was able to do."

Mac began practicing as an obstetrician and gynecologist in Springfield in 1952. Despite his



career in town, much like his father, Mac had dreams of his own farmland. He purchased land outside of town and started his own Hereford operation while practicing medicine.

### Where people are

A doctor and a cattle producer, Mac has had his fair share of interacting with people. Like the medical field, the cattle business requires a great commitment of time, energy and people skills. For Mac, the people are what made his work — both on and off the farm — worth it.

"I happen to know and have been associated with many farm families," he shares. "I have had them for patients. I have had them for cattle-buying customers. I have had them as neighbors. And, I like people. I like working where people are."

His love for people created his great career success. However, if you ask him, the people surrounding him have made his growth possible.

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Bonebrake cattle were traditionally horned Herefords. Today, the family uses both horned and polled genetics.



Mac's father traded a few sheep for his first Hereford cattle and a shotgun to boot. The family has raised registered Hereford cattle since the mid-1930s.



Al (left) learned a lot about medicine, Herefords, family and life from his father and mentor, Mac.

When Mac first started raising Herefords, he had a lot of questions. One individual in particular at the American Hereford Association stood out to him, and that was Claude Willit.

Mac describes both Willit and his wife as good business acquaintances and overall nice people. In answering Mac's questions, Willit played an instrumental role in Mac's first cattle purchase.

"I cannot hold back on words on how much I appreciated Claude Willit and his wife," the cattleman says.

### Living a stimulating life

Not only are Herefords a favorite breed of Mac's, but he enjoys Herefords because, "They acclimate to the presence of human beings."

Their iconic docility drove Mac's decision to raise the breed, as it does for many producers.

"I feel [the Hereford breed] ideally makes cattle that a family can own a few or a lot. Either way, they can work into a family and make family lives easier than about any other animal of which I am aware," he explains.

To say Mac has enjoyed his time as a cattle producer would be an understatement. Particularly, he appreciates the ever-changing nature of the industry.

"The cattle business is a very stimulating life to lead. Things are always changing," he claims. "It is part of the change that always keeps it interesting."

### Family bonds

As Mac developed his herd and practiced medicine, he established a home and a firm foundation for a family. He now has three grown children: Ann Grace, Dr. Albert (Al) Bonebrake and Tom Bonebrake.

All the Bonebrake children make time for the Hereford operation when they can, but Al plays a more constant role these days. With his mother's encouragement, he took a particular interest in his father's life's work, and they now share the labels of "physician" and "cattleman." Like father, like son, some would say.

"The unique thing about this is knowing your parent as a colleague and partner is not always possible in this world," Al says.

Over time, the second-generation physician and third-generation cattle producer learned a lot from his predecessor. "You could probably say it took me a little while to realize how much I was learning and how much he was teaching, but I have learned a lot," he admits.

The father-son duo, if anything, are not defined by their labels. According to Al, Mac is more than a good cattleman and talented physician; he is a loving father and a great storyteller.

When asked to reflect on his lifetime of balancing career successes, the farm and his family life, the witty 99-year-old says, "When you want to do something, you find time."

Well, folks, it is as simple as that. **HW**

**Editor's Note:** We were saddened to hear of the passing of Mac Feb. 9. His wit and smile will be missed, but his story will live on in the hearts of his loved ones and in the pages of this issue.