



ANNABELLE FAUSTINO

WCC INTERMEDIATE WRITING COMPETITION WINNER

Growing up in a suburban neighborhood, the only animals we ever had were cats. Both my parents are city slickers so living near farmland was the most “country” we would ever get. My family and I never knew about 4-H until one of my friends in grade six asked me if I would be interested in joining her. Since we did not live on a farm, my parents had no idea how we would make this work. I suggested some sixth-grader ideas “How about we put the calf in the backyard next to the treehouse?” That idea got shut down pretty quickly! Living on a postage size lot in a subdivision controlled by by-laws, made the thought of joining 4-H an impossibility until we heard about borrowing a calf from a dairy farm. My parents loved the idea since the calf would stay at the farm and I was beyond excited to train something other than our family cat! So began my 4-H journey, not knowing the opportunities I would be given in the future like attending the Western Canadian Classic.

In May of 2022, I applied for the WCC dreaming of the opportunity to represent Team BC. Because I had less hands-on experience than the kids who grew up on dairy farms, I didn’t know if I could make it. I was hesitant to apply but with the encouragement of my 4-H leaders



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and family, I went for it. Sure enough, I made the team and I was beyond thrilled to attend the 2022 Western Canadian Classic. It was time to get busy and prepare; there was much to do! At first, it was overwhelming getting all these emails about articles and pedigrees, not to mention the long list of abbreviations to memorize but I was ready for the challenge. To stay organized I got a binder with dividers for all my reading material which weighed close to ten pounds, I'm sure of it! Let's not tell my mom that I printed every single document, in colour! Next was picking a new calf to take. I was given a September calf which was nerve-racking because she was sizeable. Being only 5'2" on a good day, she was the biggest calf I had ever trained and prior to this, I had only worked with winter heifers. This was a stretch out of my comfort zone. During my preparation for the show, I felt uneasy at times but I recognized that this was what WCC was all about. The community encourages the future generation of farmers to go outside our comfort zones and embrace every opportunity given to us.

Before I knew it, I was in Brandon, Manitoba competing against three other provinces. The first day consisted of building and decorating the stalls for the herdsmanship competition. It was all hands on deck and I loved the energy and comradery. Half our team occupied the washracks, scrubbing to their heart's content, while the rest strung lights, swept the floors and assembled the pack for our pristine heifers. That night, we stayed up late studying for the dairy science quiz which was in the morning. It was a night of online quizlet tests, stacks of flashcards, dairy cow anatomy sheets and a list of important Holstein Canada CEO representatives. Waking up the next morning was a struggle since we only got 2-3 hours of sleep. Day three was another jam-packed day full of activities starting with judging. I have never seen more kids talking to themselves than on judging day! With a majority, including myself, talking to inanimate objects, like fence panels, around the show ring. The stadium was filled with the clicking sound of pens as we wrote our final reasons. One of my most memorable moments was the clipping

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competition. I now understand the dialogue I overheard as my fellow competitors crossed their fingers, hoping for a flawless and well-tempered calf. Unfortunately, I got the complete opposite! Everything was going smoothly with the odd kick to the leg and the flare of the nostrils. Then suddenly she flipped upside down and started bawling. This happened over five times and by the end, I had two bodyguards protecting me from my feral calf! After a couple doses of calming meds and taking a 15-minute break, I was able to complete the competition. Quitting would have been the easier route to take and no one would have faulted me if I did but that is not what WCC is about. We are taught to persevere through the tough times and never give up. If you fail, pick yourself up and try again. We take every opportunity we get and never waste a good learning experience.

I have always had an interest in the sciences and a fascination with medicine. As a young girl, I thought I wanted to become a doctor. Since I started my journey with 4-H, working on a dairy farm and having the honour to attend the WCC as a member of Team BC, my eyes have been opened up to a world of opportunity that I can pursue beyond owning a dairy farm. I now plan to pursue veterinary medicine and this program has prepared me with more skills than I can name. In preparing for the dairy science quiz, I have gained an understanding of dairy breeding and management. Preparing for dairy orals

has taught me how to assess a quality animal and to look for its desired attributes. I have improved my communication skills with dairy orals and communicating my knowledge of conformation through my reasons. I read that The Western Canadian Classics, an elite program, was developed to bring dairy youth together, stimulate friendships and provide an opportunity for friendly competition to name a few. Being a member who lost my heifer in the tragic cattle liner accident, I learned that I was not “just” part of Team BC but a part of a whole dairy community. I wasn’t connected with the WCC as “just” an organization but I was connected to a tight-knit community of Canadian farmers. The overwhelming support I received from the WCC, WestGen and the national dairy industry made me realize that I was not grieving alone. When one member hurts we all hurt and when one member celebrates, we all celebrate. WCC is about supporting and building family-like connections with one another. I was proud to have the opportunity to participate as a member of Team BC this year and compete alongside my dairy family!

Annabelle Faustino | INT.