

Undaunted Enthusiasm

Evan's diagnosis with hemophilia has brought a unique twist to the lives of the Boehmer family, one which has led them to become more involved in the Angus industry and junior Angus activities.

Story and photos by
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They have an enthusiasm that is absolutely contagious. An admirable competitive spirit. A true passion for getting involved and being part of the team. With only a few years of the Angus business under their belts, they possess a sense of confidence that, at times, even amazes their parents.

To Evan and Erika Boehmer of Charlotte, Mich., Angus cattle are the center of their lives. Parents Kris and Earl watch with pride as their children become involved in a project that holds a special place in their hearts. Like many families, cattle shows have become vacations and summer highlights. Although the first National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) the Boehmer family attended was just two short years ago, they can't imagine missing one anytime in the near future.

At 14, Evan has been showing Angus cattle for five years and is finally old enough to hunt deer (a true festivity for Michiganders). Even in his young teen years, if you ask, he'll gladly rattle off each heifer's pedigree and share his thoughts on the hottest bulls in the Angus industry.

With an enthusiasm she simply can't contain, Erika, age 10, pipes in, "My first heifer didn't make it into the ring because she always wanted to flip on her back when we led her." The speed at which she tells the story hints at having many more to share from her three years in the ring.

With pride, Evan and Erika share the tales behind the numerous trophies, plaques, silver platters and awards they've accumulated. Evan points out the ear tags he's saved from each of his heifers. In a sincere big-brother way, he explains that Erika will be adding more to the collection this year.

"We always knew the kids would show cattle, but it has been great to get so involved," explains Kris. The trip to their first junior national in Indianapolis was a short jaunt from south-central Michigan, the location of their family farm, EMB Angus.

A complication

"The entire family was in awe in Indianapolis. It was an event that helped re-



Although the first National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) the Boehmer family attended was just two years ago, they can't imagine missing one anytime in the near future. Shown above are (from left) Evan, Erika, Kris and Earl.

define our goals and really brought things together for Evan." Kris explains later, "What many people don't know is that at 6 months old, Evan was diagnosed with severe hemophilia. His blood doesn't clot."

Hemophilia, an inherited blood-clotting disorder, is a life-long condition for which, at present, there is no cure. The human body depends on clotting of blood to stop bleeding after injury and to aid in healing. Normal blood clotting depends on the interactions of many substances within the blood, some of which are called clotting factors.

A person with hemophilia has less clotting factor than usual. Bruises associated with activities of everyday life can result in internal bleeding into joints or muscle tissue.

"Hemophilia affects Evan and our family every day. The biggest challenge is not if Evan gets a cut; it's the internal bleeding," explains Kris. "A person with

hemophilia does not bleed any faster; they just bleed longer."

"We had no clue what this would mean for him or us. Earl and I knew we wanted him to grow up confident in his abilities and not be afraid to try something because he may get hurt. We wanted him to be one of the guys," Kris remembers. "As parents, we have never told him he couldn't do something. We've tried to help him make decisions."

When he was little, Kris says, she and Earl tried to downplay the hemophilia and to avoid making it into a big deal. With skepticism in her voice, she adds, "He's not afraid of anything."

Evan has played basketball, softball and soccer.

"With basketball, Evan was one of the kids [who] never quit," says Matt Miller, Eaton County, Mich., 4-H leader and junior pro basketball coach. Miller has known Evan for more than eight years. "He always gave 110%."

Although Evan truly loves sports, he's no longer able to participate. Angus cattle have become his sport.

"The contests at junior nationals are fun," remarks Evan, "especially since I cannot participate in sports anymore."

A family sport

Both Evan and Erika have participated in the team sales and cook-off contests and hope to tackle public speaking this year. Vicki Meiburg, past Michigan Junior Angus Association (MJAA) advisor, compliments both juniors for their passion and commitment.

"Erika's enthusiasm is infectious. She gets everyone involved in what she's doing," explains Meiburg. "Last year Erika took a break from practicing to encourage her junior team to come up with an idea for next year's cook-off contest."

"Evan speaks from his heart. He's always serious and calculated in his thoughts," says Meiburg. She remembers noticing Evan sitting on the gate, deep in thought, at the NJAS in Tulsa. "He explained he knew his lines, he just needed to get the right pizzazz in them," says Meiburg. "He knows where he has to go. There's really no coaching needed."

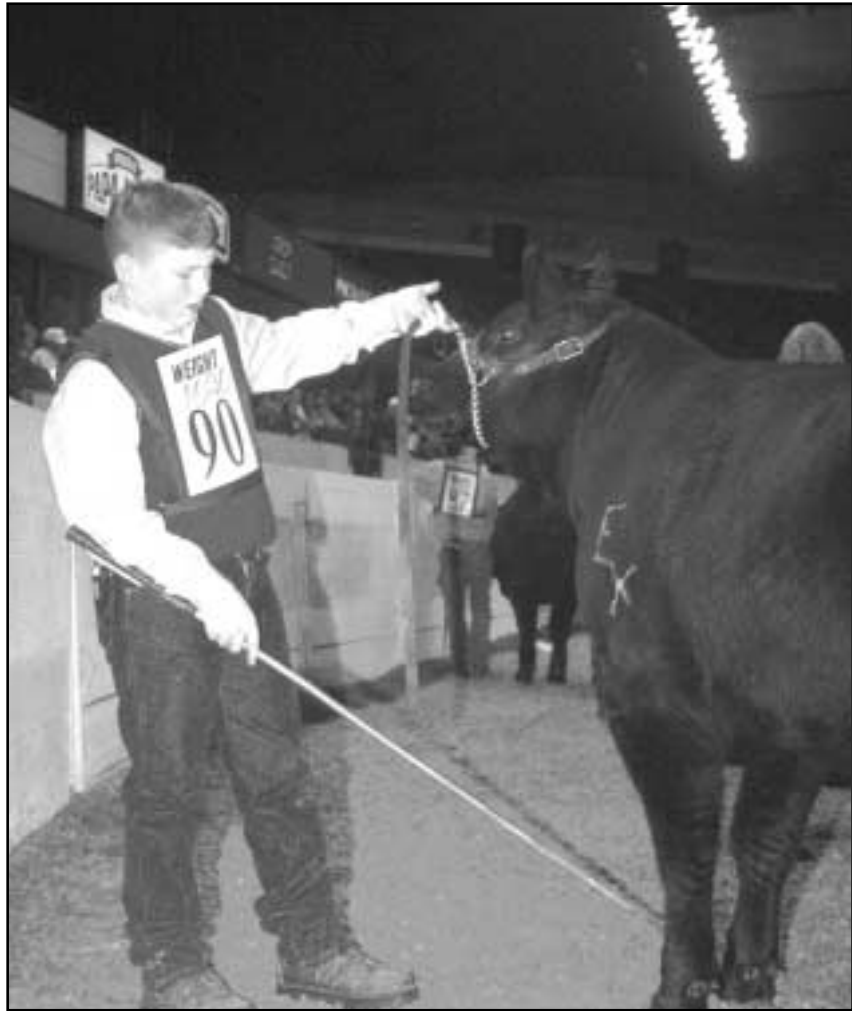
Attending shows has become a family highlight for catching up with old friends and new acquaintances. "We enjoy being able to see what genetics other producers are using and how the calves turn out," explains Earl. "We have bought many of our heifers in the past but hope to focus on showing bred-and-owned heifers in the future."

Although Earl likes to be cautious that the calves are broke before turning the kids loose, both Evan and Erika boast of doing most of the work with the heifers they'll exhibit this year.

"The shows are fun," explains Earl, "but we know how hard standing on cement can be for us; for Evan, it's even harder." The internal bleeding into his joints has caused a breakdown of the joint lining and has worn away the cartilage. The cartilage is almost nonexistent in his left ankle.

Although some people may think showing cattle would present challenges for Evan, he hasn't found any. Typically Evan receives clotting factor through an intravenous (IV) treatment at home four times a week. At shows he does an IV treatment twice a day "just to keep him safe."

The hemophilia has become easier for Evan as he gets older and can do his own treatments. "I've actually been able to do my own treatments since I was 7, but I'll never forget how hard it was to get up the



Attending shows has become a family highlight and a chance to catch up with old friends and new acquaintances. This year they exhibited at the NAILE in Louisville, Ky., for the first time.

nerve to poke myself with that needle for the first time," says Evan, "and now it's really easy."

Interacting with others

Every 18 weeks, Evan gives a presentation on hemophilia for his school's sixth-grade health class. "I always warn them I am going to put a needle in my arm and there may be a little blood that comes back into the tube, but I still made one girl pass out," chuckles Evan. "I really enjoy speaking in front of people."

Evan's hemophilia has led him to medical school with his uncle and to a camp for children with the same condition.

"At camp we don't let the hemophilia bother us. We just have fun and get to be away from our family for a few days," he says, adding that at camp there is everything from basketball to fishing to his favorite team event, hide the flag. Evan says he enjoys the camp, but he's not sure if he'll make it this summer because he has a busy show schedule.

For Erika, all she has ever known is growing up with her brother. "I really

don't worry about him. He does his treatments before we go to the barn, which helps," she explains.

Kris admits it can be hard to know how to deal with each situation. "Evan has always operated under a high level of pain. When he was little, it was hard to know how to make him comfortable," she explains. "Still today he hurts every day. It's hard to know if you should make him take a break."

Kris, who works with special-need infants, often takes Evan on calls with her. "Sometimes we need to look at the reality that things could be worse," she explains, adding how thankful she and Earl are for the opportunities the family has had.

At home on the farm

Currently EMB Angus raises about 30 Angus cows and utilizes popular genetics through artificial insemination (AI). Although Earl makes most of the breeding decisions, Evan is involved with helping select sires and reviewing expected progeny differences (EPDs).



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Tax time is a busy season for EMB Angus. As a certified public accountant, Earl puts in long hours at the office in the spring. Evan and Erika step in to pull their weight by doing all of the chores after school.

The Boehmers' close-knit extended family has helped provide opportunities and coaching for the young Angus enthusiasts. Evan boasts of traveling with his uncle (who works for Lathrop Livestock Transportation) to the airport in Miami, Fla., with 25 bulls to be exported to Colombia. A recent highlight for Evan was a personal farm tour of Wilson Cattle Co. with past American Angus Association president Bill Wilson and his uncle. Both of Kris's sisters, Beth and Kelly, have put their years of Angus knowledge to work attending sales with the family and helping with showmanship pointers and fitting.

Competitive spirit

"Both Erika and Evan are as competitive as can be, but they are as helpful as they are competitive," explains 4-H leader Miller. Both were good, natural showmen from the start, and Miller admires their dedication and willingness to improve.

"They are as competitive within the family as they are with others," says Jerry Cassady, American Angus Association regional manager. "Evan doesn't want to get beat by Erika, and Erika's goal is to beat her brother."

Cassady, who just recently learned of Evan's hemophilia, sees Evan as a real role model. "He never draws attention to [his hemophilia] or complains."

It is with true excitement that stories are shared about tough questions asked in showmanship classes and the many lessons learned along the way. With admiration, Kris shares a photo that has become a tradition.

"I always get a photo of Earl and Evan walking out of the ring and heading back to the barn," she explains. "Now that Erika is showing, I've added many of her showing moments to my photo collection, too."

Angus activities are only the beginning of the family's activities. Both Evan and Erika have shown sheep and participated in livestock judging where their mom is the county leader.

Confidence in speaking

Public speaking and performing are second nature for both Boehmer children. Erika plays the piano and has recently taken up the cornet. Evan plays the saxophone. Erika has taken part in many plays, and both have been active in presentations at school and church. Kris credits Olivet school district, which requires oral presentations in each class, for helping them gain speaking skills.

Evan is active in his school's junior-high FFA program. Cheryl Worden, junior-high FFA advisor and Evan's past homeroom teacher, describes Evan as "very goal-oriented and a great leader at keeping other kids on tasks." She adds that, "Evan is always the first to talk to other students at contests and events."

Worden admires Evan's enthusiasm, commenting that, "You don't care if he sits next to you on the bus on a field trip

because you know the conversation will be interesting."

"I will always admire the way he handles himself. He doesn't bring it up," she says, referring to Evan's hemophilia. "He's very strong. He's conquered it."

As a teacher, Worden has also gotten to know Evan's parents. "Kris comes into school at the beginning of each year to meet with Evan's teachers," she explains. "Evan's parents have been very strong to not hold him back. This is commendable."

Worden laughs as she remembers a seventh-grade project designed to help establish a closer homeroom atmosphere. "Each Friday the students could bring in a pet. Many brought their cats and dogs. Evan had his dad trailer two Angus heifers to school," she says.

Unending enthusiasm

Their unending enthusiasm tells you their involvement in the Angus industry is here to stay. If you ask Evan and Erika, they simply can't wait for the next show, commenting on how much they love meeting new people and seeing new places. Erika eagerly agrees with her brother when he shares the idea that maybe they should have a dance every night at the NJAS.

From winning a class at junior nationals to doing well in public speaking, Evan always sets his sights high. "I'd like to see another part of the country for a while. Maybe I'll go to Kansas State or Nebraska. I would really like to be a veterinarian like my grandfather, Quentin Bosworth," he remarks in regard to his long-term goals.

Erika has always looked up to her Aunt Beth and Aunt Kelly as role models. Not only have they helped her with fitting and showing, they have taught her to be passionate about the Angus business. Although it may be a ways off, she thinks someday she'd even like to work someplace like the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program.

Evan's diagnosis with hemophilia has brought a unique twist in their lives, which has led them to become more involved in the Angus industry. Yet to their family, it's just what they love to do.

"It doesn't matter how you place in class as long as you learn. Try your best and try to meet people. Make the best of it!" is Evan's advice to other juniors. He laughs as he adds, "And, for all of the guys out there, there are lots of girls at the shows."