

Dairy farmer, science fiction aficionado

# Tom Engle: tacit, quixotic

Editor's note: this is the sixth in a series of weekly articles which profile University students selected at random.

By RICHARD DYMOND  
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At four in the morning, when Thomas Engle rises in the employes quarters above the Dairy Office (part of a complex of buildings beyond East Halls), he has already travelled a great distance in sleep to arrive back in his little bed. Once he has maneuvered his body in order not to awaken his roommates, he tiptoes to the bathroom to shower away emerald grains from the shores of Cinmeria and once again becomes Tom Engle (4th-dairy science).

After shaving he turns on the ceiling light and gets into a droopy pair of overalls, a blue work shirt, clean socks and heavy-toe shoes. He then will go down to Barn D in the dark to prepare the milking parlor for the morning milking. This means attaching the rubber teat-cups and checking the tubing devices. The milk parlor is a room containing a maze of clear pipes and eight pyrex bowls graded in metres.

A tube from the rubber teat cup propels the warm milk into the bowl, where it is measured and then released into a storage area. From the Barn D tanks it goes to the Creamery or to Borland Lab, where it is pasteurized and prepared for student use in the dormitories. There are about 140 cows to milk, twice a day. Tom and his co-worker, a man named Dutch, will milk until 9 a.m., eat breakfast (Tom has a dish of Wheaties) and then go back to clean the barn and milkers.

Tom Engle has been getting up at four in the morning since he was old enough to carry the milk cans from the barn. (During the school year when he lived in Lyons, he still found himself rising at four o'clock with no cows to milk.) When Tom was 14 his father died and left the farm to Tom, his brother Dean, who is 18 and their mother. Recently Dean sold all the cows. Now the only thing made on the Engle farm is hay and silage. Tom has not been home since.

His home town, Myersdale, is located near the Maryland border. He went to school at Myersdale Area High School, where 88 graduated with him. Twenty of those 88 went off to college at places like Shippensburg State College, Slippery Rock State College, Indiana State College and Frosburg State Teacher's College in Maryland. The other 60 are married or work on local dairy farms or coal mines around the area. These people may be seen on a Saturday night hanging out at Donges Milk Bar in downtown Myersdale or driving to the State Theatre in Sommerset some 20 miles away.

In Myersdale you are either a miner or a dairyman, and either way you are not part of a minority. The only class friction is caused when the Amish come into town with their steel wagon wheels that make deep gouges in the road. The Amish do not permit themselves the use of machinery.

Sarah Kinsinger was ostracized from the Amish sect for buying a wrist watch. She severed ties completely from the people who sire her by marrying out of the faith. In 1951 she married Woodrow Engle, a small farm owner in Myersdale. They bought 35 head of cattle and raised corn and hay.

Tom Engle would milk the cows before and after school. He has come to Penn State because he realizes that a degree in dairy science may make it possible for him to work as a dairy man after college. It costs at least a hundred thousand dollars to start a dairy farm. Without that kind of money the only other chance a man has is to become the manager of a cor-

porate farm — in other words, he would care for someone else's business.

As a dairy man, Tom won blue ribbons in last year's Penn State Dairy Exposition, showing an Ayrshire cow. He also won second prize for an Ayrshire heifer in the Pennsylvania Junior Dairy Show in Harrisburg.

Tom has been as far west as Kansas City, where he went as a delegate of his Future Farmers of America chapter. But big cities make him feel strange inside. He calls them deserts because life to him means hills and valleys and streams like the area where he lives. Pittsburgh, where he once stopped on the bus going home from Penn State, seemed to him a desert filled with mute stone. He would like to own a farm in New England, where there are plenty of rocky knolls and river-cut depressions.

Dutch has a very gritty, base voice while Tom's voice is reedy and hollow. Dutch's face is dark from years of walking between barns and farmhouses, mending fences, clearing pasture and leaning over clogged motors. Tom has done those same things but some time in his life he must have dreamt of the druids.

It is dusk and the cows have come up the dust path from the pasture, having turned clover and dallis grass into milk. Tom guides them into the milk parlor. Their udders rock beneath them like the shoulder bags of ladies waiting on the subway to spend their money in town. These ladies — Brown Swiss, Ayrshire, Guernsey, Holstein-Friesian and Jersey — spend their allowance in forceful spurts once Tom and Dutch attach them to the milk machine. Tom shuts the electric gate after eight are in. Dutch has a stick that he waves as he bellows, "Hup, git in there, git in there, hup, hup," and the cows low and jockey around like racehorses jittering in the gate. Dutch taps them gently below the hocks until they have cornered so the teat cups will fit flush. After each cow is milked, her amount is registered and then her teats are dipped in iodine to prevent mastitis, a bacteria that can eat away at the udder.

When Dutch frees the cow he just yells, "All right, git outta here," and they bow their heads and lumber on through the stall. But Tom doesn't yell anything; instead, he just pats them on the side and they nod and leave. Dutch is loud; he's stored away tales to bring out after work when the men are waiting for the time-clock in the office to tick close to 9:30 p.m. Tom stands by one wall and stares ahead. He doesn't talk much. The men think of him as a quiet farm hand who's just a good, hard worker. Dutch yells, "How was your shower, boy?" And then he laughs as Tom smiles meekly.

Dutch and his pals go home to sleep the sleep of the justified, pure physical sleep, that comes over the sleeper like bells over a cradle.

But upstairs, in the employes' quarters by the wall there's a bookshelf belonging to Thomas Engle which contains "Gods from Outer Space" by Erich von Daniken; "Conan the Warrior," Vol. 7, by Robert E. Howard; "Star Wolf" by Ted White; "The Wind From the Sun" by Arthur Clarke; "The Ancient of Days" by I. A. Greenfield; Edgar Rice Burrough's

"The Mad King," "The people that Time Forgot," "Back to the Stone Age," "The Cave Girl," "Land of Terror," "Pellucidar," "The Land that Time Forgot," "Pirates of Venus," "The Martian Chronicles" by Ray Bradbury, "Dandelion Wine" by Ray Bradbury and a book by Howard, DeCamp, and Carter called "Conon of Cinmeria," Vol. 2.

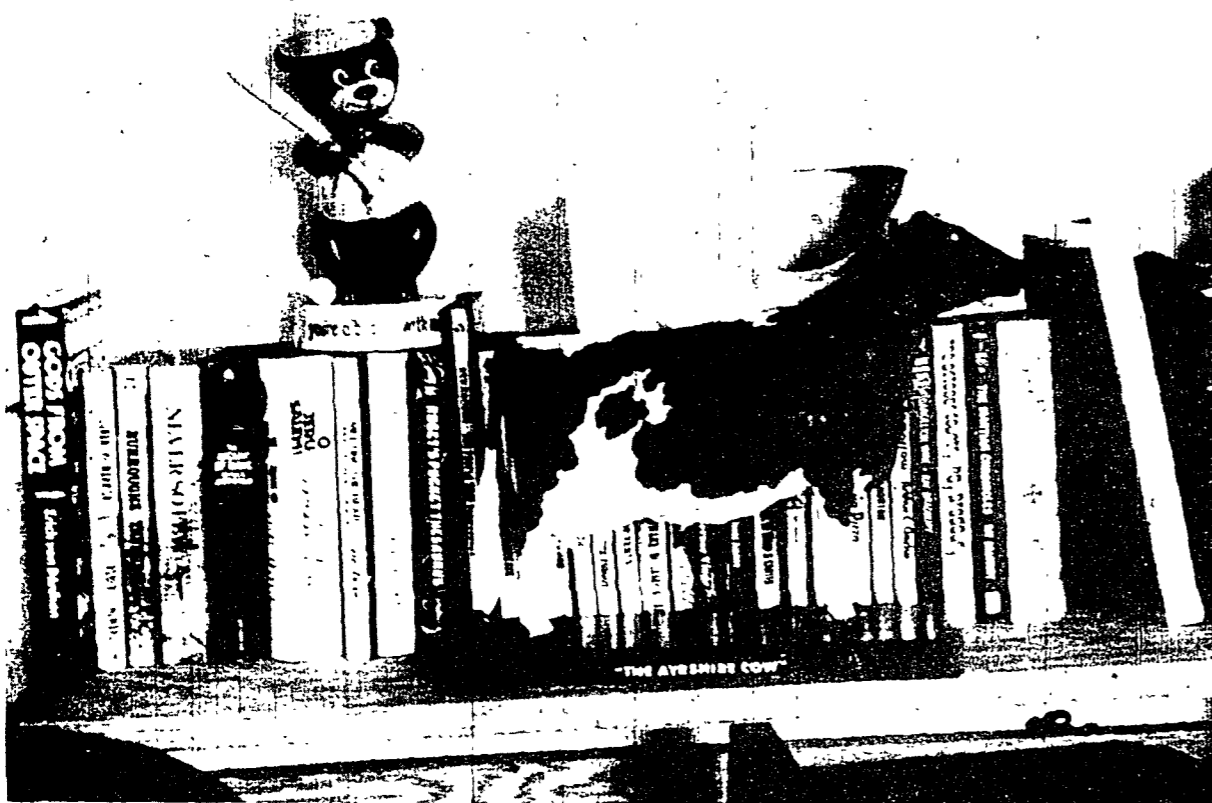
They seem to say, "Enter these enchanted woods, ye who dare."

After hay picking. . . .

WHEN HE'S NOT up in the hayloft preparing fodder and bedding for the University's herd, Tom might be at his desk, where a model Ayrshire shows the lines of a cow judged prize milker. Those books in the background would impress a judge like Rod Serling.



Photos by Ed Golomb



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