

Norman Olsen Family

Norman Olsen, or “Charlie” as most knew him by, started in the sheep business in 1952 in Spanish Fork, Utah. He married Barbara Fielding who supported him through his years in the sheep business. He gathered up a few ewes from Clifford Olsen (no relation), Ed Winn, S.P. Nelson and Grover Orton to get started.

Before he bought any sheep he started purchasing the farm when he was in the military. He sent money home to his parents during his service in World War II and the Korean War and they made the payments for him. He also earned a little extra by loaning money to other soldiers right before payday for a handsome interest rate. Norman’s career is noteworthy in view of the fact that he inherited no land and no sheep. He truly started from scratch.

The main part of his sheep business was raising range rams for the western range men. In his prime, he had around 500 mother ewes. Dad sold a lot of sheep to the Midwest breeders in the 70’s and 80’s. Dad said he felt the “like a Rhinestone Cowboy. Getting cards and letters from people I don’t even know, and offers coming over the phone.”

He summered his ewes in Strawberry Valley in the mountains east of home. It was a community range that we shared with several other sheep flocks in the Spanish Fork area. In August, we gathered the sheep to remove the buck lambs. If we didn’t, they’d start breeding the ewes. We always seemed to miss a few and we’d end up with a few early lambs that we called “strawberry catch lambs.” We often used them as market lambs for our Jr. Market Lamb show that was held in May of each year. We gathered the herd again in October to bring them all home. Time spent at Strawberry was one of Dad’s favorite parts of his sheep business.

The sheep have been good to Norman and his family. He used the income from the sheep to pay for the farm and the mortgage on his home and to generate enough income to raise his 12 children. Mom was also pretty instrumental in the raising of the 12 children. Mom took care of things at home and taught us religion by her words and actions. Dad often made the comment that Mom saved our souls and he saved our hides.

Mom was a patient woman. Sometimes Dad would be so caught up in what he was doing that he’d forget to mention to her that he was leaving town for a few days to buy or sell sheep out of state somewhere. When he wouldn’t show up at home that night, she’d ask one of the boys where Dad was. They’d just kind of look at her and say “uhhh, he’s gone to California for a few days...” She took it all in stride and didn’t let it bother her... too much.

He was one of the few sheep operators in our area who relied entirely on sheep and agriculture for his livelihood. He taught us how to work, to be honest, to respect other people and their property, to respect our elders, and many other things that have helped us in life. He prided himself in raising his family and helping them be successful in life. Once, when asked what he did for a living, he said “I am in the business of raising kids and I figured a sheep farm would be a good place to do that.”

Early in his sheep raising years, his brothers Snell and Alden caught wind that he was going to sell all of his ewe lambs. They noticed that their little brother had started making some strides of his own. They wanted to pick from his ewe lambs for replacement ewes for their own herd. He penned all of his ewe lambs together and told his brothers to take their pick and put them in a separate pen. After they had done so with the preset number of ewe lambs, Dad looked things over and said, “If those are good enough to go into your herd, they will work well in my herd. Those are the ewe’s I’ll keep. Now you can pick from those you left in here.” Dad was clever and he showed us that every once in a while, the little brother wins.

Over the years, he sold range rams at various ram sales in the western states. In the late 70’s and 80’s, Dad had a production sale along with the Caras Brothers in Des Moines, Iowa. Those were the good years. One highlight of his career was in 1974 when he had a Suffolk ram that sold for \$3,500 to Caras Brothers. He was the grandson of Long Ears and the sire of Revolution.

Dad had a lot of quotes that he would rattle off at, what seemed to be, the exact moment it would have the most impact. He would have a quote que’d up in his mind for years waiting for the right moment to use it. When the moment came, he would let it out without skipping a beat. This often left those within earshot wondering how on earth he had come up with it.

Some of the more meaningful quotes are as follows:

1-“The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, but the grass is only as green as you make it.”

2-“When you have a hard time sleeping, don’t count sheep, talk to the Shepherd”

3-“Best crops, best sheep, a lot of blue ribbons don’t mean anything if you haven’t raised your family right.”

4-From a church leader: “No other success can compensate for failure in the home.”

Norman retired in 2007. He sold his ewes to his sons and leases the farmland and the facilities to them. Today 6 of his 7 sons still own sheep and operate a flock on some level. Many of his grandkids and great grandkids show market lambs and some of them have even started small flocks of their own.