

***Excerpt from interview by Varick Chittenden with Clark Decker, the fifth generation on the Decker Farm in Stockholm, NY, and his mother Madeline Decker, the fourth generation. Clark's sons also work on the farm, which milks about 150 cows.***

VC: So this is a big question. How would you compare the changes that have happened over the years?

CD: A lot more physical activity back then. We cleaned the gutters by hand, we threw the silage out of the silo by hand, and we loaded the shucks of corn onto the wagon by hand and fed them through an old ensilage cutter by hand. There was a tremendous amount of physical work, now there is a lot more mechanization and automation and a lot more stress. When we were kids, we would get up in the morning, milk early, then get in the car and drive and spend the day at the state fair. Then come back and help Dad with chores when we got home. We got away and had a wonderful day, and wonderful memories. Now the way the farm is, it is just not viable. You're really incapable, unless you can work it out to take the day off, schedules are much more fixed. There is so much more emphasis on production, and production per cow that everything has to done. You try to just bore then into giving you the most milk possible. No changes, no stress. It's much more technical and much more stressful than when I was a child.

MD: He has a lot to be thankful for in his life. She is a wonderful bookkeeper. Her mother was very business-oriented too, and Nancy is excellent.

VC: What was Nancy's family name?

CD: Everhart.

VC: Did she live around here?

CD: West Stockholm.

VC: So you knew her in school?

CD: I had to go to Cornell though to appreciate her *[laughter]*

MD: She's a wonderful girl. I don't know what I would have done without her. She takes me to the doctor, she comes every night to make sure I am all right.

CD: She still feeds calves twice a day.

VC: You said she would have to leave at 3:00, does that mean to feed the cows?

CD: Yes.

MD: With all the talking, I couldn't get by without saying how important she is to the business.

VC: She did not grow up on a farm?

CD: No, but 4 or 5 days after we got back from the honeymoon I was getting off a tractor and severely sprained an ankle and could hardly get around. So she stepped in and started learning how to milk cows at that point.

VC: Drive a tractor?

CD: No, she would rather work with animals. She was a teacher. She taught math out at St. Mary's School for several years. Once she was pregnant with Wade she decided she rather work with calves and kids.

VC: So she grew up in town.

CD: Right. I had a tremendous appreciation. Her brother worked for Dad and had animals there at their place and had a flock of laying hens. So she was always involved with animals. She has been the anchor of the operation, that's for sure.

VC: Farm wives often are.

MD: She's the bagbalm.

***Excerpt from interview by Hannah Harvester with Bob Andrews and Diane Andrews of Andrews View Farm, Fowler, NY. The Andrews milk about 60 cows and are the fourth generation on this all-Holstein, registered dairy.***

HH: For both of you, what is the most challenging aspect of dairy farming?

BA: Right now today?

HH: Sure.

BA: Trying to pay your bills. Expenses have gone way, way, way out of line. It's like a balance beam. You sell so much milk, you make so much money. And you've got your expenses in order to produce that milk. We do a good job, we try to do a good job. I try to control my expenses. She's a lot more conservative than I am at spending and so forth. But the expenses are eating us alive. And the milk value is not staying in line. And it bothers the hell right out of me because we're in a milk deficit area. We have more demand for milk than we can produce. We can't produce enough milk to meet the demands of these plants that we have right now. And yet our milk prices are depressed. And there's no- when you and I were kids growing up, you took an economics course and they talked about supply and demand, and they talk about guns and butter... There's no relativity to that whatsoever in this day and age. It's all market manipulation and we're being taken advantage of. That's the biggest downfall to the dairy industry. There's no true value to your market. What can you do? It's fixed by the federal government what your price is going to be.

HH: What's the most enjoyable or satisfying aspect of dairy farming for you?

BA: For me? It's that new calf, it's a good crop, it's when you have events where people come around and appreciate what they see and say it looks nice; it's going out in the field and watching the wildlife while

you're working. Some days I don't talk to people; I don't see anybody to talk to but I have deer running around me, I'll have partridge running around me, I'll have turkeys running around me. Maybe a coydog. I like that a lot. I like it when I go out in the woods. I even like it when I'm fixing fence. When everything is going smooth, I like it when fencing is coming on. I like the feel of plowing, of working ground and feeling the temperature of soil in your hand. I like the looks of that corn coming through the ground. I like it when the little oaties are starting to stick their heads up out of the ground. I like all of that. I like it when the baby turkeys line up in a row and start chasing grasshoppers; that's fun to watch. They're like little roadrunners, running around chasing. I like watching that. Have you ever seen a fawn being born?

HH: No.

BA: I've seen that several times.

HH: Wow.

BA: I like that sort of stuff. I like going down here on the edge of the swamp and watching the otters play. I like watching the ducks and the geese. I like growing my giant pumpkins!

(laughter)

***Excerpt from interview by Hannah Harvester with Haskell and Jane Yancey, who milk about 50 cows in Belfort, Lewis County, NY.***

HH: I hope this doesn't sound funny, but how would you describe your relationship with your animals? With your cattle and has that changed over the years?

HY: Not as familiar with them as individuals, maybe,

JY: As you used to be.

HY: As you used to be. The good ones, the non- I jokingly tell people that the only ones that have names are the ones you're mad at! (laughs)

JY: Not always, but yeah.

HY: Not quite as much individually. There's a lot that don't stand out for one reason or another. They're the ones that don't kick or don't give you problems, basically pretty good animals. You kind of know the best ones and the ones that give you trouble. Since we really don't have names anymore. Since the kids have gone, we kinda quit naming. But when the kids were here, there was 'LG' and 'LG's baby,' and so on.

HH: 'LG's Baby' was the baby's name?

JY: First there was Lucy. And then there was LB, which meant Lucy's baby. And then there was LG, which meant Lucy's grandbaby. So yeah. (laughs)

HH: That's cute.

HY: There are not as many individuals that stand out to you even though there's still--maybe there's just as many, there's just others that don't particularly stand out now. We had one that the one guy that worked in the sugar bush, the one older fella. He'd always ask, 'You still got that cow you had?!' And I knew exactly which one he meant and I said, 'Yup, and I still don't like her!' ( Yanceys laugh)

JY: That was LG. (more laughter)

HY: There was one out there, that I-

JY: Oh yeah, 404 right? Or you mean 373 or 374?

HY:374

JY: Okay, that's who you're talking about.

HY: I saved her life once and I regretted it ever after! I don't know how she got herself tangled up like that.

HH: What did she do?

HY: There a pipe that goes down though in front with a chain on it, that goes around their neck chain. And then they have dividers in between cows so they can't steal from one another. And anyhow, she had a knack for jumping over the pipe. Which is one of the things that made me mad about her. We anyway, she went to do that one night when I was here all by myself, and she went most of the way over and then her foot got caught in the divider. SO she was there with her head bent backwards on the floor as far as it could go and the chain just as tight around her neck as it could be. And he foot stuck, so she couldn't go the rest of the way. Now I don't know she did it. I don't think you could do it if you tried. Anyhow, she was stuck there. And I worked and worked and worked. I pulled- I tried everything I could think of. I couldn't unsnap the chain, I forgot what I did do. I guess I finally got her foot loose.

JY: I thought you said you did something with the come-alongs, and brought her backwards...

HY: I don't remember for sure what I did, but I was wringing wet with sweat. And she was gasping for breath. One of the thoughts I was having the whole time was, 'Should I just slit her throat and let her bleed out here and then we'll use her for beef?' Anyhow I got her out after a while. Ohh, what a time.

HH: Well, I'm sure she appreciated it.

HY: I don't know if she did or not!

HH: She did in her heart of hearts.

HY: She was a good cow. She gave a lot of milk for a long time.