

Nielsen

I'm not sure what prompted me to write on the dairy business, except I remembered back in my high school days in Ferron that Dean Nielsen's parents ran a dairy, and I remember hearing how hard it was to be tied down, having to do the milking twice a day. I hoped I could find enough to fill a couple of pages. Little did I know there were so many dairies back in the day.



George C. Nielsen was born in Emery September 1, 1912. He met his future wife Alta Lucille Conover while attending South Emery High School. He went with her throughout their high school years, and after graduating went to work in the potato fields of Idaho. While he was away he heard tales of Alta dating another beau so he rushed back and took her to be his wife.

Alta Lucille Conover was born in Ferron on October 22, 1912, and spent her entire life there, not ever wanting to leave because of her deep love of Emery County. She was a kind gentle woman who spent her life working alongside her husband on their dairy farm. Together they built it into a thriving business. She thought her family to be her most precious possession and worked alongside George to provide a nice home for them. Their children were Don C., Dean George, Ethel Joy, Kathy, and Garth J.



George, Alta, and their boys were hard workers. George began plowing his fields with a hand plow before using a team of horses and at last modern equipment. Together they built their herd from fourteen head of cows to sixty-five of the finest milk cows. George and Alta were pretty young to start a business, as they must have been around twenty years old in 1932.



Peggy and Don Nielsen

I took my sister Karen along with me to Spring Glen to Don and Peggy's lovely home to learn more about their business from them and younger brother Garth. Later I contacted Kathy the youngest in the family.

Six years after Dean was born, at age forty-two Alta gave birth to her last little boy, Garth. Don and Peggy remembered their wedding being put on hold until after the baby came. Garth was born on August 11 and they got married on August 24, 1954.

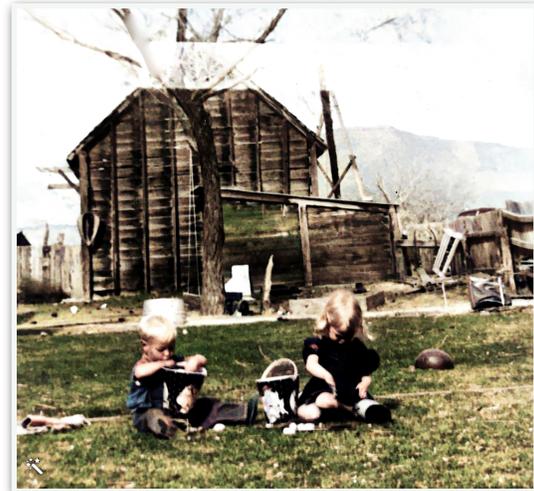
Being twenty years older than Garth, Don took us back to when he first started helping his dad at age ten. "While Dad would go out and tend water, my mom and I would go out and milk about ten cows by hand. In its prime, a Holstein could give five gallons. We had mostly Holsteins, as Jerseys didn't give that much. Jerseys have good butterfat where Holsteins only have about 3 percent cream. Jerseys and Guernseys

were horrible cows and hard to milk because they were mean, but we used them to keep the cream to milk ratio better to get the higher dollar.”

Kathy remembered, “Buying and selling cows was essential on a dairy. My dad had an eye for cows. They would take cows to the auction that weren’t producing milk very well, and then pick up new cows. They went to Salina to buy a Holstein or Jersey if that’s what he needed to get the best mix of milk. You could go get a picture of milk out there in the milk barn and it was so wonderful.”



Ten year old Kathy in front of milk barn about 1960.



Garth and Kathy in front of hay barn about 1956.

Don further explained, “A strainer sat on top of the can. We lifted the lid up and then put a strainer on it to keep out all the foreign particles, shit, and stuff, then it had to go up to a big cooler that had cold water in it. Then someone came and picked up the ten-gallon cans.”

Around 1961 the Nielsens upgraded to a pipeline system where the milk went directly from cow to a tank with a part inside that turned to keep the cream from setting up inside the vat. Cameron Brinkerhoff of Emery came in his truck with a tank, and the milk was drained into the tank. He picked up about three times a week in the middle of the night or early morning. The Nielsens were very cautious about the milk, as it was tested for flavor by Brinkerhoff. If the cows were out in the pasture it would dis-flavor the milk, and if it was really bad, they had to dump it.

Following every milking, the piping and milking equipment was cleaned as well as walls and floors were mopped with Clorox and sprayed down with water. The crazy thing is Garth loves the smell of Clorox to this day!

During the day the cows ate dry hay, but they liked silage, which had to be fed at least three or four hours before milking, or the milk would become dis-flavored. Don spoke lovingly of his mom, “Mother was a milker. She did most of the milking when I was a kid. I remember Dad used to pack sod and have it ready when the water came in, using sod to adjust the water to go evenly down the furrows, and Mother would milk the cows.”

Don remembered very clearly his dad saying, “Get that lazy turd up and get him milking the cows!” His mother responded, “Oh, no let him sleep.” “I’d be wide awake and I’d pretend I was asleep, and Mom would go out and milk. I felt bad after I got older. My mother, I can see her hands still. They were beaten up. You see the ladies’ fingernails now so pretty, but hers were broken up. It was hard work!”



There was a silo on their farm, big and high! A big pipe went up to the top, and then down to the bottom. A tractor with a belt on ran the corn chopper. A lot of corn was cut out in the field with a little short hoe and then stacked up. The piles were then loaded onto a wagon to go into the chopper. It chopped the silage up the pipe then down into the silo, where they filled it clear up.

Kathy remembers climbing up the rebar steps and her dad coming unglued because he was afraid she would fall. After he gave her a good cussing she never climbed up again.

“Crawford’s farm was close and I would get out there and sing these old songs to the top of my voice. Mrs. Crawford would say, ‘boy he’s a good singer. He ought to take up singing.’ I never did dare sing anywhere except out there in the corral,” admits Don. He also envisioned how fast his dad could run. “He could outrun me when I was in my prime! I can tell you, there were a lot of times I took off and I was hoping and praying he wouldn’t catch me! And if he did, he’d kick me in the butt.”

We were all having a nice visit. Karen and I were not only learning a lot about the dairy business but the family as well, including the baby of the family, Garth. It seems he was probably pretty spoiled. The sheriff came by wanting to find him and throw him in jail because he had been going too fast on his motorcycle. His mother told the officer, “He is not a bad child. He wouldn’t do that. I don’t care.” Although Garth admitted he was a little hellion when he was younger, his dad had always praised him for his ability to run anything. He could do everything.

Garth agreed with Don, “Mom was still the number one cow milker. It was because the other work was too hard. So I would get up at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning and offer to milk.” She would reply, “No you go feed because I can’t do that, but I can milk the cows.”

Garth stated it so well, “It was the same for all the dairies, the cows were milked twice a day, three hundred sixty-five days a year no matter what! I milked Barton’s cows a lot when they couldn’t find anyone to do it. They had a more advanced milk barn where they milked ten at a time and were elevated so you didn’t have to stoop over. It was all much the same except chopping the corn.”

The Nielsen’s upgraded to an old binder they purchased which bundled the corn. It was lifted onto the wagon and then thrown into the chopper. They loaded it up to the top. The neighbors all helped at corn time, where their mother fed big groups of men. She prepared turkey or roast beef dinners, and after the meal, they rested on the grass before going back to work. Garth exclaimed, “I’ll tell you what! You just start young.”

George started his three boys driving the tractor as soon as they could reach the pedals. However, Kathy was not afraid to state she never milked a cow and only had one duty, to call in the cows from the pasture. “You make this hoop and holler sound, almost like a loud yodel. They perk their ears up and immediately start walking to the barn because they know they are going to get the grain.”

The tractor was Garth’s mode of transportation to middle school. He had to drive standing up because he wasn’t tall enough to reach the pedals. The boys sacrificed a lot growing up because the work had to be done before baseball or other sports. Garth was six or seven when he took his first vacation to Texas to see his sister, Joy, and that was his last. The older boys had moved out by then and he always stayed home and milked the cows.

Being the only son left at home to help out on the farm, Garth had a close relationship with his mother, as they worked together every night and every morning. Shooting a few basketball hoops between bringing three or four cows in at a time to be milked. Hiding to jump out and scare her when she scooped up some

grain. His Dad still hid his whiskey bottle out in the grain, so his mother told him to pour half the whiskey out and fill it up with water.

Because they lived on the highway, Hobos passing through to Emery were seated on her porch and given something to eat. This happened quite often, as though they had a circuit with word getting passed along where they could get fed.

Garth remembered the hard work, “The cows had calves and the calves had to have milk and be fed. We had a couple of nursing cows that took on four calves. When it came time to doctor or brand them, Mom and I did it. My mom was an expert at it. All I had to do was get strong enough to hold that calf down, while she made it a steer and brand that thing, and attach that ear tag. When she doctored a calf, I remember she put salt in the wound.” His mother knew exactly what to do if a calf got scours after taking it off its mother. She whipped up eggs and siphoned them down to its stomach. She also pulled calves at birth.

Kathy knew how busy her mother was, “It wasn’t just the work on the farm. She raised a garden, churned her butter, bottled delicious pickles, and she baked cookies and bread. My mom also sewed all my clothes including my prom dresses.”

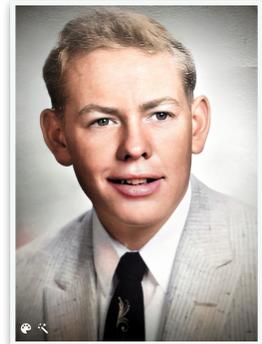
The more I learned of this hard-working woman, I wondered how many ranch hands could top what she was able to do. To me, Alta was extraordinary in every sense of the word. That’s why I understood what a difficult time it was for this family when their beloved mother was tragically killed in an automobile accident in 1971, after which George sold the farm to Hal Lemon, Ralph Lemon’s son.

There was emotion in Garth’s voice as he spoke of being deeply devastated after losing his mother and best friend right out of high school. He remembered her always wearing a kind of red or orange sweatshirt, a pair of pants, and toes poking out of the open-toe gym shoes she always wore. They had tried to get her to buy some boots, but she always replied, “No, this is all I need.”



Kathy’s love and respect for her mom are evident. “All I ever want to be was like my mom because she was my idol. There isn’t anybody in any facet of my life that I do not have an idol like because it is my mother. When I don’t measure up to that at times, it is really hard for me because that’s all I’ve wanted to do.

Dean is more like my mother than any of us, although over the years I’ve been told I look like my mom. I just can’t imagine as an older person than me that he wasn’t just as hard a worker as anybody on that farm. Dean was always kind and loving.”



Dean’s view of his mother was obvious in Kathy’s account, “We went to the Temple one time, Dean and I, on my mother’s birthday. He came over and put his arm around me and said, ‘Kathy, our mother is eating angel food cake today, and she is probably the one who baked the angel food cake!’ We miss Dean more than anything. He reminds us of our mom.”

Alta was loved and respected by everyone. She always gave so much, to her family, her neighbors, and the community. She was the strength that held the farm together and instilled in her children the value of hard work. I believe she ranks right up there with the best of “dairymen” and trust she is well remembered and honored for her accomplishments, along with her husband George.

by Joyce J. Miya