



Christmas Morning on a Dairy Farm

By Gabby Wormuth, *Dairy & Livestock Specialist*



Growing up on a dairy farm is one of my biggest blessings. Christmas morning as a child is always a magical thing, but Christmas morning on my family's dairy farm was by far my favorite memory. Being the oldest of six children, I was given more responsibility on the farm, which I gladly accepted. Christmas mornings started off being no different than most mornings. I would hear my bedroom door creak open and my dad whisper, "You up?" However, different than most mornings, I would in fact already be up from the excitement of it being Christmas! I would get out of bed to and make a detour to take a peek at the Christmas tree with presents underneath. This is something I found myself still doing as a teenager, but seeing all the presents beautifully wrapped under the tree was truly a sight to see. When I was a child, I would take a peak to see if Santa brought me the present I wanted. As I grew older, I would take a peak just to appreciate all my parents did for my family and knew my siblings would be filled with excitement. After admiring the Christmas tree, I would then rush to get my barn clothes on to head out the door with my father and my brother, who was second oldest, to start chores.



Without fail, like effect snow would fall from the sky as we walk through the snow. I always loved opening the barn door on those cold winter mornings, the barn would be warm and steamy inside from the cows' breath. It was always so quiet and peaceful, as the cows were laying down and there was the quiet radio playing Christmas music in the background. My family's barn was a tie-stall, where we had about 80 cows. We would begin chores, feeding cows and giving them fresh, clean bedding before we would start milking. Milking was always my favorite job at the barn, because most days it didn't feel like a job, it was a way I could connect with each cow. Milking in a tie-stall, we would bring the milking machines to the cows and move the machines from cow to cow as we moved

down the barn. By milking, I got to know each and every cow in our barn: From their favorite spot to be pet or scratched, to about how long they would take to be finished milking. We knew our cows by name and knew the "family" to each cow. This is something I always took pride in. We truly cared about our cows and provided them with the best care and treatment possible. During milking, we would turn up the radio a little louder so we could hear the Christmas music over the milk pump humming in the background. I would sing along to the Christmas classics and always enjoyed talking and joking around with my father and brother as we milked.

My parents' rule was that barn chores and milking had to be done before opening presents Christmas morning. As a child, I remember trying to rush through chores and milking, impatiently wishing time would move faster so I could go home and open presents. As I grew older, I would still try to hurry chores along, knowing my siblings were home anxiously waiting for us to finish chores, but I also wished time would slow down, since I truly enjoyed and appreciated this magical morning and didn't want it to end. As the years passed and the older I got, I knew Christmas mornings on my family's dairy farm would come to an end. Being a dairy farm, let alone a small dairy farm, in today's economy became more and more challenging. I knew not even a Christmas miracle would save my family's dairy.

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The last Christmas morning I spent on my family's dairy was Christmas of 2018. I came to stay Christmas Eve night at my family's home so I could wake up and enjoy possibly the last Christmas on the farm. I was about 6 months pregnant, my winter bibbed overalls were getting a little too snug and it began to be a little difficult for me to bend down and up, but I woke up before sunrise to help my father in the barn. This Christmas was very different. I knew my parents were struggling. There were fewer presents under the tree, but still the same amount of love from my parents for my brothers, sisters and me. I remember my mother warning my younger siblings that Santa might not bring many presents this year. Most young children would be upset or whine hearing that, yet my siblings were not phased. They knew that was not the true meaning of Christmas.



My last Christmas morning at my family's barn was similar to the past Christmas mornings, yet it was somber knowing it would probably be the last. I knew it was something my son would not get to experience. I tried to soak up that last Christmas morning milking the best I could, so I would have that memory to last forever. My family's dairy farm went out of operation in May 2019. I knew my parents couldn't have done anything different to prevent selling the cows; they did everything they possibly could to keep the farm going and provide for my family. I've learned since the barn sits vacant, the spirit of Christmas still remains during our family's Christmas because it has and always will be about the time and love we share together. The greatest gift my parents' gave us kids was unconditional love, the second was being raised on a dairy farm.

Although my family's dairy farm is no longer in operation, farming still runs in my blood. I am a third generation dairy farmer and my son represents the fourth generation. Today, I have my own small herd of dairy cows and enjoy raising, milking and caring for my animals. It may not be at my family's dairy farm, but just like a house becomes a home, a barn becomes a farm by the love and work you put into it, surrounded by loved ones. I look forward to continuing on the family legacy of farming and continuing our Christmas traditions on the farm.

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