

The Saga of Gertrude and Maggie Moo

By Dan Gill, Ethno-Gastronomist

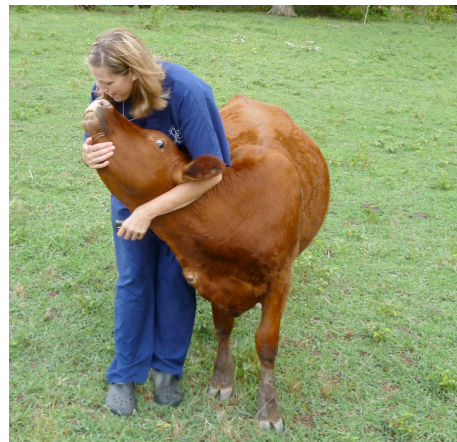
Around the middle of June, our granddaughter, Taylor, found a baby calf surrounded by turkey buzzards and realized that she was motherless, starving and would not survive much longer. Taylor brought the calf to our house for intensive care, which included force feeding her electrolytes from a bottle, as she had lost the suckling instinct and was too weak to nurse. The calf responded quickly and didn't need medication – just milk. We kept her in our solarium for a few days until she was strong enough to go outside.



Photos by Shelley Gill

We raise a lot of beef cattle on our farm and sell the yearlings at livestock markets. Usually, cows have their calves and raise them without much help from us, but occasionally something goes wrong. A cow may need help with a difficult or abnormal birth, a calf may be sick and unable to nurse, the cow may have an udder infection and refuse the calf, or occasionally a defective mother will abandon her calf. We suspect that Gertrude was abandoned, but we were not able to determine the cause or identify her mother.

We had a similar situation last year. Maggie Moo, an abandoned three-day-old calf, was running a high fever and was blind and near death when Taylor and I found her curled up in the pasture. Our daughter, Sarah (Taylor's mother) gave her antibiotics, electrolytes and medicine for scours until she was well, and then raised her in a garage near the store. Within a few weeks she had regained her sight. We fashioned a temporary pen for her so that store customers could pet and talk to her.



As she was raised completely away from the herd, Maggie Moo had no idea she was a cow – she thought she was a dog and chased, head butted and played hide and seek with Sarah until she was too big and the games became too rough and dangerous. At night, Maggie Moo would retire to her room in the garage, close the door and turn on the light. If someone came by, she would open her door and peek out to see if she wanted to greet them. Maggie Moo is all grown up now and back on the farm learning how to be a cow.

Gertrude now sleeps in the cattle trailer after her evening meal and is on a long leash or in a pen during the day. I take her to the store when we are open and customers love to visit and pet her. The inevitable question is, “Will she be on the menu someday?” The answer is, no. She is a heifer and will go back to the farm to be a cow and have calves of her own when she grows up. Had she been so unfortunate as to have been born a male, he would have been named “Sir Loin” and would have ended up in the grass-fed beef market.



Gertrude in her pasture behind the store



Photo by Liz Kidd

When we are closed on Monday and Tuesday, Gertrude comes back to the farm where she can visit with Maggie Moo and her friends and socialize with us on the lawn in the afternoon. One day I was eating potato chips and Gertrude decided that she wanted to taste one. She liked it and wanted more. Sarah recorded her antics; and our other daughter, Shelley, edited the video and added appropriate music.



Gertrude Meets Maggie Moo



Bet you can't eat just one

The video is on the store Facebook page. Just search for “Something Different, Urbanna” or visit our web page at pine3.info for the link.