

Dedication to Detail

Hereford breeder Phillip Moon combines lessons from football, law and cattle to produce practical cattle for a practical world.

by **Bridget Beran**

For Phillip Moon, “simple beginnings” is an understatement. Growing up on a small farm in northwest Bergman, Ark., Phillip found himself enchanted by Hereford cattle. He says he remembers his family’s first horned Hereford bull, one his parents owned when he was about 4. Though he laughs because that bull was struck by lightning and died shortly after, it made a lasting effect on him.

Though his parents ran a small commercial herd, his uncle ran Hereford cattle and gave Phillip several of his old *Hereford Journals* when Phillip expressed an interest in the breed. At the age of 9, Phillip pleaded with his mother to get a subscription so he could learn more about Herefords.

“I remember coming home from baseball practice and the first Herd Bull book had come in the mail and I read it cover to cover,” Phillip says. “I still have that old 1970 issue and it’s tattered all to heck but it’s special to me.”

Dedicated to learning about the breed, Phillip credits Joe and Henry Hamilton, Hereford breeders and good friends of his family, for educating and encouraging him in his involvement in Herefords. Although there were some distractions along the way, Phillip’s passion in life has always been raising Hereford cattle.

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Lisa says one of the most important parts of their relationship is the respect they have for one another. They are a team and Phillip takes her thoughts and opinions into consideration when they make ranch decisions.

Football lessons

During high school, football found him and led his life in a different direction. Phillip says Bill Smith, a high school coach, believed in him and pushed him to be a better player. A belief that paid off when he was recruited to play for the University of Arkansas (1977-1980) under legendary coach Lou Holtz.

“My family couldn’t have afforded to send me to college and I wouldn’t have let them pay for me to go. So that scholarship was everything to me,” Phillip says.

Through hard work and a dedication to details, Phillip went from a kid from small Harrison High School, who had never even been on a plane, to playing in the Orange Bowl and being a three-year-starter. Still Phillip doesn’t take any credit, saying he is just fortunate for the opportunities provided for him and for the people who believed in him.

Then Arkansas assistant coach Larry Beightol, who went on to be an offensive line coach for eight different professional football teams over a 20-year career in the NFL, made a lasting impression on Phillip, and Phillip says he still sees lessons he learned from Larry in his lifestyle today.

“Coach Beightol taught me how important it was to be methodical



Phillip says his No. 1 goal every day is to be better than he was the day before and to overcome his own mistakes.

and detail-oriented,” Phillip says. “I was surrounded by and had the opportunity to study so many tremendous individuals who instilled the importance of details and having pride in what you did.”

While “Holtz-isms” and “Beightol-isms” find their way into his vocabulary, Phillip is proud of the people from whom he was able to learn. He stood by his humble beginnings, and when he lettered the third year and the university offered him a gift for his accomplishments, he asked for luggage because, well, he didn’t have any — luggage he still owns, 30 years later.

However, during his time at college, he never forgot about Hereford cattle. His mother would bring him copies of the *Hereford Journal* whenever she came to watch his football games, and after a while, his parents transferred the subscription to him so he could read it on the bus or plane to away games or after practice.

Law school

After graduation, his life focus shifted again, this time to law. Joe Hamilton strongly encouraged him to attend law school, and with the guidance of the Hamilton brothers, he had the opportunity to work under E.J. Ball, who now has a building named after him at the University of Arkansas.

While he now practices law, Phillip says he’s a cattleman first. Many of the lessons he learned from law school and years of football translate into his cattle operation today.

Due to his law practice obligations, planning ahead is vital at Moon Herefords. However, Phillip says that he gets things done the same way he did when he was a kid.

“When I was in school, I got up and did chores before school and again once I got back from practice. Now I do chores before work and after I get back from the



Breeding Canadian horned Herefords since 1987, Phillip says he is raising practical cattle for a practical world.

office,” Phillip explains. “That’s how I grew up. You didn’t have to choose one thing or the other. You could do two things, it just takes more planning.”

Phillip says that his calendar is planned out as far ahead as possible, and as soon as he learns when a Hereford event, like the Annual Meeting or the National Western Stock Show, is scheduled, he makes it a point to block time off.

“Whenever I have to be gone from court, they know it’s always for a Hereford event,” Phillip laughs.

“A lot of people think I’m nuts but I believe in my Hereford cattle. It was something I’d always wanted to stay involved in. Not just cattle but horned Herefords.”

Team effort

While his law hours lead to his winter cattle work being done primarily by headlights, he’s got a pretty good hand to help him out. From castrating to dehorning, there’s one helper who’s been by his side for the past 16 years — his wife, Lisa Sparrow.

She’s a military kid, but after her father retired, her family moved back near her uncle’s ranch. Lisa grew up showing dairy cattle, rabbits, goats and any other animal she could get her hands on. She says she always had an interest in beef cattle, and when she and Phillip first met, after he’d been hauling bales all day, she surprised him by asking questions about his cattle and his operation.

With a marriage centered on agriculture and Hereford cattle, their first date included a visit to the pasture so she could see his Hereford herd.

“Phillip has a way of presenting something to you when he gets excited that is effervescent,” Lisa explains. “I wanted to be a part of it because he was so enthusiastic about it.”

Though her sons, Andy and Julian, put Phillip through the ringer, they say he absolutely earned his place, and they can’t imagine a better man for their

mother. Learning how to work on a farm also prepared them for their futures as members of the U.S. Army Special Forces. Julian laughs that after growing up on a farm, he found Ranger school was easy by comparison. Now that Lisa’s boys are grown with families of their own, it’s just Phillip and Lisa, working as a team to run their 75-head operation.

“There’s a great sense of togetherness that comes from it just being the two of us working cattle side-by-side,” Lisa says.

With Phillip’s encouragement, Lisa served on the former American Hereford Women (AHW) board of directors. Serving with women who became some of her best friends, Lisa says it was important to her and her fellow board members to promote Herefords and to strive to see a white face on every calf in the pasture.

“I enjoyed that organization more than I’ve enjoyed any other group that I’ve been in. We could really see through the product of our passions and commitments,” Lisa says.

Though she says she’s Phillip’s “sidekick” on the ranch and laughs that she gets paid in compliments, Lisa now owns a couple of her own cows in their herd, and she and Phillip fiercely defend her independence and her own development in the breed.

“I told her from day one that I didn’t want her to be dependent on me,” Phillip says. “I believe in strong women. My mother and my grandmother were strong all on their own and she didn’t need me any more than they needed anyone. I was there to back her up and to support her but she can do anything all by herself.”

Focus on family, Herefords

Though Lisa’s sons are both accomplished soldiers with double-digit deployments, Lisa says what she’s most proud of is what good fathers they are — something she says they learned from Phillip.

“I think boys need a good example of how to be good fathers



Though Lisa has a deep passion for Hereford cattle, she also loves horses and owns two so her grandchildren can ride when they visit.

and husbands. He helped show them how to treat their wives, with the utmost respect and love,” Lisa says. “Phillip showed me I had worth, not only in his eyes, but through mine. Every woman deserves to be looked at the way he looks at me.”

While they moved back to Phillip’s grandmother’s ranch and home, they’re making their own mark on Bergman. They’re in the process of finishing an overhaul to expand his grandmother’s small farmhouse so it has room for times when their grandchildren visit, and Phillip has taken a different direction with the cattle as well.

Breeding Canadian horned Herefords since 1987, Phillip says it was important to him that his herd stand out from those of the polled or Line 1 breeders located in their area. Introduced to the bloodlines by the Hamilton brothers, coupled with many years of learning about the breed, Phillip knew that Canadian horned Herefords were the way to go for him.

“I liked the cattle and I needed to be competitive in a different way,” Phillip explains. “I always had a goal to have a strong, productive

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Phillip works to incorporate cattle into every part of his life. Even his law office is decorated with Hereford art.

herd of useful Hereford cows and I've always believed in them. I'm raising practical cattle for a practical world. So I kept studying the breed to figure out what was going to work best for me and my operation. I don't think I can ever know enough and the cattle business changes so rapidly so I'm always trying to learn."

For Phillip many of these lessons are learned by meeting and talking with other cattlemen and learning the opinions and directions from

opposing sides. No matter the breed, he knows that there are takeaways from any producer, breeder or researcher. If he can promote the benefits of Herefords, then that's an added bonus.

"I think it's important to go hear things you don't agree with so you understand what those people's point of view is," Phillip explains. "I'm always trying to promote Herefords. When people start talking cattle, I start talking up Herefords."

Industry leaders

Phillip also tries to pass along those lessons to agriculture enthusiasts and to serve the agriculture industry. For the past 15 years, Phillip or Lisa has served on the board of directors for their county cattlemen's association, with Phillip serving four terms as president. Also a former president of the Arkansas Hereford Association, Phillip knows from his own experience with the

Hamilton brothers how a little encouragement can go a long way in a young person's life.

Phillip and Lisa are dedicated supporters of their local FFA chapter. After a lightning storm killed the chapter's cow herd, Phillip donated a cow-calf pair, as well as lending the chapter members a bull, to get the group back on its feet. When the market sale comes each year, he makes a point to talk with the ag teacher to find out which child needs the most help and encouragement in agriculture.

"We do it because we see kids who have a potential or a need to be involved in agriculture," Lisa says.

Phillip says their involvement is always centered on people who really need a hand up and have a passion for the agriculture industry. This cause is close to the heart of Phillip, who says he wouldn't be the cattleman, lawyer or man he is without the positive influences he had throughout his life.

"I've been so fortunate for all the people who have believed in me," Phillip says. **HW**



Cover dog

The June 2014 issue of *National Geographic* honored military working dogs that put their lives on the line to protect soldiers. Lisa's son Julian, an Airborne Ranger, trains dogs for war. Prior to training dogs, Julian was a dog handler in combat. After Julian's dog Layka was injured in combat, losing her leg, Julian worked to adopt her and to bring her home so she could have a full life. *National Geographic* chose to feature Layka on its cover.

"We all felt very honored that *National Geographic* chose to honor the military dogs because they do the job that nobody else wants to do. And they do it for a red ball and a treat," Lisa says.

Julian's first dog, Benno, saved countless lives, including Julian's, and is now featured in the painting "Into the Breach" for the 75th Ranger Regiment. Though Benno lost his life protecting Julian and his team, Julian says he has never encountered another dog quite like Benno.

Julian's work has led him to train more than 35 dogs for combat, and he says he's just happy they are getting the recognition they deserve. Although Layka is the first dog to receive an official military award since World War II, Julian says that dogs don't care about awards.

After his experience adopting Layka, who has gone from a military weapon to a beloved family pet, he hopes more dogs will get to be retired eventually, preferably back into a home with their handlers.

While these dogs, due to their extensive training, can't be handed over to just anyone after returning from war, Julian says he thinks it's important that military working dogs have a chance at a normal, happy life after their service is done. For Layka, Lisa says, though she's fun to be around and perfectly gentle with Julian's 3-year-old, it is important to remember that she's still a weapon that's always loaded. Since her return from war, Layka has become a dedicated protector and family member, a decorated veteran, and, now, a cover girl.

"All the military working dogs are special, but Layka's our cover girl," Lisa says. **HW**



COURTESY OF LISA MOON