

COW LEGENDS IN A GREAT MOTHER BREED

Scotch Ridge Oakley I *Contributed By Mary Ellen Wozny* *Spectrum Farm, Coolville, Ohio* *March, 2002*

Her name on her pedigree is Scotch Ridge Oakley I. But from the moment she came to our farm, she has been "Zellie."

And how we came to own her, and enjoy her, involved good luck for our farm, and events at other farms.

Zellie's life story started in Carlisle, Iowa, where she was calved on March 23, 1987. Her breeder of record was Bernard Zelinsky, who along with his wife, Beverly, owned Scotch Ridge Farm. And her nickname, obviously, comes from her breeding origin.

In early 1988, Scotch Ridge announced its herd dispersal. Coincidentally, that same spring, the Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute announced that it was interested in establishing a Murray Grey herd at its Wooster, Ohio campus. Dr. Mike Borger, along with Joel Litt, Herd Manager, were willing to accept Murray Grey heifers as part of a new brood cow herd. A group of Murray Grey producers wished to make donations to start the MG herd, either via providing animals, or by buying a heifer to donate.



At Spectrum Farm, 1987 had been another "Cinnamon Bear" calving season...Bear had sired a 100% bull calf crop! There were no yearling heifers, period, at Spectrum Farm. So we decided to buy a heifer to donate.

Elwain and Betty Dreyer were instrumental in founding the OSU/ATI herd. They learned of the impending Scotch Ridge dispersal, and the availability of open yearling heifers from that farm. In typical adventuresome fashion, they determined there were six donors who would buy six heifers for OSU/ATI, including Spectrum Farm. And in that same adventuresome spirit, they drove a pick-up truck pulling a large cattle trailer to Iowa, bought 20 heifers, and returned immediately to Ohio. In their eagerness to get the heifers to ATI, they drove to Wooster directly from Iowa, with the trailer heavily loaded.

Here's where the story comes back to Zellie. At OSU/ATI, Elwain and Betty pulled into the barnyard, and were met by Mike and Joel. Their selection process was very democratic. They literally "jumped off" six heifers from the trailer. The first six that came off, regardless of pedigree, became the donated stock. Luckily for us, Zellie must have been in the front of the trailer. She stayed ON the trailer, so she came along with the remaining heifers for some respite at BEJE Farm.

A few days after that, we went to visit Elwain and Betty, and to appraise the remaining heifers, which they were offering for sale. Obviously, if Spectrum Farm was to increase its brood cow herd size, we needed to buy one. Before we went out to the barn lot to inspect the heifers, I told Elwain that I was looking for the cleanest-fronted heifer in the bunch. Color was not a priority, but if there was a dark one fitting the bill, that would be good, since our cow herd at that time consisted totally of silver females.

Zellie was the only dark heifer in the group, and she was wonderfully clean-fronted. We bought her straight away, and brought her home. Luckily for us, we got to pick her out of the group. And at that time we had little idea of just how lucky we had been.

A clue to the good fortune came from Bernard Zelinsky himself. Earlier that same spring we had purchased a farm sign from Bernard, and when we had mounted it on our loading chute, we took a photo of it and sent it to him. Upon receiving the snapshot, he phoned us. During the call we talked about the heifers also. He was glad that they were finding good homes. Then I mentioned that Spectrum Farm had bought the dark one. Bernard immediately responded, "You got Oakley? She's from our strong Annie Oakley cow line, and one of the best ones in the bunch. She'll do all right for you." He was so right.

Zellie, now in her 15th year, has had an enormous influence on our herd. In the photo she is introducing Zoe, her 2001 heifer calf, to the pleasures of getting a snack of sweet grain. As with all her calves, Zellie's mothering abilities have provided us with vigorous, sturdy and well-growing calves. And she is getting ready for the arrival of her 14th calf, this coming spring.



In our herd record book, she fills many pages. We reviewed her stats, and compiled this summary. In Zellie's lifetime to date, she has had eight heifer and five bull calves, all arriving unassisted. Through her years she has had several service sires. Yet her birth weight average for all calves is 71 pounds, with bull calves averaging 76, (range 68-82), and heifers averaging 69 pounds (range 58-74) at birth. Most remarkable is Zellie's lifetime calving interval, which is 364 days.

The weaning weights of Zellie's calves have averaged 625 pounds for bulls, and 547 for heifers. Her lightest bull calf at weaning has been 487 pounds, in a drought year. He ended up as freezer beef, with a carcass dressing percentage of 66%.

Three of her daughters currently are part of our brood cow herd, plus several granddaughters. Shown in the photographs are daughters, the silver Spectrum Debutante, above, and the dark-colored Spectrum Oakley, respectively.



The dark calf at side of Oakley is Oakley's boy, hence Zellie's grandson, Made Right Ollie, who was 2001 Ohio State Fair Reserve Grand Champion Bull, and now is owned by Windmill Hill Cattle Company in Texas.

We have never taken Zellie into any show ring. In fact, she is reluctant to lead on halter, preferring by far to follow behind you when you walk through the pasture. She will wait at a gate expectantly, well before we arrive, when she knows it is time to move the herd to the next section of its grazing paddock. And she has taught not only her offspring, but also all the new arrivals at the farm, where the water and mineral boxes are located, and how to navigate through the laneways.

At one point, in 1999, we took a close look at Zellie's teeth, and realized that she essentially didn't have any. They were worn clear down to the gums. Yet she raised a great calf that year, Spectrum Mocha Man, now a herd sire in West Virginia at Rhinestone Ranch.



Mocha Man's unadjusted 205-day weight was 705 pounds, quite a measure of Zellie's milking ability on good grass. Since then, she is like the Every Ready Bunny, and just keeps on going. Living essentially 100% on grass for these many years, she now gets a little extra care and nurturing from us, a small reward, for her outstanding performance.

We hope and wish that Zellie's next calf will be her best ever, as we do every year. You can bet she will give it her all. And we will be thankful, once again, for how lucky we are to have her at Spectrum Farm.