



The Welderspahn family includes parents Cheryl and Francis, Nathan, 14; and Merideth.

Yahweh Dairy Farm Is Promise Land For Weiderspahns

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COCHRANTON (Crawford Co.) — Yahweh Dairy Farm is home for Pennsylvania Alternate Merideth Ann Weiderspahn.

Because "Yahweh" means God in Hebrew, people often express curiosity about the farm's name. The Weiderspahns' decision to incorporate the name into their farm stems from the family's saga in finding their "Promise Land," or farm, which parallels to the biblical account of the Israelites awaiting their Promise Land.

Merideth said that her dad purchased his first cow when she was three years old. Because they did not live on a farm, the cow was housed in the garage. Her dad liked cows so much, he purchased three more and the family moved to a small rented farm while waiting for their home to be sold. The Weiderspahns milked with a bucket and gave the milk to family and friends. After five years of attempting to sell their A-frame home and looking at 40 farms, the family finally found exactly what they wanted in their 270-acre farm in Cochranton.

"We dedicated the farm back to God because we felt like the Israelites must have felt after 40 years of looking for their Promised Land," Merideth explained.

God, family, and farm are all intertwined for this poised 17-year-old, who believes her role as dairy princess is possible because of her supportive family, who includes her parents, Francis and Cheryl, and 14-year-old brother Nathan.

The family togetherness extends to the previous generation. After Merideth's family had purchased

the farm, her grandparents left their Florida retirement community to purchase a farm down the road from Merideth's. Since then, her grandmother has passed away but her grandfather remains active in farming. Heifers, calves, and chickens are kept at her grandfather's farm while the mixed herd of 35 milking Holsteins and Jerseys are kept at Yahweh.

Merideth said that her mother did not grow up on a farm. At first she had a difficult adjustment, but now is a big fan of dairying and is eager to do things on the farm.

Merideth has been milking cows since she was eight years old. On a regular basis, she continues to help with feeding and washing the bulk milk tank.

"I enjoy washing the bulk tank because I have time to think while I'm doing it," Merideth said of the 20 minute chore.

Becoming a dairy princess was no haphazard decision for Merideth who always admired the county dairy princesses since she was little. When she was old enough to be eligible, Merideth served as a dairy maid for three years. This experience made her even more eager to compete for the dairy princess in her county.

Merideth's mother joined the county dairy promotion committee about the same time Merideth first became a dairy maid. Her mother is now co-chairman of the committee and books appearances for Merideth and the five dairy maids in the county.

"Every body at school and church has been very supportive of my role as dairy princess. They often offer to drive me to appearances," Merideth said.



Pa. 1st Alternate Dairy Princess Merideth Weiderspahn spreads the word that milk is packed with nine essential nutrients that help the body with everything from vision to regulating blood pressure, and maintaining strong bones and teeth.

Life seems relatively safe in her hometown of Cochranton where the biggest outrage to hit the the sparsely populated area is "a dog biting a kid," Merideth said.

Compared to most Pennsylvania schools, the Cochranton Junior Senior High School where Merideth attends is a bit small. With only 70 students in the senior class, everyone knows each other.

"The advantage is that one never feels lonely, but the disadvantage is that everyone knows everything about everybody. And sometimes that includes things that you'd rather not know," Merideth said.

Her classmates are supportive of her role as dairy princess. To devote more time to dairy promotion, Merideth gave up cheerleading. But she manages to continue her membership in the school's Bible club, art club, and the year-book staff where she is in charge of special effects.

Her art ability is no doubt inherited from her mother.

"She's very creative," Merideth said of her mother who started a business called Homestead Specialties about one year ago. "She makes wearable art design patterns for vests, jumpers, collars, and

children."

Her mother has a distributor who sells her patterns. For information or a brochure about Homestead Specialties, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to 1883 State Road, Cochranton, PA 16314.

"When I was little, my mother always made me these cute little outfits," said Merideth who is now an accomplished seamstress herself.

Through 4-H sewing club, Merideth has advanced to state sewing competition every year since she was old enough to join. This past year, she entered her prom dress.

"I always have this fear of going to the prom and seeing three other dresses like mine. If I make it myself, I don't need to worry," she said.

Although Merideth is a capable

seamstress, she is grateful that her mom continues to alter clothing for her.

In addition to sewing club, Merideth is also active in the 4-H dairy club.

Responsibilities as the state alternate dairy princess requires Merideth to travel to many places across the state.

"I've been visiting a lot of areas I've never been to before," she said.

In fact, this year was the first time that Merideth has ever visited the Pennsylvania Farm Show, which is a six-hour drive from her home.

Although Merideth has always loved children, her decision to become an elementary school teacher was an outgrowth of her dairy promotion duties.

As dairy princess, she often visits elementary schools to tell them about the dairy industry.

"Kids are so eager to learn, and they are so innocent," Merideth said.

After graduation, Merideth plans to attend Geneva College in Beaver Falls.

"I wanted to attend a small Christian college that wasn't so far away from home," Merideth said of selecting the college that is about a two-hour drive from her home.

Merideth is involved in helping with the Pioneer Club, the church youth group planning committee, nursery and was a former Sunday school teacher at the family's church.

Of her 14-year-old brother, Merideth said sibling bickering is part of her life, "but we always help each other."

Recently her brother broke both of his arms, which means he requires lots of assistance. Merideth writes down the answers for his home work assignments.

The Weiderspahns have hosted Japanese students for the past three summers. This past year, a mother, daughter, and son from Japan lived with them.

"At first we used lots of sign language," Merideth said of the difficulty in communicating. By the end of the summer the family was fluent in English.

The Japanese family was amazed at the abundance of milk and the low milk prices in the states. In Japan, cows are primarily only seen at the zoo because crowded conditions have ruled out farms. However, the Japanese do eat rice and rose ice cream.

Merideth said that by the end of the summer, she became like a sister to the Japanese girl who plans to move to the Weiderspahn's Yahweh Dairy Farm while attending college in the states.



Home for the Weiderspahns is Yahweh Dairy Farm located in Crawford County. When Merideth was three years old, her dad brought his first cow, which was kept in the garage since they did not have a barn. The family now owns 70 cows and a 270-acre farm in Cochranton.

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