

THANK YOU... from Vincent and Christine Maefsky

(Our "Response" to Doug Thompson's "Citation" and the presentation of the 2016 Minnesota Livestock Breeders Hall of Fame Award, March 17, 2016, North Star Ballroom, University of Minnesota, St. Paul)

Vincent Maefsky (**VM**) - Christine, was he talking about us?

Christine Maefsky (**CM**) - Yes, he was, and we should thank him. Thanks Doug

**VM** - We need to thank him more than that. Thanks a whole lot Doug!

**CM** - And there are a number of other people we want to thank.

**VM** - (An aside: I apologize for using a script. Christine and I talked at length about what we wanted to say. At the end she handed me this script. I told her "I don't want a script." And she said to me,

**CM** - "If you don't have a script, you'll ramble on and on, going on for an hour and a half."

**VM** - She was right. So, while you might say, "They read from a script." Recognize that this script is my gift to you.)

We'd first like to thank our parents for getting us started (even though technically they didn't have a lot to do with our choosing to be farmers and dairy goat breeders as we were both born in the cliff dwellings of Brooklyn, New York.) but they did get us started in life. And actually, we do need to thank my parents for choosing to retire to – not Florida or warm environs – but to Minnesota where they built a house on five acres at the corner of the farm. My mother was helpful in the raising of her grandchildren. Being an aircraft mechanic, my father brought his considerable mechanical skills to the farm. I would sometimes jest that we had the only tractor in Minnesota that could fly.

**CM** - And interestingly, we can begin the story of our adventure with goats with another New Yorker who Doug has already mentioned - Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement in New York City. The Catholic Worker, in its mission to serve the poor, had as one of its precepts the idea of growing food on the land to feed the hungry of the city. We were very captivated by this idea and by "going back to the land", a movement for the city-born of that time. Our first experience on the land was in Peabody, Kansas on a 10 acre farm owned by the Mennonite Church. We wanted to raise our own food and have some livestock. Kansas is where we got our first 17 chickens and 2 pigs and we were saving to buy a heifer calf to raise as a family milk cow. I wrote a personal letter to Dorothy Day, telling her what we were doing and of our plans. A bit to our surprise, she published my letter in the Catholic Worker Newspaper, a newspaper that to this day has worldwide circulation. Shortly thereafter, we received a letter from a man in the Bronx, New York, Robert Perazio, telling us that, rather than a cow, we should consider getting a dairy goat. He went on at some length about how good the goat milk was, how it was more digestible than cow milk, explaining how goat manure would be so good for our garden, among other things it was higher in phosphorus than other livestock manure. He ended his letter with, "And besides, I really like goats." We never did learn why this man from the Bronx knew so much about goats.

**VM** - During this same time we had been befriended by a Holdeman Mennonite man, Mr. Jost, who was both a Deacon in his church and a farmer. He would stop by weekly to talk to us about the Bible and the Mennonites. I think he thought of us as prime candidates for conversion since Christine had long hair and wore long dresses, and I had a beard, not the common look of the day. We had somewhat of a symbiotic relationship when, during his visits he would talk to us about the Bible and the Mennonite church and eventually the conversation would move to gardening, chickens and pigs. During one of these conversations I mentioned that we were considering getting a goat for milk. The next week, upon his visit, he told us that he had found someone who had a goat for sale. As Doug mentioned, we took the front bucket seat out of our

friend and housemate Tom Temple's Karmann Ghia, and I hunched down in the back seat as Tom drove to where we could purchase the goat. We returned to our little farmstead with goat in tow.

**CM** - *So, that brings us to our next Thank You's, our friend Tom, Deacon Jost, Robert Perazio, and Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker, all who played key roles in our getting our first goat (which we named Dorothy) and setting us on the path that led us to where we are today. (You might recognize Dorothy Day both from the Dorothy Day Center in St. Paul named after her that is the site for a shelter and care center for the homeless, and by her being named as one of four great Americans by Pope Francis in his speech before the US Congress in 2015.)*

**VM** - After a year in Kansas, we moved to Minnesota and, in 1972 purchased our farm which we named Poplar Hill. When we moved to Poplar Hill we had 6 goats. The farm came with a well-worn but functional 1949 Ford 8N tractor. With youthful naiveté and inexperience, I decided to farm our land with that Ford 8N tractor. Too early in the spring I hooked up the two bottom plow and began the arduous task of turning the soil. It wasn't long before I had that Ford 8N tractor mired in the mud. I spent hours digging out around the tires, trying to push boards, rocks, logs under the tires to gain traction, but to no avail. I went over to one of our few neighbors to ask for help. He quickly came with his tractor that made our Ford 8N look like a toy, and in a matter of minutes we were unstuck. We were so grateful to this neighbor who helped us in our hour of need, and who also continued over the years to help us by giving us advice as we furthered our venture into farming.

**CM** - *And that brings us to thanking this neighbor, Alden Booren, who, in 1984 was himself a recipient of this Minnesota Livestock Breeders Association Hall of Fame award which we are receiving today. We feel humbly honored to be in his company.*

**VM** - Speaking of the times getting started – one might wonder how my background in philosophy and theology was connected to the physically arduous task of farming. I personally consider it a great background. In those early years, knowing nothing of agriculture, my approach to farming was to read everything I could on a topic, talk to everyone I could who had knowledge of the subject and then fall back on my classes in logic and logic and the scientific method. I would then do the most logical thing.

**CM** - *And when that didn't work, he would go to "Plan B".*

*We would also like to collectively thank the many people - neighbors, friends, fellow goat breeders, members of the Minnesota Dairy Goat Association and the American Dairy Goat Association, and the University of Minnesota Veterinary College, especially Dr. Cindy Wolf, Dr. Ann Goplen, of course Dr. David Sherman, and other veterinarians of the Small Ruminant Division over the years, who have been helpful to us in this great life adventure.*

**VM** - Most importantly, we want to thank our children. Without them and what they've contributed to the farm, both as they were growing up and today, we would not be here receiving this award.

I often jest with people, saying that the road to eternal bliss is to "never get married, never have children, and never have goats." The irony of course is that my truth is the exact opposite.

**CM** - *We'd like to thank our oldest child Sarah, her husband Steve and their three children Ashley, Alison and Ava. Sarah was very actively involved in both 4H and FFA as she was growing up. And today, although involved in other endeavors, Sarah puts in many, many hours with the animals and on farm business. Steve is always eager (!) to lend a hand and our grandchildren have taken their place as farm children with their own dairy goat 4H projects, and Ashley now beginning in FFA.*

**VM** - We also want to thank our second child Seth, a 4H member with a dairy goat project in his youth, and who presently lives in Spokane, WA with his wife Kristen and four children Grace, Marley, Clara and Cameron. Although no longer directly involved in the farming, Seth lends us moral support from a distance. We're especially thankful that he's flown here from Spokane, Washington to be with us this afternoon.

One of our favorite farm related remembrances about these two oldest children is a time when Sarah was about 7 years old and Seth was about 5. It was summertime; we had been involved in showing our goats much of the summer, and had just returned from the Washington County Fair. I came into the house and said, "Christine get the camera." With camera in tow, we walked out into the front yard. There Seth was, standing covered with ribbons that we had just won at the Fair. Sarah was standing beside him and I inquired, "What are you guys doing?" and Sarah proudly informed us that they were playing "Sharper at the Withers".

**CM** - *Our next thank you goes to our son Shane, his wife Ellen, and their daughter Linnea. Shane was very active in both 4H and FFA as he was growing up. And we hope his daughter might follow his lead. Even at four years, Linnea is a big help on the farm as she enjoys bottle feeding the baby goats.*

**VM** - (I think though Linnea, when you turn 5 you'll have to pick up the pace.)

We'd like to relay another Washington County Fair story that concerns Shane, and also another person we feel thankful for, Jim Sheldon who was a neighbor from May Township, a fellow goat breeder, and longtime superintendent of both the Washington County Fair and the Minnesota State Fair dairy goat shows. Jim actually told us this story about Shane. From early on it was our practice to have the children involved in showing and caring for the goats at the Fairs. Each child had a designated assignment. Seth, being the biggest had the job of keeping water buckets filled with clean water. Sarah's job was to keep the hay racks filled with fresh hay. Shane's job was to grain the goats as needed. (Stephen was not yet even a twinkle in our eye.) Superintendent Sheldon, noticing that one of the water buckets was running low and seeing young Shane, called him over and pointed out that the water bucket needed to be filled. Being well aware of his appointed job as chief grainer, 5 year old Shane looked up at 6'2" Superintendent Sheldon and said, "Mr. Sheldon, I don't do water buckets."

**CM** - *We'd also like to mention at this point another remembrance from those early years that turned out to have greater importance to our family than we realized at the time. At the State Fair, when Shane was about 5 years old, he was invited to go along to see the Fair with the daughter of a famous Wisconsin goat breeder who was exhibiting. She had been told, no questions to be asked, that Shane was her new friend. This turned out to be the first introduction of Shane to the wonderful woman who is now his wife. And it all started at the Minnesota State Fair Dairy Goat Show.*

**VM** - Speaking of Ellen, we'd also like to thank her family: her grandfather Harvey Considine, one of the patriarchs of goat breeders in the United States, her father Dan and Uncle Stephen Considine. Harvey gave us much encouragement and was gracious in sharing his extensive knowledge with us as we were getting started and continuing on. And it was from Dan and Stephen that we bought our first two purebred goats. That was in 1970 – 46 years ago.

**CM** - *We'd like to thank our youngest son Stephen who was born just enough later than the first three to have missed out on some of these stories and on some of his parents' more youthful energy. He too was in 4H with his dairy goat project, a breeder of Toggenburg goats, and contributed to the success of the farm. Even as a young boy, being tall and strong for his ages, as his father says, "he was always a good man on the pitchfork". Today we are thankful that Stephen is in many ways the public face of our farm as he takes the milk to the creamery to have it pasteurized and containerized and then delivers the milk, in*

*cartons ready to sell, to our distributors. As Vincent likes to say, he must be doing something right as our milk sales continue to increase each year.*

**VM** - In conclusion we'd like to thank the Minnesota Livestock Breeders Association for this award. We accept this recognition not just on our own behalf, but also as an acknowledgement of the increasing role of the dairy goat in the livestock industry.

As Christine and I are now in our 70s, we've begun the arduous tasks of downsizing. One of the tasks is to go through old pictures and 35mm slides. We've wondered what will become of them. I envision a time in the future when one of our great, great grandchildren goes up to their mother or father and asks, "What did Great Great Grandma Christine and Great Great Grandpa Vince look like?" And their parent can respond, "Well, even though many of the pictures of them have been lost, if you go to Haecker Hall on the University of Minnesota St. Paul campus, you will find a room where a picture of them is hanging on the wall. And for this Minnesota Livestock Breeders Association, we are eternally thankful.