



MICHAEL ANDRES

WCC ALUMNI WRITING COMPETITION WINNER

One day I hear that there is a group of people going out West to a heifer show. What's it about? How do you get to go? Lots of questions back in 1985 or 86. Fifteen-year-old me didn't get to attend that first year that I had heard of it, as I didn't make the cut for "Team Toba". However, it sure made the competitive side of me rise up and I came up with a plan to improve my chances for the next.

I began to study any Holstein Journal that came my way, I analyzed the "Blue Pages" to find which sires dominated the Type charts. I began to up the ante on my barn clipping throughout the winter, and suddenly each cow had an enthusiastically sprayed up topline as I put in some practice in hopes to improve my clipping and prepping skills. My work paid off, as the summer of 1987 saw me making the team! However, that year I was just attending as an alternate. I woke up early, washing the endless lineup of heifers. As I spent my time picking the pack for steaming pies and learning all the tips and tricks for making a straight pack, I watched the others go out to the show ring. Needless to say, this further wet my appetite for improvement.

The spring of 1988 was the year I graduated from high school. I knew I could make a lot more money that summer, and therefore decided to take out some personal money from my savings and invest in a heifer that would give me a chance of getting me on the team. I found a local March yearling Starbuck



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heifer that showed promise for the show season. I took her and a few others to as many shows as I could that summer. I managed to find a few first and second place ribbons with her, and with those I knew that I could likely expect to crack the coveted “Team Toba” that fall. As the team tryouts came and went, I was ecstatic to finally be named to the team! I was never an alternate on the team ever again. I was a shy kid that was willing to work super hard and as the years went by, I ended up being on the team for five years until I aged out.

In my experience, Manitoba (“Team Toba”) always had to work extra hard to excel, so we focused on areas where we felt we had a chance to control our own destiny. The Herdsman award was our mission, as we knew that we just had to put in a consistent effort every day. We were coached to study hard for the Science Quiz, as that was something that was also controlled by our commitment. We worked hard at the Judging Competition, but only a small group had a lot of success there. It was always tough to crack the elusive cuts in the Showmanship classes. Occasionally one or two of our members had success, but it was always a difficult part of the competition to collect team points.

The Conformation classes saw varied levels of success. As far as I am aware, we have had the Grand

Champion heifer on two occasions, which is and was super exciting. There were only a few established show herds in the province that knew what type of animal to breed for. We relied on these herds, such as Donfield, Donohoe, Roswitha, Hanson, Benner, and Narfa to provide competitive heifers for the team. Naturally, the owners of these herds became active in the behind the scenes coaching over the summer. Some were able to be team Coaches, others taught us during our team preparation weekends. They really taught us a lot about, not only WCC competition, but also a lot about being mentors. They probably didn’t realize how much us members, myself included, looked up to them over the years.

Now that I am a parent of four children, I am proud to say that all of our kids have had a chance to take part in the WCC experience! For me, it has truly come full circle. I am proud to have played a few roles, including a supportive role at home as the kids head out for competition, or I have been a driver, both in shuffling kids to and from the hotels as well as transporting the cattle.

Having been a WCC graduate also played a role in my interest in becoming involved at a higher level. I was approached by the Board of Westgen a long time ago to consider being the inaugural Manitoba Representative. I was elected to the board and



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served for eight years. That opportunity paved the way to my current involvement as Chairman of the Westgen Endowment Fund. That committee is proud to provide the funding that Westgen uses to sponsor the Western Canadian Classic for the last 25 years!

I am proud of the role that Westgen has played in developing these talented young people into the roles that they play currently in the Field of Agriculture. Graduates have learned essential life skills that extend beyond agriculture. They have become confident, capable and outspoken as leaders in our communities throughout Western Canada and beyond. I know what the program did for me and am excited to see it happening to my kids and the youth that are still involved today.

Thank you to Westgen and all companies that have financially supported the WCC shows. Thank you to all the people who have ever played any kind of a role in the planning, and execution of each WCC show that has ever happened. Thank you to the Team Manitoba leaders that contributed to my experience and my children's experiences. I am forever proud to say that WCC played a role in my life.

Michael Andres | ALUMNI