



Who Is She, Anyway?

by Lori Ward Bocher

Unlike Monroe Miller, Pat Norton and Bruce Worzella, I'm not a golf course superintendent. Unlike Chuck Koval, Wayne Kussow and Tom Salaiz, I don't even play golf. So why am I writing a regular column in *THE GRASS ROOTS*?

I guess it's because I have a few things in common with His Honor the Editor, Monroe Miller.

Like Monroe, I grew up on a farm. My dad was a fourth generation dairyman on a farm near Fort Atkinson, Wis. I totally loved my childhood, a childhood that helped me cultivate a root-deep understanding of what it takes to nurture a crop in the same soil year after year and to depend on Mother Nature for favorable weather conditions.

If you could use only one word to describe Monroe, it would have to be "opinionated." Well, I'll never admit to being as opinionated a Monroe. That's impossible. But I do remember telling off my high school guidance counselor early in my senior year. You see, when I expressed an interest in choosing journalism as my college major, he suggested that I take advantage of my farm background and major in agricultural journalism. "No!" I adamantly stated. "I *don't* want to write about cows the rest of my life. Those words would come back to haunt me.

Like Monroe, there was never any doubt in my mind as to where I would attend college—the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Maybe that's because both of my parents graduated from the UW, just as Monroe's father did. In fact, our fathers even knew each other while in school.

I was a student a decade later than Monroe, from 1973-1977. A funny thing happened in my junior year. After a summer internship at a daily newspaper, I began to realize that I really didn't like the daily grind of straight news reporting. I began to realize that agriculture really *was* my first love, that maybe it *wouldn't* be so bad to write about cows the rest of my life.



Lori Bocher, husband Luke, daughter Sarah and son Andrew.

Upon graduation, I went to work for a publishing company that specialized in magazines, newsletters and direct mail pieces for agricultural companies. In less than two years I visited more than 200 farms and ranches in 33 states gathering information for testimonial articles.

Unlike Monroe, I did not become a "lifer" at my first place of employment. Although I could talk "farmer language" and write about farms, I felt that my basic agricultural knowledge and experience was shallow. So I returned to my father's farm to gain some first-hand experience. I was no longer writing about cows; I was milking them, feeding them, cleaning up after them, doctoring them and delivering their calves. After a year on the farm, my quest for more knowledge drew me back to the UW. This time I majored in Dairy Science. Now I was *studying* about cows. My second time around at the UW took me to the college of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Like Monroe, I gained a deep and lasting love and respect for the college and many of its professors.

While working on my Dairy Science degree, I began to do some part-time writing for a Fort Atkinson-based publication called *Hoard's Dairyman*, the national dairy farm magazine. Four months before I was to graduate, they

offered me a full-time position as an associate editor. I began my new career in January of 1982—a career that combined my skill for writing with my knowledge of cows and agriculture. And I spent the next seven years of my life—you guessed it—writing about cows!

Like Monroe, I developed a love for editing, writing and creating a publication during my years at *Hoard's Dairyman*. But my love for a young minister who worked a block down the street proved to be stronger. So when Luke asked me to marry him in 1988, I accepted even though I knew he would be leaving his church in Fort Atkinson shortly before the wedding.

Luke's new church was in New London, 20 miles northwest of Appleton. Because we were both in our early 30's when we married, we knew we wouldn't be waiting too long to start a family. So I decided to become a freelance writer instead of looking for a full-time job. That way, I'd have flexible working hours and could work as much, or as little, as I wanted.

Then, in 1989, it finally happened: I had the privilege of meeting Monroe Miller. He was elected to his first term on the board of directors for WALSAA — Wisconsin Agricultural and Life Sciences Alumni Association. It was our mutual love for the UW College of Agriculture that brought us together.

At the same time, I was asked to supply feature articles from Wisconsin for a trade magazine called *TURF*. This was my first venture into the turf-grass arena. I was a little apprehensive because I'd never written about turf before. But I figured my agricultural education would help.

However, I didn't know any people in the turf industry—except Monroe. So I began to seek his advice on *TURF* articles. As I jogged Monroe's memory about people in Wisconsin's turf industry, the wheels in his head began to turn. He had always wanted to include a "Personality Profile" in *THE GRASS ROOTS*, but he didn't know who would write it. Now he knew. And that is how I began to write a regular column in your newsletter.

I'll admit, before I started writing for *TURF* and *THE GRASS ROOTS*, I'd only been on golf courses in the dead of winter with cross country skis attached to my feet. But I wasn't a total stranger to turf.

Many of my childhood hours were spent riding or pushing a lawn mower. I was the chief mower for our various farm yards. I also mowed a 1.5-acre cemetery for three years. I always enjoyed hopping on the lawn mower; it gave me time to meditate, solve problems and daydream.

In my first job out of college, I did a lot of traveling in a small company airplane. Since we usually were going to rural farming areas, we landed on a lot of grass strips. "I bet you hate it when we make you land on these small grass runways," I said to the pilot one day. "Actually, I'd take a good grass strip over a paved runway any day," he replied. "The turf absorbs the shock of the landing. It's easier on the plane." I gained a little respect for turf with that knowledge.

I gained even more respect for grass after walking on the artificial turf at the UW's Camp Randall on a hot August day. I couldn't believe the amount of heat radiating from that field; **real** grass has a cooling effect. I'd also seen Camp Randall on rainy days when the turf was as wet as a sponge; **real** turf, with **real** soil, would absorb so much more rain and drain it away.

And while working at *Hoard's Dairyman*, I did some articles on an intensive form of grass management called "rotational grazing." You see, cows aren't very competent lawn mowers. If put out on one large pasture, they'll keep going back to where they've already grazed because the grass is young, tender and full of protein. The rest of the pasture is wasted as the grass matures and the cows refuse to eat it. But if you divide the pasture into several small paddocks, and move the cows every day or so, they'll make efficient use of all the pasture and always be eating the most nutritious kind of grass. I just couldn't resist saying something about cows!

Even though cows are my first love, I've really enjoyed writing for the turf industry because it's given me a new challenge. Learning your lingo has been especially interesting. The word "turfgrass" doesn't even appear in *Webster's Dictionary*. Neither do "aerify" and its derivatives, "aerification" and "aerifier." My computer spell-check has had fun with those words!

Then there's "verticut." The first time I heard this word I was completely lost. How can you make a vertical cut on a lawn? So I swallowed my pride and asked for an explanation.

At least I knew what "topdressing" meant, or so I thought. I took it to mean scattering fertilizer on top of grass. Wrong. When I first heard a superintendent tell me that he top-dressed with 80 percent sand and 20 percent peat, I was dumbfounded. The last I had heard, sand isn't a fertilizer. So I quietly wrote his answer in my notes and waited until I could consult with Monroe.

Then there's my favorite, "bentgrass." Before writing for *TURF* I had never heard of it. Then, six months later, I spent a day and a half learning all about it at the 1990 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium, "Bentgrasses: New, Old, Right or Wrong?" I had never imagined that a whole symposium could be structured around one grass variety.

Blackwolf Run Golf Course and University Ridge are the two golf courses that Monroe has steered me to so far for *TURF* articles. Many thanks to Marc Davison and Jeff Parks for giving me complete tours of their gorgeous and meticulous courses.

I also had a chance to meet several superintendents when I covered the 1990 Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium for *TURF*. And later I had detailed discussions with five of them who agreed to participate in a round table discussion for *TURF*. A special thank-you to Dan Barrett, Roger Bell, Rodney Johnson, Pat Norton and Randy Smith. Their comments gave me a deeper appreciation of what it takes to be a golf course superintendent.

Then there are all of the people I've met while doing "Personality Profile" interviews. Most of the interviews were done over the telephone, but I always felt that I was able to get to know the person quite well after an hour or so of conversation. Going over the list is like reading a "Who's Who" in Wisconsin turf and golf: Lee Bruce, Eugene Haas, Egon Herrmann, Lois Latham,

Leo Walsh, Christine Faulks, Gayle Worf, Russ Weisensel, Bob Newman, Bill Roberts, Jerry O'Donnell, Jim Love, Curtis Larson, Ed Devinger, John Mortimer, Bob Lohmann.

Know what else I've learned? First, people in the turf industry have a tremendous amount of enthusiasm for their careers and a great love for the industry. I didn't think anyone could be as excited about his job as Monroe is, but I was wrong!

Second, turf people are very flattered when I call to get their story. Not many people pay much attention to grass or how it grows, so the interviewees are very excited to tell about their contribution to the turf industry.

I was very excited, too, when Monroe asked me to write about myself for *THE GRASS ROOTS*. Journalists don't get to tell their own story very often; we're always writing about someone or something else.

As confusing and challenging as it has been to write about your industry, nothing was as confusing or challenging as when I became a mother—to a 2-pound, 2-month premature daughter on November 5, 1990. Suddenly, I had another lingo to learn—that of doctors, nurses, geneticists and therapists.

Being mother to a special needs child (mild cerebral palsy and a rare genetic condition) takes extra time, effort and emotional stamina. But Sarah is the most precious thing that every happened to me. She adds joy and delight to every day. And on January 26th she was joined by an equally special brother named Andrew. Luckily, he came into the world at a normal weight and time and had no medical problems.

With the birth of each child I've had less and less time to write. But I hope to be able to feature more "personalities" in upcoming issues of *THE GRASS ROOTS*. ♣



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