

My Life and the Jersey Cow

Lydia Chittenden, Schodack Landing, New York

Jersey cows have always been one of the most important things in my life. I am so incredibly thankful to have been given the opportunity to be raised on my family's Jersey farm and grow my own personal herd over the years to now have 50 cows and 46 heifers, all Registered Jerseys. When I was young, I loved following my dad around in the barns or hiding myself in a calf pen for some much needed calf cuddles.

Every year when summer comes around and it is time to pick the show string, my dad always asks my opinion on which heifers should make the cut. When I was young, I didn't have a clue what I was supposed to be looking for, so I simply picked the heifers that I thought had the cutest faces. I must have been pretty lucky because my six-year-old self ended up showing a spring calf named Dutch Hollow Legion Kitty.

Although "Kitty" was not a fan of shows and insisted on being stubborn and giving me a hard time regardless how often I practiced with her, I still fell in love with that little calf. The second year I showed "Kitty," my dad saw the bond that I shared with her, so he decided to transfer "Kitty" into my name and gift her to me. She was not the first Jersey I owned, but was definitely the most special and became the matriarch of my most successful cow family. Today I have 88 cows that all trace back to her.

When I look back and recall my best memories, most of them involve my Jerseys. Whether it was the first time I won Grand Champion at my county fair with "Kitty," the first time I won Supreme Champion with "Kitty's" oldest daughter, when Ronnie Mosser appraised "Kitty" Excellent-94%, or when I stepped on those green shavings for the first time—my Jerseys have shaped my life.

In my sophomore year of high school, my dad asked me if I wanted to go to the New York Spring Show for the judging competition. My high school did not have FFA and there were not a lot of other dairy kids in my county, so judging teams were a foreign concept to me. It did sound interesting so I went along and tried it out. I really enjoyed it. When the 4-H dairy judging contest at the New York State Fair came a couple months later, my dad asked me again if I was interested, and I decided I could try it out one more time. What dad failed to tell me was at this competition we had to give reasons on some of the classes. To say it went rough is an extreme understatement. I wrote out every set of reasons word-for-word and read those reasons right off of my paper to the judges with a very shaky voice, but I made it through them. After the competition I told dad how much I disliked it and I was never going to do that again. For a while I stuck to my word and refused to do any judging that involved giving reasons. I still really enjoyed judging classes though, so I decided that I should practice a lot on my reasons and it would gradually get better.

In my senior year of high school I went to Harrisburg on the

New York 4-H dairy judging team and the following year I went to Madison. This year, now a senior in college, I will be going to both Harrisburg and Madison again and competing in the judging contest on the Cornell University Dairy Judging Team. Over the past few weeks, in preparation for these contests, I have judged over 30 classes and given more than 20 sets of reasons. These reasons don't scare me anymore. I don't have to write everything out or read off my paper, my voice doesn't shake, I don't rock back and forth, I don't avoid eye contact with the judge, and I have seen myself grow to be so much more confident in not just giving reasons, but public speaking in general. For any kids that may read this article, I encourage you all to go out on a limb and make yourself uncomfortable because those situations can turn into some of the best experiences you'll ever have.

To follow along with that message, I urge any Jersey youth to apply yourselves to the many available opportunities provided by Jerseys. Submit an entry into the youth production contests,

Pot O'Gold contests, Achievement contests, apply for scholarships, go to annual meetings, and most importantly apply for Jersey Youth Academy! I understand how Academy can sound a little intimidating. I was very introverted in high school and the thought of going to a different state without my family, hardly knowing anyone that would be there, and having to room with a stranger was very overwhelming, but I am SO glad that I did it. There is so much valuable information and incredible experiences that come from Jersey Youth Academy, and the people you meet will provide you with life-long connections, whether with other Jersey youth or adults



Lydia Chittenden is the 67th recipient of the National Jersey Youth Achievement award. She is the fifth member of the Chittenden family to be awarded the American Jersey Cattle Association's highest youth award. Lydia is a senior at Cornell.

working within the industry.

Currently, I am looking forward to my senior year at Cornell University, where I am majoring in animal science and concentrating in dairy management. This year I will be doing lots of exciting things such as traveling to Germany with the dairy science club. Although my time as a Jersey junior is coming to an end, I know my involvement with the breed and the incredible Jersey community is nowhere near over. After graduation I hope to do work with herd management and Jersey genetics, and will continue to try and improve not only my personal herd, but also the Jersey breed as a whole.

I would like to thank my entire family for instilling the deep love and passion for Jersey cows within me and starting my herd at such a young age. More specifically, I want to say a huge thank you to my parents for always supporting me in whatever I set my mind to. I truly would not be the person I am today without the everlasting encouragement I have received over the years. Most importantly, I am thankful for the Jersey cow for providing me with the best experiences and memories, and the most amazing community I could have ever asked to be a part of.