

Lot 44 From Mills County, Texas

Another year of rodeo has come and gone in San Antonio, Texas. For three weeks each February, the city decks out in cowboy finery to host the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo, complete with top notch entertainment every night in the AT&T Center arena, from bronc riding, to Mutton Bustin', to Extreme Bulls, followed by concerts from some of the best performers in Country music. Out on the grounds you can find petting zoos, a carnival, unique shopping experiences in the exhibition centers, and every kind of festival food one could hope for. There are plenty of spots to get a drink, listen to some local live music, watch pig races, try some kettle corn or Texas barbeque, or buy some Western art. Voted the number one Large Indoor Rodeo of the Year for the past five years in a row by the PRCA (Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association), the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo is a first-class entertainment thrill ride with something, literally, for everyone.

Not as well-known is the fact that we are also home to the largest Junior Livestock Auction in the world, right there among the entertainers and vendors and cowboys. The barns overflow with thousands of animals brought by children from around the state, and sometimes from farther away than the Texas border, hoping to win a place at the auction and the often very generous paycheck they can receive for their livestock if they are selected to participate. On the last weekend of the rodeo, the auction barn fills with the rowdy sounds of buyers bidding, auctioneers calling and the crowds cheering for the kids as they present...steers, poultry, pigs, goats, sheep....you name it, we buy it. The buyers are a Who's Who of San Antonio, big corporations and wealthy individuals who believe in the future of agriculture in America and more importantly, who believe in the youth of Texas.

The media likes to film Extreme Bulls, buzz with the entertainment line up and talk about the record attendance at the rodeo each year. There is even an occasional piece about the Grand Champion Steer and the amazing price it brought. We wonder, though, if people know that the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo is about educating the youth of Texas, awarding scholarships and sending kids to college. We wonder if while the cowboys are busting broncs and the crowds are loving Toby Keith and Tim McGraw, people know the reason for all of it is right there in the auction barns, where bidders buy animals and give the children money to help them follow their dreams. The SALE website describes our historic contributions to educating the youth of Texas, but stories such as this one, about Lot 44 from Mills County, Texas, usually don't make the local paper.

On Saturday evening, February 20, 2010, a young boy brought his goat to the auction. Dustin Mangus drew Lot 44, slightly less than halfway through the 100 Lots going to auction that night. It was not a particularly advantageous or unlucky draw, but ordinarily might have been a place in the program that wouldn't have commanded a record purchase price. The auctioneer, however, took time to reign in the frenzied crowd and tell Dustin's story.

Early in the morning on December 8, 2009, Dustin, his younger brother and sister, and their father, David Mangus, were in a rollover accident near their home in Mullin, Texas. Their truck's roof was crushed when it crashed into a tree, and David Mangus was killed at the scene. Dustin's brother and sister suffered minor injuries and were treated and released from the hospital. Dustin, though, was in critical condition from his injuries, and underwent several surgeries to save his life and reconstruct his face. The first surgery was to remove a part of the truck's dashboard that had lodged in his head, and to reconstruct the eye socket that was damaged as a result.

The little boy who stood before us on the auction block, holding his goat while we heard this story, smiled at us from a beautiful, innocent face that showed no signs of his tragedy or his loss. Had someone not shared his story, we never would have been allowed to ponder this child's ability to overcome adversity. We never would have had the privilege of comprehending his incredible achievement. To have been able to continue to raise that animal and be ready for a stock show in February, he had to have gotten right back up and kept on living the minute they let him out of the hospital.

The auctioneer asked every bidder who had already pledged funds to this boy to stand, and every top buyer in the room stood. When the bidding opened, the price for Lot 44 was already at \$20,000. The people of San Antonio opened their hearts for this boy. Corporation after corporation added on another thousand, another two thousand, another \$5,000, and the price went to \$60,000 at record speed. Individual members of corporations started making personal contributions out of their own money, and the price kept climbing. One of the auctioneers went to the buyers' reception area to bring in more people to hear the story, and the price kept climbing. Dustin's little brother joined him on the block and the two of them smiled their sweet smiles while the money kept coming in, and we feel certain they had no idea what those numbers meant. Dustin's grandpa came down from the audience to stand with the boys and choked back tears, while people in the room who weren't registered bidders started coming forward to make personal contributions. It was one heck of an altar call, and the only thing flowing faster than the money was the tears.

When the price hit \$110,000, one of the top buyers announced he had partnered with another to add on to make it an even \$150,000 for Dustin. The gavel came down on the highest priced goat at this year's Junior Livestock Auction while everyone cheered and cried at the same time. Dustin's grandpa was openly crying when he took the microphone to thank the crowd in a shaky voice, with no real ability to impart his gratitude more than his tears communicated.... He simply said "Thank you. I don't know what else to say. Thank you."

We all know there is no amount of money that heals the pain of losing your Dad. Not one of us gave to this cause imagining there was any way it could ever make up for what Dustin and his family lost. This was our way of reaching out to a family in need, in tragedy, in suffering, and offering them something shining and positive and good to help them on the road that lies ahead. Dustin has already had to overcome more adversity at the age of 10 than some of us will ever face. What the people of San Antonio did for Dustin and his family was truly amazing, but even more amazing is the spirit Dustin embodies, in showing up with his goat to do what he set out to do. With a smile on his face and with his family by his side.

This demonstration of generosity, kindness and support is what the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo is really about. We are investing in the future of our country by investing in the lives of our country's children. We are raising money to help provide educational opportunities for as many children as we can reach. And sometimes, we are witnessing miracles.

You had a part in Dustin's story, and every other story that came through the auction this year. We hope one day very soon, you will come see it for yourself. Thank you for your contribution to our efforts. You and Dustin are our heroes.

From the bottom our hearts,

The Raffle Committee