

Local family featured in CBC documentary



Nov. 4, 2020

By Chris Drost

A local mother and her three children are one of five families featured in a new Markham Street Films documentary, *Year of the Goat*, which was released on CBC on Saturday, Oct. 24 and is now available on CBC Gem.

Year of the Goat, written by Michael McNamara and co-directed by Aaron Hancox, follows five different families who raise and show goats on their journey towards the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto.

Kristen Holyoake and sons Logan, age 10, Griffen, age seven and Ainsley, who just turned four, live on 75 acres just south of Bancroft. She is a busy woman who drives a school bus in between looking after the goats and her children. Previously from Lakefield, the offer of more moderately priced real estate lured them to the area. She has been raising Nigerian dwarf goats for seven years, up until more recently, only on one-half of an acre. She initially started with unregistered goats but now those she has are registered.

While the family currently has nine Nigerian dwarf goats, the plan is to gradually increase the herd. "I am so excited to have more space to grow the breeding program. I feel good about the choices I have made," says Holyoake. The arrival of a new doe is expected soon.

The person Holyoake bought her goats from got her interested in showing them about five years ago. Now each of the children has their own areas of interest explains Holyoake. "Griffen is hands-on and likes building, Logan loves the animals and showing them and Ainsley has just started showing," she says. The Showmanship Class teaches children age five to 12, a sense of responsibility, confidence and gives lessons in empathy.

"I really think kids are sheltered from death. We don't want to expose them to this. On a farm it gives life experiences, a chance to experience feelings such as grief, loss and anger. I believe if you see it early on you learn to cope and celebrate success. It is good for kids to see that sometimes life is messy," she explains.

Each year the family typically shows their goats at a number of small fairs, mostly from August to the end of September, culminating in the Royal Winter Fair in Toronto. Holyoake actually ran the Peterborough Goat Show for a number of years. "The goat community is a fantastic community. Everyone works together," she says.

Holyoake has been considering how her family could be eating and drinking less processed food for awhile. "Goats are something I could do on a small acreage. Goats produce more milk for their size than other animals," she says. Now Holyoake and her children grow a large garden and tap maple trees in the spring to help them achieve greater self-sufficiency. She would like to empower others about growing things and is considering offering courses in sustainable living in the future. Animal therapy would also be a good fit with her previous background.

COVID-19 has proved a disappointment to many, including this family. After participating in showing their goats for four years at the Royal Winter Fair, this year it has been cancelled. While the family looks towards getting back to showing the goats next year, Holyoake is busy trying to get as much done as possible around her farm before winter sets in.