

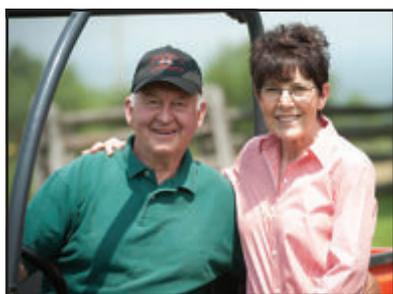
# HILL HAVEN...

## A Story of New Life Adventures and Success Along The Way!



If you have been around the Shorthorn breed for any length of time, I'm quite sure you have heard the Hill Haven name on more than a few occasions. The Hill Haven Shorthorn herd started a brief 15 years ago, and as they say, "the rest is history" but with more to come.

Hill Haven is owned by Dale Asser and Bob Meldrum and it is located at



Duntroon, Ontario just a few miles from beautiful Georgian Bay. This is referred to as "cottage country" and it is a popular tourist and vacation spot, as it is just an hour north of Toronto. The Hill Haven story started in the early 1990's when Dale and Bob purchased a beautiful but rundown 100 acre farm on a hill overlooking the bay. At the time they were working in Toronto and looking for a place that would provide some peace and tranquility

from their busy urban lives. Dale had a senior management position with an international reinsurance company and Bob owned a meat packing and food distribution company in the heart of Toronto. For several years they spent weekends renovating the 1855 stone farmhouse which was fun and a great escape. They rented the land out to a local farmer who took off the hay. Then one day he came by for a visit and began to convince them that since the farm had good fences and a workable bank barn they should buy some cattle to run on the farm. The farmer would do all the work and they would split the revenue from the calves sold. Bob says that to this day they both wonder what made them agree to this offer... but they did.

Sometimes what happens in life is determined before hand by luck or as what is sometimes referred to as fate. That could certainly have been what occurred in this case as what happened next was a life changing event. The farmer with the convincing proposal took them out one day to look at cattle on nearby farms. The first farm they stopped at was a well known Angus herd, but the owner was not home. The second stop was at McQueen-Vue Shorthorns, owned by George Sr. and George Jr. McQueen. They purchased



*McQueen-Vue's Happy Go Lucky*

two Lincoln Red cows with calves at side. They immediately fell madly in love with their new cows and luck may have played another part that day as one of these original purchases is still in their herd at 17 years of age and is

a foundation matriarch. This cow is McQueen-Vue's Happy Go Lucky. I will mention more about this female later in this article. Two cows soon became more with the purchase of six commercial cows and a bull from Rob Davidson named Downlea Chief Executive Officer. They followed this with a cow-calf pair from Scotsdale Farm and in the fall of 2001 they attended Shadybrook Shorthorns sale in West Brome, Quebec. Even though their knowledge of cattle was at a very early stage, they purchased one they had their eye on. This female was Scotsdale Kelina 4F. Call it luck, intuition, fate or anything else you want to name it, but this female became the undisputed matriarch of the best female family at Hill Haven. It is interesting to note that two of Bob and Dale's original females purchased became the foundation of their best females and bulls.

It was shortly after Bob and Dale made their first Shorthorn purchases that I met them at Canadian Western Agribition where they decided to go to learn more about the Shorthorn breed. The following January, our paths crossed again, when Dale went to the National Western Stock Show in Denver, where again she was on a mission to learn as much as she could about this breed. I remember Dale asking several of us breeders at this show a pile of questions about why we liked certain cattle, why we raised Shorthorns, what we liked and what we disliked. Only time would tell if this new interest in Shorthorns would develop into anything serious; it did.

It was about this same time that the company Dale was working for moved their head office to the U.S. Dale had no desire to head south so after 26 years she decided to take early retirement. She says it was an easy decision as it allowed her to live at Hill Haven full time and work with their small herd of Shorthorns. By this time, the commercial cows had been sold,

the farmer was no longer a partner and Bob soon sold his company and also moved to the farm. Many of Dale's city friends and former colleagues from work thought she had lost her mind, however, most of them changed their minds when they saw the farm and the fun and the modest accomplishments they were beginning to have.

Bob and Dale have many people to thank for being their mentors in those early years. They could never repay the assistance and encouragement they got from neighbors. Some of these people were Gary Plater, who raised Blonde d'Aquitane, the McQueen family (McQueen-Vue Shorthorns), Archie Currie (Glen Islay Shorthorns) and Don Currie (Glen Islay Angus). Dale recounts how it didn't matter whether it was 7 pm or 4am, summer or winter, their phone calls were always met with patient words of advice or a trip to the farm to help out. Also, there were several other breeders who lived further away that were contacted countless times for advice. Some of these people they kept on speed dial were Emerson Clarke, Rob Davidson and Lloyd Wright.

Just one year after moving to the farm full time, Dale and Bob decided to make their debut in the show ring by attending the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto. I can't think of any other breeder who had such a successful first show experience, as Hill Haven had that year. They took nine head and came home with nine banners which included Grand Champion Female (Hill Haven Rebecca 5P, a daughter of their foundation Kelina cow), Reserve Grand Champion Bull as well as Premier Breeder and Exhibitor. Since then they have continued to successfully show at Agribition in Regina, SK, recently at the North American International Livestock Show (NAILE) in Louisville, KY, as well as the Royal every year. Some of their more notable accomplishments were: Grand Champion Female 2006 Royal and Reserve Grand Champion Female 2006

Agribition with Hill Haven Colleen 14R and Reserve Grand Bull at the 2008 Agribition with Hill Haven Stout 11T. Stout was also high selling bull in the Agribition sale at \$10,000, to Shane and Erin Sawley in Saskatchewan where he was used in their large commercial herd for many years. Hill Haven Bold 4X was Reserve Grand



*Hill Haven Bold 4X*

Champion Bull at the 2010 Royal. Bold was privately sold to Sullivan Farms in Iowa and Dixon Farms and Jordan Buba in Alberta. Bold is now senior herd sire at Cagwin Farms in Illinois. Hill Haven Primabella 35X was named Heifer Calf Champion in 2010 at both the Royal and Agribition. Hill Haven Breathtaker 35Y was Grand Champion Female at the 2012 Royal and returned two years later in 2014 to be named Grand Champion Female again. In



*Hill Haven Breathtaker 35Y*

their first show trip to NAILE in Louisville, Hill Haven Cognac 39B, who was sold to Hahn Family Shorthorns, Illinois, was named Spring Bull Calf Champion. It should be noted that many of these show winners go back to those two original foundation females, Happy Go Lucky and Kelina. Needless to say, the show ring has

become an important promotional tool for Hill Haven's breeding program.

Winning banners, however, is not their ultimate goal. If you ask Dale she will say that their goal is that "elusive, complete Shorthorn". Hill Haven has been diligently working at improving feet, udders and birth weights while striving to optimize carcass traits. It is therefore not surprising that they have numerous happy commercial female and bull buyers, some of whom are repeat customers. As Dale mentioned one day, it's fairly unique to the Shorthorn breed that you can compete commercially with other breeds while simultaneously "wowing" them in the show ring - nothing shows like a Shorthorn!

Happy Go Lucky and Kelina are outstanding examples of why foundation females are so very important in establishing your herd and they can have a major impact on the success you have for decades into the future. There are several females in the Hill Haven herd that are daughters of Happy Go Lucky, but she is probably best known for her sons. These included Hill Haven Stout 11T and Hill Haven Bold 4X mentioned earlier. More recently she produced Hill Haven Distinction 30Z (co-owned with Uluru Shorthorns) who was used at Hill Haven and sold to Springlake Farms in Tennessee. Today Happy Go Lucky lives a pampered life at 17 years of age as Bob gives her special, daily, tender loving care. She still averages six embryos per flush and is flushed three times each year.

Scotsdale Kelina has produced equally well, but she is best known for her daughters. Hill Haven Rebecca 5P was her first Hill Haven daughter that got noticed by winning the Royal in 2005. Hill Haven Sierra 7S was her next daughter and she produced Breathless 13U who in turn produced Breathtaker 35Y. Today there are many Kelina,

Breathless and Breathmaker progeny in their herd.



Hill Haven  
Sierra 7S



Hill Haven  
Breathless 35Y

It is oftentimes said that a good herd bull will make the most difference in advancing and establishing a good cowherd. Their purchase of DF Gold Eagle 0019 is a testament to this philosophy. Dale and Bob had been watching the job Gold Eagle was doing at Shadybrook in Quebec and they liked how consistently he was breeding. When he came available in Shadybrook's 2006 sale, they decided that they just had to have him. After



DF Gold Eagle 0019

their purchase, Dale was told on several occasions by fellow breeders that he was "old news". It turns out that he was actually very good news for their herd. Today, you will find Gold Eagle's influence virtually everywhere you look in their herd, including being the sire of Bold and Breathless just to name two of the most prominent.

Current herd sires include Hill Haven Rocko 27Y, a son of HD Swagger and a dam who was sired by Downlea Chief Executive Officer and Hill Haven Endeavor 21A who is sired by

Gold Eagle and his dam is their famed Sierra cow, making him a full brother of Breathless 13U. In addition, three young sires are being used this year: Hill Haven Bullitt 25B who was in dam when Dale purchased SULL Pretty Woman (a Bold daughter) at Sullivan Farms in Iowa (Bullitt's sire is KL Primetime Paymaster); Hill Haven Density 4B, a son of Hot Commodity and their Breathless cow and Hill Haven Battle 15B, by Gold Eagle and Happy Go Lucky. They can't wait to see the results next spring from these young sires.

Late in 2014, Hill Haven purchased semen rights on two bulls that they hope will advance their breeding program in new directions. After Bob, who is an avid follower of Australian Shorthorn news, found Kamilaroi Meat Packer in a publication, Dale and Matt did research on him and secured the rights. Meat Packer's phenotype, genetics and EBV's are the kind that can make a real impact in a herd. At about the same time, Hill Haven was very impressed with CSF Evolution, a young son of Hot Commodity and they purchased the Canadian rights along with Blenview Farms in Ontario.

Bob and Dale never fail to point out that a large part of their success is due to their herdsman, Matthew Hargrave. Matt started at Hill Haven in 2006 as a summer job and he has been there ever since. Matt grew up on a farm nearby where his family raised registered Angus and along with his many years in 4-H he has honed his skills in fitting and showing

t h e i r  
c a t t l e .  
Bob is  
also quick  
to mention  
that Matt  
does it  
all at Hill  
H a v e n ,  
from field  
w o r k ,  
c a l v i n g ,

breeding, building repairs to anything else that needs to be done. Perhaps most important of all is his involvement in the buying and breeding decisions at Hill Haven. Dale noticed early on that Matt had a real talent for being able to pick out the good ones at any age and it's a rare day that Matt isn't involved in a purchase. Breeding decisions are a combination of Dale who likes to look back and see what has worked well and then tweak it and Matt who tends to look ahead, seeing new opportunities and ways to perfect what they already have with something new. Their relationship in this regard could be considered a push-pull or a ying and yang style and it always involves lengthy debate. This process reminds me of a quote Julie French used in her presentation at the recent CSA AGM in Ontario : "Nothing is so dangerous as an IDEA, when it is the only one you have."

Today the Hill Haven operation consists of the original 100 acre farm as well as a satellite farm that has been added down the road. They calved 64 females in 2015 which includes a small group of Uluru cows they maintain for Bob Riviere, of Oakville, Ontario. There are also two donor females and 21 bred heifers. They are working on developing new female family's which is no easy task as Happy and Kelina are hard acts to follow. Beginning in 2011, Bob and Dale decided to hold their first on farm private treaty sale. By 2013 the decision was made to hold a biannual auction sale at the farm. The next one is being held this fall, October 4, 2015 at the farm.



Dale has been active in the Ontario Shorthorn Association for over 10 years as a Director and most recently as Treasurer. She has also now spent two years as a director of the Canadian Shorthorn Association and has been very involved in coordinating a genetic evaluation program that will help develop additional methods and tools that can be used along with EPDs for evaluating breed selection.

The story of the Hill Haven Shorthorn herd is quite unique and this is an understatement. To take two individuals from corporate, downtown Toronto and place them in a farm setting in rural Ontario and have them establish a respected herd in the breed within a very few years, would involve a major learning curve for almost anyone I can think of. Bob and Dale have done this and done it very well. I think all Shorthorn breeders in Canada were very "lucky" when the Angus breeder they first visited was not home that day.



If he had been, Hill Haven may well have an Angus herd today. So was that luck... or fate, or just good timing?

If you have not visited the Hill Haven operation, I would strongly suggest you

should do so. I don't think you will be disappointed! I can guarantee you will find very good hospitality... and very good Shorthorns.♦