

Kids Korner

Roller Coaster Year For Top Guernsey Cow

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YORK (York Co.) — Not many students get called out of class for a message about a cow.

But that was the case when Terri Johnson was summoned to York Central's school office from her eighth-grade classroom last May to learn that her prized 4-H show cow, Lily, was still alive.

While that message — the first the school's secretary ever had to deliver about a cow — eased 14-year-old Terri's concern, Lily was far from being out of danger.

Rutter Brothers Enhancer's Lily is Terri's 4-year-old Guernsey, one of nearly two dozen animals she owns. While Terri, and her 11-year-old sister Kelly, are very attached to all their animals, Lily may be a little more special than the rest.

Classified EX-93 and currently number one in the Guernsey breeder's Cow Performance Index (CPI) measure of the genetic value of animals, Lily is a prized producer in the well-known Rutter Brothers dairy farm herd. She was the Guernsey breed's junior division grand champion at last year's Farm Show, and has been unbeaten in the junior division show ring.

The Johnsons have photos of Terri in the barn when she was just a baby. She got her first 4-H animal December 1994, at age 7, when she helped her mother deliver a heifer calf from one of the herd's show cows, Rutter Brothers Pro Kings Leamay, VG-88. Terri named the calf Lydia, in honor of her then-best friend.

"That was the first time I ever really helped to pull a calf. It was just Mom and I here and there was no one else to help," says Terri of her hands-on assistance to the first calf she would show as a 4-H cloverbud member. Rutter Brothers Perfectos Lydia, scored VG-88, is listed 83 on the current CPI list. On her second calving, April Fool's Day 1997, Lydia delivered the heifer calf Terri named Lily, her first very own bred and owned animal.

In May 2001, four years after Lily's birth, the prized cow lay stretched out in the farm's dry cow pasture, unable to stand. Lily had been dried off and turned out for her pre-calving rest period just one day earlier. During a chilling rainstorm, which had blown through overnight, Lily had gone down.

Herd veterinarian Dan Pike was already away on another emergency, and unable to come immediately. Terri's mom, herd manager Cindy Johnson, quickly treated the downed Lily for milk-fever, while attempting to dry and warm her with towels.

Once Dr. Pike arrived, he began intravenous treatment of Lily for shock and, eventually, she stood. His intent was for Lily to slowly return to the barn, a few steps at a time. The big Guernsey had her own ideas. She walked, non-stop, the whole way to the barn.

Lily was found to be battling a Clostridial infection, a usually deadly condition. A battery of medicines was administered to absorb the toxins her body was producing and reduce her high



Terri, right, and Kelly Johnson will each have three head from their junior show strings at the Farm Show, including Lily, Terri's youth Guernsey champion from last year.

fever. But, she was unable to get up, even after three days of continuous intravenous treatment.

"My mom decided that we should try and float her," says Terri in a heart-tugging story about the experience she recently wrote for her 4-H dairy project book. "Floating would let her stand in warm water, while only supporting 20 percent of her body weight."

Floating was recommended to continue for 12 hours, and the equipment was not ready until two o'clock that afternoon. Thus, at 2 a.m., the Johnsons were out with flashlights, draining the float and holding their breaths with anxious anticipation. Lily walked out — and headed to the water bowl.

But later that day, the big cow lay down to rest and was, again, unable to stand. After two more days, the float equipment was hauled back for a second try.

It was six days before Lily finally gained enough strength to rise back up on her own after resting. Meanwhile, she contracted coliform mastitis. The

often-devastating udder infection fortunately responded to a treatment regime and cleared within the week.

Sickness had cost Lily a good deal of body weight, so she was put in a separate pen and hand grazed during an extended recovery period. Once she had gained back both weight and strength, she was turned back out with the other dry cows. Any concerns about Lily's stamina vanished when she promptly began bullying dry herdsmates over feed and territory.

"I felt such a great relief when she started fighting with the other cows. I thought my cow was back to feeling normal," says Terri in her 4-H story.

Lily's freshening date came — and went — with no signs of her udder bagging up. A vet check found her uterus filled with fluid, making detection of a normal fetus difficult. On Aug. 1, while the county's 4-H dairy roundup was under way, Lily was induced into labor. Not only Terri and her family, but many of her friends showing at the roundup, anxiously waited for news.

"What a relief to see a set of front feet, following by a moving tongue, coming out of the birth canal. The calf was finally here. It weighed 100 pounds, which is big for a Guernsey and best of all, it was a girl," writes Terri. "My mom wanted to call it Lucky because of all she went through, but I decided to call her Luscious because she is so special."

Luscious has grown into a hefty, spunky, five-month heifer, which Terri and her sister, Kelly, are already halter breaking along with several other project calves. Mother Lily bounced back from near death to collect a string of champion wins to add to her unbeaten junior show record.

Not only did she milk more than 100 pounds on each of this lactation's first four DHIA tests, she was selected the winning 4-year-old in both junior and open classes at the Pa. All-American Dairy Show at Harrisburg in late September. Later in the show, she was named the Total Performance Winner of the Guernsey breed show. That same week, her 15-month-old son, Rutter Brothers Luxury's Legend,

was selected for service with Select Sires.

Lily, initially dubbed an "ugly calf" by family members, is remembered as being a gawky, not a particularly strong-looking heifer. In fact, she was left at the barn during show season because she was not good enough to include on the show string.

"She started to blossom just before she calved for the first time," said Cindy Johnson. Two weeks after calving at 2 years and 3 months, Lily was scored 89. Classification a year later raised her to EX-92 and in October, she earned another point for EX-93 designation. In November, she was at the top of the Guernsey breed CPI list, which scores equal value for butterfat, protein, and type performances.

Lily first walked into a show arena as a junior 2-year-old in the county's 4-H roundup and went on to be named unanimous junior division, junior 2-year-old All-American. She won at the Louisville National Guernsey breed show both as a junior 2- and 3-year-old, and was reserve champion of the junior show at the 2000 Pennsylvania All-American.

Meanwhile, Lily completed a 305-day, 2-02 record of 19,297 milk, 5.2 percent, 990 pounds butterfat, 3.6 percent, 689 pounds protein, then followed with 3-02 record of 25,365 milk, 5.1 percent, 1,302 butterfat, 3.2 percent, 811 pounds protein.

Embryo flushing of Lily has yielded limited results; she is now serviced with hopes for a September calf. Terri, of course, enjoys getting heifers out of Lily, while national A.I. firms are interested in a bull calf.

Lily was recently featured on the cover of the Guernsey breed journal, peacefully grazing under one of the Rutter farm's massive old trees, with one of the dairy firm's antique home-delivery milk trucks parked in the background. A tame, gentle cow, she munched her way through the two-hour photography session, standing and eating where she was posed.

"It was so impressive to read Terri's story," says York extension 4-H agent Linda Spahr, who encouraged the young dairy woman to expand her original paragraph into a more extensive account. It demonstrates all the qualities we try to emphasize in 4-H: responsibility, leadership, and teamwork. You can almost watch Terri growing as a person as you read her account."

Lily's brush with death and dramatic rise to the top of the breed has definitely had a lasting effect on Terri Johnson, who sums up her feelings in the final paragraph of that 4-H story.

"I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the people who helped me overcome such a traumatic experience. These include my vet, Dr. Dan Pike, my mom and dad, Cindy and Tom Johnson, my sister Kelly, and my grandparents, Leo and Marg Rutter. Thanks for being there. You have helped me realize that I should never give up, no matter how hopeless the situation seems."



A veteran of show preparations, Lily stands patiently while Terri trims her ears with the clippers.