

# Children's book inspires learning of farm life

Jen Bradley for *Progressive Dairyman*

"Prancing, Dancing Lily" lives on One Dairy Road in Ayrshire, Wisconsin, and soon realizes she is not the bell cow the other cows expect her to be. She leaves the farm and tries to find her place by traveling the world and trying all sorts of dances, from the kick-line at Rockefeller Center to a ballet in Russia.

Lily finally ends up in the Caribbean and hears a far-off drumming. The conga line becomes the perfect fit for Lily and her line of cows back at the farm in the Midwest. Lily could dance to her heart's content and still keep the others in line behind her and her drum.



When author Marsha Diane Arnold, now living in northern California, decided to write a children's book about a cow, she knew that her childhood in rural Kansas would be an inspiration. The book is dedicated to her father, with an inscription that reads: "For my father, his Ayrshire dream, and all the cows at Highland Ayr dairy farm."

Her father served on a livestock judging team as a child and fell in love with the Ayrshire breed, Arnold says. In his adult years, he started purchasing a cow here and there, and the Highland Ayr dairy farm was born. "I remember the pasture, the pond and all of these things, which are represented in the book," she adds, noting that a farmer's daughter never truly leaves the farm behind.

## Cultivating creativity

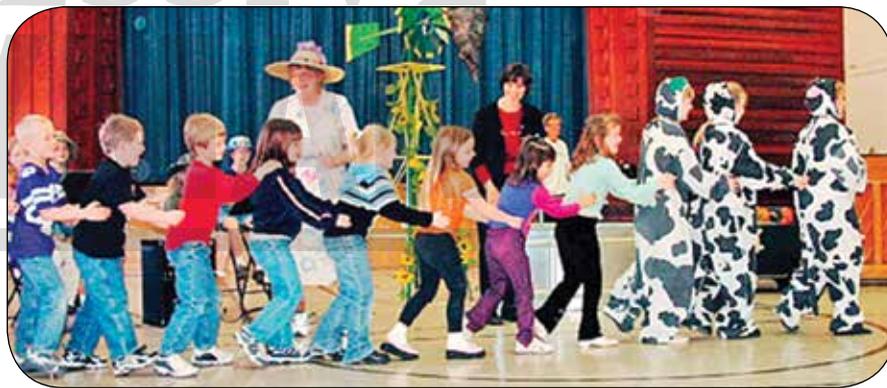
Arnold spends time teaching children in schools about being an author and also about Lily's adventures. She says that children really enjoy the book and the quirky character, which makes them want to learn more about Lily. They ask her what an Ayrshire is and other questions such as: What is a cowbell? Are there a lot of cows in Wisconsin? "It's Lily they fall in love with and can relate to," Arnold adds, explaining that Lily doesn't fit in all the time, which is normal for anyone. She also perseveres, a second relatable theme in the book.

When she visits schools, whether by Skype or in person, Arnold brings her cowbell and drum. She does a slide show presentation to show pictures of herself as a child feeding a calf, which children love. Technology integration specialist Tina Riley works at Roane County Schools in Spencer, West Virginia, and is a big fan of Arnold's book and her work with students.

Riley says she wanted to tie a Skype experience into the classroom lesson, so she did an Internet search on "Skype the Author." She picked Arnold out of the line-up, and the rest is history. The relationship between

Riley, the students in her schools and Arnold has become one they all enjoy. This rural West Virginia school system is located in an area where many families raise animals, so this was "right up their alley," Riley says, "but the new experiences gave them a whole new way of communicating."

The first experience was a simple Skype session, and after the children enjoyed Arnold's visit so much, Riley says they set up three more



Students in Phillipsburg, Kansas, act out a conga line, like the dairy cow character Lily did in Marsha Diane Arnold's book "Prancing, Dancing Lily." Photo provided by Marsha Diane Arnold.

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opportunities, involving three grade levels.

"It was just so awesome," Riley says. "The kids had a wonderful time."

In one of the calls, Arnold challenged the students to write the sequel to "Prancing, Dancing Lily." Riley says she asked the author to issue a writing prompt, as they hear from the teachers all the time. She wanted them to get a new perspective, and an author in California was very exciting for these elementary school kids.

"The ideas and creativity that came out of this opportunity, just by saying: 'Write my sequel' were amazing,"

this 30-year education professional says. She admires the fact that Arnold encourages kids to step outside their comfort zone and experience new things, just as Lily does in the book.

They loved the fact that Lily was a dancing dairy cow and trying to find her way. In their stories, the children exhibited life lessons as well as knowledge about the dairy industry. "She never gave up until she was happy," Riley says of Lily. "The students said that you should never give up on the good things you should do."

While a conga line was best for Lily, it was also the best for the farmer,

who had a happy and organized line to the barn.

#### Interactive Lily

Lily is now dancing digitally, through FatRedCouch Interactive Media's app for the "Prancing Dancing Lily" book. Riley's students were more than excited to help review it. Two fourth-grade classrooms participated in this activity, which has led to a variety of extended lesson opportunities.

She also incorporated the technology aspect again by hooking her iPad to the classroom smartboards, just another way Lily has continued to

excite the imagination of children.

Riley says the children helped review the app each time a new version came out, looking for bugs and emailing the company back with their findings. The fourth graders used this as a writing project too, authoring short and long reviews of the apps for Arnold and her publishing company.

"It turned out to be a huge project for us, and it was a lot of fun," Riley says. "The kids can say they actually reviewed an app in the production stages, and their review is at seven different locations online."

The review process also helped the fourth-grade students think more critically about their sentence structure, Riley says. Their classroom teachers have noticed a big difference in the way they are writing. The experience helped them understand the process of writing, not just seeing it as something to do, she adds.

Now they're asking when they get to Skype with Arnold again?

"Prancing, Dancing Lily" was released in 2004 by Dial Books for Young Readers (The Penguin Group) and the app just this year. The Prancing, Dancing Lily app includes an interactive, animated storybook, with narration, audio effects and music, as well as puzzles. A free, downloadable activity guide is available on the FatRedCouch website.

Arnold says that merely bringing a lovable cow to the wider audience is a positive thing for the dairy industry and builds awareness to children of all origins. While browsing past reviews of the book and app, she says the words "milking cow," "dairy herd," "heifer" and "hooves" are all used in a positive light. "Those are words we don't usually see in the wider world outside dairy farming," Arnold notes.

"If you have fun while you're learning, you're going to do it," Riley says.

"Who would have thought that reaching out to someone to do a simple Skype session would turn into so many wonderful opportunities?" **PD**

*Jennifer Bradley is a freelance writer based in East Troy, Wisconsin.*

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#### Related resources:

- Marsha's website – [www.marshadianearnold.com/](http://www.marshadianearnold.com/)
- Information about the "Prancing, Dancing Lily" App (for IOS, Android and Kindle) and the activity guide on the FatRedCouch website – [www.fatredcouch.com/Prancing\\_Dancing\\_Lily](http://www.fatredcouch.com/Prancing_Dancing_Lily)