

Heidi and Charles Anderson – Livestock Photography

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Fresno, California. A California cattle ranch is preparing for a livestock sale, complete with taking pictures of the animals to be sold. Who do you suppose was taking these high quality photos? Would you believe, a professional photographer from half a continent away in Kansas? It's today's Kansas Profile.

Heidi and Charles Anderson are the owners of Legacy Livestock Imaging, the company which took those California photos. Heidi was a city girl and self-described Air Force brat. Her father served all over the nation, and she had visited 48 of the 50 states before she got out of high school. While her dad was serving at the Air Force base in Topeka, Heidi started at Washburn University.

"I thought I'd be gone in six months," Heidi said. "Now it's been 22 years."

As a kid, Heidi came to appreciate photography. "We moved around so much that we valued capturing images of where we'd been," Heidi said. "It was how we learned to communicate."

Heidi earned degrees in finance and accounting, but she followed her interest into becoming a professional portrait photographer. For example, she photographed ballet companies as far away as Seattle and Atlanta.

One day at church in Topeka, she met a guy named Charles Anderson. Their interests could not seem to have been farther apart: City girl versus farm boy. She was a dancer and art photographer. His background? Cattle. But something clicked between them.

Charles had grown up on a farm near the rural community of Randolph, population 168 people. Now, that's rural. He was active in 4-H and FFA and judged livestock at Dodge City Community College before coming to K-State. When he met and married Heidi, their professional interests began to merge.

"I wanted to really know where he came from, and his folks had a beautiful place," Heidi said. She enjoyed photographing the rural scenery. As she learned more about the cattle business, she came to realize that there was an opportunity for photographers who specialized in livestock. They might take pictures in the showing or do photos for cattle sale catalogs.

Heidi and Charles created a business of their own called Legacy Livestock Imaging in Topeka. "If you would have told me ten years ago that I would be taking pictures of cows, I wouldn't have believed it," Heidi said. "But I love the peaceful feeling of being outside and in a pasture." Heidi continues to take wedding photos and senior pictures as well, but now many of those involve farm families with whom she has connected through the cattle business.

Legacy Livestock Imaging specializes in show catalog content, farm and ranch images, and other photography to share agriculture's story. The company serves cattle operations as far away as Kentucky, south Texas, and California. "Since May 2015, I've put 45,000 miles on my car," Heidi said.

The company also produces fine art photography with rural themes. For example, one face shot of an Angus bull has become one of the iconic images of the breed.

The company has a huge social media presence. As one might guess, the company's photos make compelling visual images to post on Facebook. "We have 20,000 fans on Facebook and we reach some 500 to 600,000 people through our social media altogether," Heidi said.

At one show, she was displaying a black-and-white photo of an Angus calf in the snow, covered by a ranch jacket. This meant that the rancher gave up his own coat to warm the calf. An older gentleman walked by the display and looked at this photo for a long time. He came back again and again. Heidi said, "His eyes were welling up, and he said to me, 'You don't know how many times I've done that myself.' That's when we know our art is speaking to them," Heidi said.

For more information, go to www.legacylivestockimaging.com.

It's time to leave Fresno, California, where Heidi and Charles Anderson are making a difference by using their talents and skills to photograph and promote these family-owned beef cattle businesses. I'm glad to see such a rural business come into focus.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.