

Farm Features

Wee Kin Farms

Merging our Irish heritage and literal Gaelic meaning: “little acres farm,” George’s parents, George Sr. and Margaret McKenna christened our current family operation: Wee Acres Farm. After the barn was empty for nearly a decade, I returned to Albion with my wife Iva to eventually reoccupy and rename the sleepy homestead. Wee Kin Farms (little family farm) became the residence of our veterinary practice after we converted the milk house, milking parlor, front barn storage, and heifer pens into Country Lane Veterinarian Services. This left the free stall barn, calf barn and barnyard free for our four daughters’ 4-H projects. The girls started out small with dairy goats. At the age of 5, each girl got a kid to work with, beginning the journey of their 4-H experience. According to Iva, Wee Kin Farms symbolized the continuing history my parents created by keeping the prefix “wee” and incorporated the girls as a living legacy; Grandpa’s “kin” or family.

As the girls got older, the dairy goats just didn’t fill the void of childhood memories. Iva had also been raised on a dairy farm: her parents Richard and Iva Caton owned Caton Farms Holsteins, located in Oakfield, NY. For both of us, past remembrances of being raised on Holstein dairy farms could not be quieted. We wanted our children to experience those pleasures and create their own dairy farm adventures.

Caton, our oldest daughter was given the opportunities to pick the breed of cattle that the McKenna girls were going to raise. At the age of seven, she looked at all the breeds at both county and state fairs. She hesitantly woke the sleeping Mr. Roland Ripley at the N.Y. State Fair to ask him about his breed of Guernsey cows. Even with her parents’ history with Holsteins, she selected the Guernsey breed, possibly for that reason. We soon found out that Guernsey cattle are in short supply in Western New York. There were a few grade cattle but we were looking for registered dairy animals. We contacted the Guernsey Association and were directed to Nedrow Farms, which provided the opportunity for Caton to purchase her calf, She’s A Dandy. Caton did a wonderful job with Dandy, and with the help of Grandpa Caton was able to show at both Orleans

and Wyoming county fairs where she did very well winning lots of large ribbons and trophies. She had caught the “love of showing” bug.

Finding a calf for Kerri, our second child was more difficult. She went a couple years forced to raise and show Holsteins. The opportunity to purchase a calf from across the border in Ontario, Canada at Maple Hurst Farm owned by the Forster Family came after Kerri saw the ad in the Guernsey Journal and said, “It doesn’t hurt to ask.” A phone call from a persistent 10-year old paid off, and they told us to come and look at a heifer if we were interested. We came home with Gidget, who a year later won Kerri first place in her class at the NY Junior Guernsey Show.

The search was on again, as our third child, Betsey, turned eight and began looking for her fair calf. After two years of helping her sisters show their animals she was determined to have one for her very own. When Betsey was home schooled for fourth grade, she decided to complete the essays for the Guernsey Scholarship Calf with hopes of getting a calf of her own. The call that came from Christel Axtel telling

Betsey she won, thrilled our whole family. Betsey received her calf, Serenade, from Smithfield farms. She has provided Betsey with many educational moments and life lessons. She has learned much from the opportunity

and has become a confident young public speaker because of her enthusiasm of the Guernsey breed. Betsey encourages anyone she knows to try for the scholarship calf, even to say they could house it with our cows. During her time at the fair, she has told everyone who comes through the barn about the breed and about how she came to be involved with it. Eric Craig being nearby encouraged her and taught her many farming lessons including that the best color hair on either a cow or person is RED!! The Guernsey breed has even enriched our relationship. She her father on his toes to know everything that is going on with her cow, including the best feed, best housing and best bulls to use. Betsey loves Serenade, and that



love has motivated her to be so much more than she would have been without her.

Jenny, the youngest of the four girls benefited from her older sister Caton’s breeding program and was given her first calf as a Christmas gift from Caton; naturally named Merry. Jenny is eager to meet the challenge of doing as well as or better than her bigger sisters. She’s been carefully watching for a long time!!

Our whole family has become diehard supporters of the Guernsey breed. We have made so many friends in the Guernsey Association that annual meetings and fair time now feel like reunions. We also have had many joys and some disappointments that come with owning cattle: the hoping that “she’s bred” to she’s not going to make it to the wonderful smells and sights of an exhausted momma cow tending to her still steaming calves wet with the newness of birth. Some feel they can meet God in the garden but the miracle of birth of a calf lends us to believe you can also find him in the barn.

Caton is now a freshman at Cornell. This past month she received the honor of being the New York State Guernsey Outstanding Youth. She was also awarded the Max Dawdy scholarship, which is given in honor of Max Dawdy, former Executive Secretary of the American Guernsey Association. Receiving the Junior Guernsey Breed Production Award and Grand Master Guernsey Showman at the New York State Fair; Caton has been largely affected by Guernsey breeders.

Kerri is a junior at Albion High School she is very active in FFA serving as District Nine President and Chapter President. This spring she is hoping to run for state line



officer. She also enjoys drama activities. She has done very well with her Toggenburg goats she continues to raise. After winning grand master showman with her goats five consecutive years, she hopes to win showmanship with cows in the near future.

Betsey has become quite the public speaker and will be competing next month in four competitions at the NYS FFA Convention. Betsey stays busy with basketball, soccer and track.

Jenny is eager to follow in her sisters' footsteps and enthusiastically awaits her first calf from Merry due on May 4th.

Caton's choice for the Guernsey breed led to our love of the creamy golden milk that would also make many batches of butter in a butter churn. A gift from Grandpa and Grandpa, the churn is a constant reminder of their endless love and support of the girls and the pride they shared in seeing their granddaughters enter the show ring. Pictures bring back treasured memories of Grandpa Caton helping Caton prepare Dandy for the big day at State Fair and his joy at seeing the pair contentedly walk the ring. Years after Dad passed away, Mom continued to travel the 2-1/2 hour trip alone to watch her granddaughters show. She took great strength in her favorite verse: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," Philippians 4:13. This verse that once led the generation before will now guide us in the same way.

The Guernsey Breed has led us to many special memories. One fresh summer morning a little friend Eliza was over visiting Jenny. They went out to check on the cows and got to see the wonderful of the birth of a calf. What a thrill when her older sister Kerri named the calf Jenny Eliza!

Kerri experienced the loss of a cow last summer that we just could not seem to get up the fight to get up and get going. George and I and the girls spent many hours getting the cow up it seemed that she would prefer us to get her up so she wouldn't get up without us!! The cow was pregnant so we hoped to at least get her through delivering her calf and then maybe she would get up. One night in "udder" exasperation and exhaustion, Kerri prayed: "Lord, I pray that it's healthy heifer calf. George chimed in and said, "I just pray that if it is a dead calf it is a bull calf. The next morning both of their prayers were answered when first a gorgeous heifer calf was born and shortly thereafter a dead bull calf was born. Of course the moral of the story is, be careful

what you pray for you just might get it!! Even these disappointments are learning experiences for the kids.

In reviewing this essay it seems that we are bragging about our children. Although we feel they are wonderful, that is not our intention. It is to relay the many ways being involved with the Guernsey Scholarship Calf Program has benefited them and our family. Thank you to all of those involved in it for your hard work and for the opportunities you have afforded us.

