

In the spring of 2004—18 years ago this coming spring—a big white-faced cow had a calf that looked a lot like her. The heifer calf, though, had horns, while Big Whiteface was polled. I suppose, thinking back, that the mother was a crossbred Hereford/Shorthorn, since that is the cross we had pursued for a number of years. I don't recall the reason we sold the big cow, but I do remember where she stood in the line of cows of that time.

For some reason we kept her offspring that year, even though the calf had horns. In time, she became known as That Horned Heifer. She grew up and had a calf and to facilitate her feeding at the manger, we dehorned her. So, she gradually became That Heifer—now no longer with sharp horns. It wasn't long, though, before That Heifer became Heffie and then, Effie. She was a good cow, and even better, a nice cow, and she remained in the herd.

One of Effie's calves joined the herd, too. Black Effie looks a lot like her mother except in color. Effie is a light red with a pure white face and some white on her legs. Black Effie is—as one might guess—white faced, too, but black in body color. Effie had been bred that year to a Black Angus bull (via semen from the bull tank.)

Over the years, Effie more often than not gave birth to bull calves. So, in time, they became good food for people. But Black Effie stayed in the cow herd, and with the birth of her daughter Baby Effie, who is now bred for the first time, the family heritage continues to play a role here at Coe Creek. Three Effies stand side by side in the row of cows.

The normal life expectancy of a cow, I read, is 15 to 20 years, but few bovines attain that age. Dairy cows are usually culled as soon as their milk production goes down, and that is often as early as after three or four calves. Effie doesn't have to worry about that. We milk her for a time after she calves, letting her calf nurse as well, and a few months into her lactation, we turn her and her calf out with the rest of the beef herd. By that time, there is usually a good supply of home churned butter in the freezer.

Effie is a leader. We can call her and the herd will come with Effie in the lead. The cattle seem to pasture where she chooses to be. Nobody challenges her authority.

Black Effie has many of the same characteristics as her mother. The most noticeable, and this is evident in all of Effie's calves, is that she is very friendly. Even The Effies' bull calves are tame as long as we have them. This makes them very easy to handle.

We have never had a cow as old as Effie is now. And, yesterday, 18 year old Effie had another calf—a little red and white heifer that will soon acquire an Effie-friendly name—maybe Euphenia, the Greek name from which Effie is derived; or Young Effie; or, perhaps, Effilena. We will see what sticks. In any case, if she is like the rest of the Effie line, she will be friendly and easy to handle. And that is the kind of cattle we prefer.