

THE LEGACY CLUB

Creating a family legacy is sometimes not as simple as it sounds.



(Left to right) Julie McIvor holding daughter Locke Ann, Scott McIvor holding daughter Mae and Don McIvor, Christmas 2000 on the ranch.

BY JULIE W. MCIVOR

Editors Note: In our Winter issue, we introduced you to the McIvor family and the issues they faced dealing with The Nature Conservancy and their family's ranch. In this issue, we invited Julie McIvor to give us the current generation's take on the legacy of the U-Up U-Down Ranch in Fort Davis, Texas.

Why do so many feel the need to leave a “legacy” for the world to see? Is it the age-old search for fame and fortune?

I would like to think that sometimes our search for fame and fortune is just for the experience. And the treasure is almost always found in our own backyard.

However, there are many well-primed organizations ready to help us all achieve the glory of being immortalized past the grave. In fact, you can go to The Nature Conservancy web site and see an entire section dedicated to helping you with gifting and estate planning. It is entitled “Gift & Estate Planning. Leaving a Conservation Legacy”. You can learn how to “give wisely” on this site. You can “Compare Gift Plans” with many ideas, including words and legal phrases to use in your will. They leave no stone unturned as to how to give your precious belongings, money or land to *THEM*. You can give outright gifts such as cash, stocks, real estate, donor advised funds, business interests, partnership interest, personal property including

artwork or rare books. Also, there are plenty of ideas on how to give them money through bequests, life insurance and retirement assets. You can even give them your home and still live in it until you die. And all this is part of “The Legacy Club” – as they call it. The Nature Conservancy’s website defines, “The Legacy Club” as “a group of Nature Conservancy supporters who have made a lasting commitment to conservation by making a life income gift with the Conservancy, or by naming the Conservancy as a beneficiary in their estate plans. The Legacy Club is a way for us to recognize this profound contribution to The Nature Conservancy’s future.” They do a fine job of “working the room” for those who want to “leave a legacy” – for the world to see.

In our hearts, we all probably want to leave some sort of a legacy. I know Scott and I would like to leave a legacy for our children. We would like to leave them the U-up U-down Ranch is up and down capitalized? In some places it is...to continue the ranching heritage that we have been a

part of for over 125 years. We would like to leave them a legacy of appreciating a hard day's work. We would like to leave them the values and character of being a good person. We want to teach them to be someone you can trust and count on. We want to teach them to fight for what is right and not accept the status quo. These are the things we think of when we think about leaving a legacy.

But today, it seems many people desire some sort of celebrity or to be glorified. In my opinion, I believe that is only for the few who really make a difference in this world. The Thomas Jefferson's and Mother Theresa's of the world deserve these kinds of accolades, but if you think the more common efforts really live on past a generation or two, let me tell you a story about how long some of these "legacies" actually live.

In 1933, Violet Locke McIvor, my husband Scott's Grandmother, was approached about giving Mt. Locke on our ranch to the University of Texas for the McDonald Observatory. She thought it was a good idea and donated the land where it sits today. If you go on a tour up there they will tell you a little about her and her gift. Don McIvor, Scott's Dad, was remembered as Violet's son and I guess a few people up there must know that in the '80s the water wells went dry at the McDonald Observatory and Don gave them a water well from down on our ranch - the *U-Up U-Down* - so they could have water again. I am sure a few people know how important it was to Don to be sure McDonald Observatory would have "dark skies" when he needed to sell a good portion of the ranch. He worked hard to not sell to someone who would develop another subdivision. But as for Scott and I, we had to go as Don's guests to all the meetings and BBQs. In fact the only reason we are invited to the yearly meeting and BBQ now is we chose to become a member of the Board of Visitors and pay our membership fee each year. To be honest, each year when we attend the meetings, we don't even know the majority of the attendees. Most of the members of the McDonald Observatory Board of Visitors are not the Observatory's surrounding neighbors but large donors from more urban areas. Recently, it was brought to my attention that a few connecting landowners don't even receive invitations to meetings anymore - even though they neighbor the Observatory. The reason we chose to become members was when Don passed away, we knew the tradition and heritage should be continued. The Observatory was so important to Don, and to Scott's Grandmother Violet, we felt we should respect that legacy (our family's involvement).

The bottom line is the folks who ran the Observatory when Don was alive, used to remember who the McIvor's were. Today, it's another story. Here's a good example: There's a bus that picks up children of families living at or near the observatory and takes them to and from school every day (15 miles each way). In the past, since the ranch

is on the route, Scott and Don's stepchildren were all allowed the special privilege of riding that bus. When our children started school we called to inquire if our children could enjoy this same privilege that had been bestowed on our family in the past. I was told by the acting superintendent at the time, "No, that is just too much liability and opens up to too many people wanting the same." What if Violet would have said that back when she and Don McIvor were making their decision about their gift of property? Would the observatory even be there today? What if Don would have said that? Would the "crown jewel" of the University of Texas system enjoy the benefits of the fresh water well they do today?

And what gratitude did the McIvors get for the care taking of what is now The Nature Conservancy's Davis Mountains Preserve for over 100 years. Nothing but grief. To Don's face he was "the Father of Conservation in the Davis Mountains" and for his benefit, and donations, they named a building up there after him. But on the daily tours they continue to lie to unknowing visitors about how many cattle we ran and how it is our fault when the surrounding land is in bad shape. It couldn't be the drought or any of their actions. Although they have been the owners for 12 years, it seems the condition of the land is only their responsibility when it is in good shape. I guess the need to appeal to their audience for continuing monetary support out weighs the importance of the truth. I guess that is why The Nature Conservancy is worth so much. They are good at marketing.

It is amazing how a story can be manipulated to fit an "agenda". On one occasion recently, an observatory employee told me quite frankly that the State of Texas simply took the land from us and that we had no part in giving the land. And just the other day, I found a book about the McDonald Observatory. Inside it said that Scott McIvor's great grandfather, G.S. Locke, won the *U-Up U-Down Ranch* in a poker game. Truth? That was a new one on us, as well as, on all of the area's history books. It is well-known, documented fact that G.S. Locke settled here because of the dry climate for health reasons.

So if you are interested in leaving a family legacy—leave it to your children and grandchildren, and not in the hands of the government or some non-governmental private organization. Leaving your decedents entangled with other "partners" they have no control over, might not create the kind of outcome you and your family intended. Put simply, a family's heritage is too important to leave to others.



Errata: In the last issue we incorrectly captioned a photo in the McIvor story. The photo was of Don McIvor, with his son Scott next to Scott's grandmother, Violet Locke McIvor.