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Frogs & Snails  
& Big White Tails  
That what little boys are made of.

Triumph  
over  
tragedy

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# Triumph over Tragedy

***Even a little boy can learn lessons of humanity by overcoming adversity...***

**By Bobby Horecka**

Fourth place is no contestant's dream. It might rate a pat on the back or some pastel colored ribbon, but it's hardly an aspiration.

Particularly at major livestock shows like San Antonio, where stakes are high and winnings can shape the future for young showmen.

But what if that fourth place winner were to bring a whopping \$150,000?

It seems hardly probable, but as one little boy from Mullin would learn, it's entirely possible.

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C. Jason Spence has watched thousands of kids make their way through the sale ring.

A professional auctioneer, his services are often tapped as shows come to their conclusion. Youngsters dude up, parade their projects and hope for the best as he slides into his profes-

sional cadence, calling for bids from prospective buyers.

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Dustin Mangus is much like other boys his age—ready for some video games after the school day, not above the occasional tussle with his younger brother and sister, and more than ready for that next trip out to wet a hook or scare up some game.

Like his siblings and relatives, he tends animals, raising prize winners for county and statewide shows. They definitely have what it takes to win. His cousin showed the grand prize lamb in Fort Worth this year, followed by a reserve champion win in Houston.

Now in his second year of showing, Dustin likes the goats that dot his family's ranch like early spring flowers.

Yet despite the easy smile he wears naturally, his eyes reflect a difficult journey.

It's a distance few have traveled—or ever want to, for that matter—a place far removed from that rocky patch of ground he calls home, yet

still uncomfortably nearby.

And it began one dreary Monday morning four months ago.

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Those closest to David Mangus, Dustin's dad, speak with great fondness of him—a generous individual, hard worker and budding entrepreneur.

A welder by trade, the 33-year-old had launched his own business months before, having partnered with a longtime friend to build barns and boat docks for folks on the nearby lakeside.

Still, he remained a devoted father, says John Carl Smith, Dustin's grandfather and David's father-in-law.

"He was always there for them," he says. "If they had something at school, he'd call it a day and come support them. I've seen all kinds of fathers in my day, but he was really one of the best."

Young Dustin's family lives just down the hill from his grandfather's place, easy walking distance to the barns and pens where most of the show animals are kept. The family

was quite accustomed to giving John Carl a hearty wave each morning as they rode out to school on the tiny, two-lane road that connects their ranch to town.

So it came as no surprise that the Mills County Farm Bureau member watched David and his grandchildren wheel past on Dec. 7.

"It was real foggy that morning," he recalls. "I wasn't even sure if they could see me. But David drove past real slow, and it had become tradition for us."

So he hailed his morning salute and headed to the barn for the morning feedings.

Then John Carl says he got a phone call no parent ever wants to hear.

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"One of my foster kids called me and asked me if I knew David had been in a wreck," John Carl recalls.

He dove into his truck and raced down the same road he had seen them pass just moments before. Not four miles from his driveway, John Carl arrived to see the first of the rescuers frantically working.

No one knows what happened. The extended-cab truck was capsized in the opposing ditch, the roof flattened to the ground.

One by one, his grandchildren were

pulled from the wreckage and loaded into ambulances, but his son-in-law was past saving.

“They wouldn’t even let me see David,” John Carl says. “He was pinned between the seat and the cab. They said there wasn’t anything they could do for him.”

Young Dustin, who had been riding shotgun with his dad, took the worst of the crash. His brother and sister in the backseat would go home from the Brownwood hospital the next day, but Dustin was destined for Cook’s Children’s Hospital in Fort Worth.

Over the next few days, Dustin endured countless hours in the operating room as doctors worked to rebuild his face. In the process, surgeons found and removed a half-inch shard of blue plastic from behind his left eye, a chunk of dashboard that gave way when the airbag deployed.

Five days later, Dustin finally made it back home, just in time for his father’s final remembrances.

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David Mangus was buried Dec. 13, one day after he would have celebrated his 34th birthday.

The weeks following have been tough, John Carl says, with many restless nights for young Dustin.

“You always hear about these kinds of things happening, but you never expect it to happen to you,” he says. “You just can’t imagine.”

Still, plans were made months before to attend the San Antonio show. Dustin healed remarkably fast and seemed anxious to get back with his animals, so John Carl agreed to take him to the Alamo City.

Dustin finished fourth in the junior show at San Antonio, not a stellar showing but enough to make it to the premium sale the following week. He drew Lot 44 in the lineup, placing him a little less than halfway through the day’s sale.

Having spent 51 years in arenas since he showed his own animals at the age of nine, John Carl knew the sale ring could hold all kinds of surprises.

But not even John Carl could have predicted what came next.



*Dustin Mangus works one of the show goats at his grandfather’s barn, much like the animal he raised for the San Antonio show. He never named the one he sold, saying, “There’s no sense in naming him since he wasn’t going to be there forever.”*

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A knot balled up in Jason Spence’s stomach as he read the handwritten account of Dustin’s plight hours before the big sale.

“It was pretty tough,” he says, sadness still cracking his voice weeks after the sale took place. “I was certain there would be no way I could get through it by myself, particularly in the sale ring.”

So with the help of fellow auctioneer Lance Runnels and sale manager Ronnie Urbanczyk, Dustin’s story was shared with potential buyers.

“There was hardly a dry eye in the place,” Jason recalls.

down a bit,” Jason says.

A call for any interested buyers went out and bids came flying, raising the amount \$1,000 at a time.

Soon, \$27,000 grew to \$35,000.

“We were already past what the grand champion had brought,” Jason says, “and the bids kept coming.”

\$35,000 became \$55,000, then \$60,000.

“We were running out of paper for the bids, so we started writing on the backs,” the auctioneer says.

\$75,000. \$80,000.

“Vance looked over at me and said we’re about to hit \$100,000. And then we got some more...”

“That money can never replace his daddy but it will help him do a lot of things that his daddy would have done for him.”

— John Carl Smith

Projects move fast in San Antonio. They’re typically sold in less than a minute.

“There was already \$27,000 gathered up when the bidding started for Dustin, so we decided to slow things

\$108,000. \$109,000. San Antonio’s top sale record ever was \$110,000 for

a grand prize steer.

“Then we had a bit of a commotion with one of our bidders,” he says. “He waved his hand and we decided to hold on a minute. We found the boy’s grandfather and brought him up.”

The bidder was Marvin Rush of Rush Family Enterprises, who pooled his resources with Sondra Grohman with Shining Star Ranches to up the total even more.

The final outcome: \$150,000 for a fourth place goat. In barely five minutes, the unlikely became reality.

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John Carl was dumbfounded.

“Thank you,” he told the sale crowd in a faltering voice. “I don’t know what else to say.”

As the bidding wound down, Ronnie Urbanczyk turned to Dustin and asked: “Son, do you believe that’s a lot of money?”

The boy answered, “I think so,” later telling reporters he doubted he could ever count as high.

No doubt, the money will be put to good use, John Carl says, listing medical costs and college educations as definite possibilities.

“That money can never replace his daddy but it will help him do a lot of things that his daddy would have done for him,” he says. “I tell you, though, I’d give it all back and then some if we could have David back here with us.”

Jason Spence is quick to shy from any credit for what took place that day.

“This was definitely not an auctioneer thing,” he says. “It was a God thing, and you could surely feel his presence in the sale ring that day.

“Hopefully, Dustin now knows the world is a better place than we all sometimes give it credit for,” he adds. “Of course, it’s not about the money raised, but the difference it can make

in someone’s life. Hopefully, this will help make a difference in his.”

