

4-H Is A Top Priority With The Myers Family Of Ashville

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ASHVILLE — When B.J., a steer, took off across the arena at the Cambria County Fair dragging 12-year-old Billy Myers behind him, there was gasp from the crowd. A drag is dangerous enough for any youngster, but for Billy, who recently underwent kidney surgery, the accident could have done serious damage.

The steer won the tussle, and Billy dropped the line. The audience was relieved to see him get up with no more visible pain than a sprained ankle. But down in the arena, Billy was more concerned about his animal and how the show was going, than about any danger to himself.

But the Myers family of R1 Ashville, who have been active as a 4-H family for several years, have learned to take the hazards in stride. Theresa admits they were unlikely candidates for 4-H involvement. Although she was raised on a farm, Theresa was never a 4-H member. Bill grew up in Cresson and spent time on his uncle's farm but was not from a farm himself. But both Theresa and Bill like to be active in the community, and it seemed natural to them to share their children's interests.

Their involvement began when Jennifer, now 13, started horseback riding lessons before age 3. By age 6, she was showing horses for the first time at the Cambria County Fair and Billy was right behind her.

From horses, it was easy to get interested in showing livestock. The Myers children raised veal calves for several years, but when problems with stress and chlorinated water at the fairgrounds cost them their calves, they decided to move on to bigger animals.

Three years ago Bill, who stays with the youngsters at the fairgrounds for the week, heard that a new beef club was forming. The county already had a beef 4-H unit, but the new organization was going to focus on county-bred beef rather than animals brought in from outside.

"I liked the idea," he recalls. "I think good stock should begin at home, and I liked the thought of the kids being involved with their animals from birth on."

Billy and Jennifer joined the Cloverleaf County-Bred 4-H Beef Club in its first year and have been pleased to be part of its growth. But the Myers' involvement didn't stop at the children; Bill and Theresa have been active in the parents' group from the start.

"Bill and Theresa are terrific," says Janet Mayer, who founded the club. "They're committed to the organization and to helping the kids help themselves. The Myers are a really special family."

The Myers themselves refuse to take much credit for their work. They stress that the Cloverleaf club is a special group of kids and parents with a unique cooperative spirit. "Our kids have made so many friends there," Theresa says.

"At the fair, all the parents pull together," Bill adds. They're on the sidelines and in the arena to keep the kids going. They're around to chaperone them on the midway. Everyone gets involved."

Jennifer and Billy have a dozen stories to tell about the past year alone, how they had a sled riding party one dark night when temperatures were -20 degrees, how they not only staffed their own display but helped out other farm groups during the recent Farm Awareness Days at a local mall, how they have some private jokes shared only by club members.

"These are party kids," Theresa teases. She notes that whenever possible the youngsters in the club get together socially as well as for club meetings.

The strength of the club is especially evident on sale night at the fair. "Kids who graduated were back in the stands this year," Jennifer says. "They weren't in the club anymore, but they came back because they cared how we all did."

She points out that the club members get to know their sponsors and many of the buyers throughout the year. During the sale, they become a cheering



The Myers family of Ashville has been an active 4-H family for several years. They are Bill and Theresa Myers and their two children, Billy and Jennifer.

section for the bidders.

"No matter what happens, we always gather together and start crying during the sale. Kids from other clubs come over and ask if we're OK. We really are. We just care that much about the sale and about how everyone does."

That pulling together was especially touching for the Myers this past year. During a routine scoliosis screening, the school nurse noticed a problem and suggested the Myers get Billy checked. Subsequent tests revealed that he had a blocked ureter, causing an enlarged kidney. After a bout with flu delayed surgery, Billy finally went under the knife in late February.

Theresa recalls, "When he went into the operating room, we didn't know if he'd be able to keep his kidney or not. It was the longest four hours of my life." The surgeon was able to save the kidney by removing the blockage, which took up 3 1/4 inches of his ureter.

Billy awoke from the long surgery to a room filled with balloons. In his 13 days in the hospital, he received 160 cards and letters. He still grins when he remembers that the walls of his room were papered with all the support his friends showed.

The Myers consider themselves fortunate. Billy was able to return to school after two months and to complete the year with his class. In May he was given a clean bill of health and was allowed to resume normal activities.

Although the event at the fair was frightening, the Myers have learned to get over their fears and let Billy resume his favorite activities. He's proud of the Penn-Cambria Middle School football team he joined this year for the first time. And he's looking forward to joining the wrestling squad this winter.

In addition to following 4-H activities and Billy's sports, the Myers support Jennifer in the band and agree with her decision to go out for track next spring. Both Theresa and Bill have been active as well in Pee Wee baseball and softball, and Theresa has been a Brownie leader.

This past summer was their last in the Pee Wee league, and Bill and Theresa are proud of the plaque they were awarded for their involvement. "We had a lot of fun, but we wanted to move on to other things, to spend more time with our own kids as they grow older," Theresa says.

The Myers are already looking forward to next year's beef show at the fair. "It's something special," Bill says. "The kids can follow their calves from the start. They can see them get born, pick the

ones they want, and raise them for the year." He adds, "Of course it isn't always easy to get them to do the work."

Jennifer and Billy laugh and admit there are times when they want to escape the chores and responsibilities. But in the next breath they're talking eagerly about how they helped out on the farm this past summer and how

they'll enjoy raising pigs again, stock the Myers sold off when Billy was hospitalized.

Bill smiles a knowing grin. "People don't see what goes on behind the scenes at the fair, what goes into turning that newborn calf into a show animal. It's a lot of work, but it's also the best reward on earth," Bill says. "That's why we're involved in 4-H."

Homestead Notes



Jennifer poses with one of the family horses, Nakema.



Billy walks Biskit, the calf he's preparing for the 1987 show.