



*When you look at your life,
the greatest happinesses are
family happinesses.*

~Joyce Brothers

When you enter the cattle pens at Tiger Lake Ranch in Lake Wales, part of the Lightsey Cattle Company, at first things seem like a typical working ranch. Don't let the calves, already separated from their momma's, out the gate you just entered; to the right the herd is being driven through the chutes; to the left, where, after separating calves into one pen, the cows are vaccinated for a variety of things, parasite control, pregnancy checked, etc.; calves are put through a separate chute where they undergo their vaccinations, some bull calves are castrated, others kept as replacement bulls. What sets these working pens apart from others, is the four little girls on the walkway next to the chute. These four little girls, ranging in age from one to five, are the daughters of Clint and Jessica Lightsey, granddaughters of Carey and Marcia Lightsey and Larry and Jennifer Parrish.

Twins, Morgan and Bailey have their

own prods and help their mother "push" the cattle through the chute. "Today they're more interested in their ponies, but by the end of the week they will each have their hotshot, and get mad at one of the cowboys when they take it," said Jessica, as she holds one-year-old Hanna with one arm, encouraging nervous cattle to run through the gate with the other.

Three-year-old Hattie is a real Florida Cracker. When asked what she wanted to do for her birthday, she said she wanted to have her birthday party on Brama Island. "She's going to be my cowboy," says proud dad Clint. "That's her little Cracker stud over there." It seems she wanted to get an early start on her herd. On a day that cattle were being worked in the pens, she wanted every calf that came through. "I kept telling her they weren't mine," says Clint. Her quick response was, "Well what's yours?" Clint told her the horse was his and of course every little girl wants a horse! When she said, "Can I have it?" Clint said, "Yeah, I guess."

Clint and Jessica both grew up in Polk County. Jessica's family settled in Haines City where she showed calves and barrel raced. Jessica's father, Larry Parrish, was a professional baseball player who just happened to own cattle. His parents

moved from Alabama to Florida, where he was born. "He played baseball for Haines City High School," Jessica explains. "He went to college at Seminole Community and that's where he got picked up to play pro ball." Although he didn't come from a ranching family, Parrish got into the cattle business after he started playing ball.

Clint grew up on the Lightsey Ranch. "We were a lot smaller operation back then," said Clint. "We were so far from town we (the family) were pretty close." The only people living on the ranch at that time were Cary's family, and his brother Layne and his family. I've got a cousin that's that same age as me," Clint explains. "We grew up together as friends."

You would think Clint and Jessica would have met long ago, while still in middle school. Since both were involved in agriculture chances are their paths crossed.....but they weren't aware of it.

The first time Clint noticed Jessica was at a whip-popping contest. "It was all on a dare," explained Jessica. "We were in ag one day in high school and all the boys were popping the whip." Being one of

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only three girls in the class, the boys talked them in to trying it. "They dared the other two girls and they wouldn't do the whip popping contest." But Jessica Parrish did it. And one of the judges was Clint Lightsey.

Fate put Clint and Jessica together again in a very cattle ranching kind of way. Jessica was working for a veterinarian that visited the Lightsey Cattle Company to semen test bulls and Clint was the only one there. "I was getting ready to leave and go day working for a couple of weeks," said Clint. "So I got her phone number

and when I got back we went on a date."

A few years and four children later, this team of Lightsey's is growing. "It's always been my dream to be a rancher's wife," said Jessica, "to have my kids grow up around cows and horses like I did, it's just amazing. I want my girls to have the same chances I did to show cattle and horses."

This story would not be complete without a little back ground on the Lightsey family. The first Lightsey to own cattle in North America was from

Germany and he arrived in 1712, taking up residence in Buford, South Carolina. The name Lightsey was made up to better fit in with the English and Irish in Buford. The government gave him a cow, a bull calf and 320 acres. By the end of the first year he had 960 acres. They left there in 1780 and migrated to Wiregrass County, GA, staying until the mid 1800's. One of them fought in the second Seminole war and he really liked Florida. "He said it was the most grass he had ever seen," explained Carey. The first Lightsey's started herding cattle in Florida around 1837. When they arrived they settled in Hillsborough County, the Brandon area. "We had a dairy in Brandon and a ranch in Plant City, a couple in Riverview and then the ranches out here (Lake Wales area)," explains Carey. "It was so wild back here nobody lived here."

Hearing Carey talk about his family, the pride is evident. A smile lights up his face when he sees his granddaughters helping to push cattle through the chute. He is proud of something else, "the thing I am most proud of other than the family, is the 14 generations since they've settled (in the US) they've never broke the cattle business. Nobody ever got out of it."

The Lightsey tradition, one that has been a way of life for generations, is in safe hands as Clint and Jessica raise their daughters the way they were raised, loving the land, and the ranching way of life. As for Carey, when asked about having his son's family working on the ranch, he is quick to respond, "It's a dream come true." •

