

Maiden Voyage

By Jordan P. Hickey | Portrait by John David Pittman

On the night of July 22, 1958, a 16-year-old girl and her father left the port of San Francisco on a freighter destined for Japan. Among their personal effects were the normal trappings of travelers and tourists—enough clothes and so forth to get them through a two-month journey. Also in tow? Twenty heifers they'd collected across the Pacific Northwest for the organization that would eventually become Heifer International. To hear the story told nearly 60 years after the fact, you understand why it resonates—but it doesn't take long to realize it's not the entire story





The story is held in the dark at an even 71 degrees in a warehouse just across the road from where the piglets and alpacas live. Inside, there are hundreds of boxes stacked on metal shelves in rows across the floor. Financial records. Personnel files. Shipping records. Correspondence. For the most part, though the boxes lack a true sense of uniformity, owing to fact that a few are brown cardboard while the vast majority are white, each is labeled with a six-digit code—the white ones have barcodes, the brown ones with their numbers handwritten in black permanent marker. Taped inside each lid, there are sheets of paper with proper names, all written in the same hand.

In a sense, entering the room feels like walking through the brain of a person who is, generally speaking, fairly organized but has a secret proclivity for hoarding. Elsewhere in the space, on some of the racks toward the front, there are stacks of paintings that seem, at first glance, to be the work of children. A department-store clothes rack lined with the especially curious juxtaposition of zippered hooded sweatshirts and traditional Polish clothing is off to the side, just across the aisle from a pair of wooden ducks roosting on one of the paintings. A little easier to overlook, however, and more pertinent to the story at hand, there are a few boxes that do not have numbers and bear only the words “Seagoing Cowboys.”

In a word, this—all of this contained within Heifer International’s archive—is what it’s taken to get animals shipped clear across the world and into the hands of people who need them over the course of a 73-year history. In a word, this is Heifer. But of course, there’s only so much you can get just reading the files. They tell a story limited to what the boxes contain. For the full story, to the extent that any story can be considered complete, you have to look elsewhere.

Out the window there are mare’s tails. Wisps, long lines. Cold carried down from somewhere else to form there in the sky, she



After a week and a half on the 568-foot Hoosier Mariner, Kathy Moore (née Baldwin) and her father, Rev. Donald Baldwin, arrived in Yokohama on August 2, 1958, with the 20 heifers they’d brought from the Pacific Northwest.

explains, tracing the contours of the cirrus clouds with her finger from where she sits across the table. The air up there, it’s frozen, she says. For much of the first half hour or so, the conversation has lingered on the subject of the weather: how circular clouds of frozen ocean air ring the top of Washington’s Mount Rainier like a belt worn much too high, or how photos do not do justice to the lights of the aurora borealis, which sway in the night sky like a sheer curtain being gently shaken.

There’s little doubt that the second floor of the Heifer International headquarters just east of downtown Little Rock offers a fine vantage of the outdoors, of both the sky and the campus grounds alike. On a previous visit, sitting in the same booth, Kathy Moore, an archivist with Heifer, had given an extensive account of the moatlike pond that winds round the building and where, on one day each year, the building opens its doors to fishermen of all ages to try for the creatures lurking almost entirely undisturbed deep within the water’s murk.

But of course, Kathy and I haven’t met to discuss weather patterns, the ecology of the nonprofit’s campus or anything even remotely related to the present moment.

The story we’re supposed to be discussing deals with more terrestrial matters, a story that took place thousands and thousands of miles away, and nearly 60 years earlier—and which is largely contained in the unopened photo album sitting on the table between us. That’s not to say, however, that she’s putting off telling the story. If anything, the fact that our conversation has managed to hold strong to microclimates and cloud formations for the better part of half an hour speaks to her nature as a woman whose eyes and heart are held rapt and enamored by many things—with the outdoors being key among those, and those boxes stored just up the road from the alpacas right up there as well.

To understand why this is, you have to know a few things about Kathy. For one, as Heifer’s archivist, those are the materials she deals with on a daily basis: She works through the boxes, one at a time, scanning them in, cataloging and logging the information contained within each of them. Secondly, you need to understand just how long she’s been with the organization: She started Jan. 6, 1990, a date she recalls without the suggestion of hesitation, spending four years as a full-time volunteer sending out consignment materials to churches. Thirdly, you need to know that the archive as it exists today was, for all intents and purposes, Kathy’s doing. Which is to say: Those sheets of paper taped to the inside lids? That was her doing.

As she tells it, back in 1994, not long after she officially joined the staff, she spent nine months sitting on the floor sifting through records and papers that had come in from all over the country—from California



to New England—to prepare for the organization’s 50th anniversary. She sifted through each box, occasionally having to wear gloves and a mask if the files had been, let’s say, less-than-carefully stored, as was the case with the files kept in a barn out in Perryville. In fact, if you look at the inside lids of the older boxes, you can still find sheets of paper with her handwriting that provide keywords and proper names mentioned in the files.

If that all feels a little Russian dollish, with each layer yielding an increasingly intertwined history—well, that’s true. However, it’s only when Kathy reaches for the photo album placed between us on the table that the extent of those intertwined histories is revealed. She opens the album, and we pick up where she’d left off before.

Outside her window, the moon was bright, the ocean was indigo. The cows were quiet, penned up on deck in sheds made with steel beams and heavy plywood, loose straw bunched around their ankles. It had been no small task getting them aboard that afternoon. The longshoremen on the docks of the San Francisco port had balked at the idea of loading the cattle, so the task was largely left to her, a 16-year-old girl, and her father, the Rev. Donald Baldwin. One by one, they lifted each of the 20 heifers onto the deck of the Hoosier Mariner, a massive ocean freighter almost two football fields long, using a “flying stall” that was dangled in front of the truck’s tailgate. A crane then lifted stall and cow onto the ship, where Kathy, wearing high heels and getting dust and grime on her white cotton dress, then coaxed them out and into the enclosures on the deck. It took them two hours to get all of the animals onboard. That evening, on July 22, 1958, they watched as the Golden Gate Bridge receded into the purple gloaming behind the ship. It would be a week and a half before they saw land again—before they landed at the port in Yokohama, some 25 miles south of Tokyo, and the cattle were delivered.

The events of the next week and a half were guided largely by routine. Early each morning, at 6, they poured a fresh bucket of water into each cow’s manger and gave them a coffee can full of grain. Although the Pacific Ocean was fairly different than their home in the Pacific Northwest, the cattle, unlike her father, seemed largely untroubled by the motion. Members of the crew and other passengers—a pair of missionaries, several Korean doctors, a zoology professor from the University of California—came by and visited periodically. Ironically enough, on the third day of the voyage, Kathy would be banished from helping with the cattle after crew members complained that having a woman around was bad luck.

Although the setting was different, this wasn’t necessarily new, working with animals. Her uncle had a dairy farm roughly 50 miles



Top left: The Pacific Ocean may have been a very different setting compared with grass pastures in Washington state, but the heifers were by and large untroubled by the motion.

southeast of Seattle in Morton, the town where she’d been born and where the family often gathered for holidays because her uncle was unable to take time away from milking the cows. In school, she participated in 4-H, showing heifers and rabbits and chickens. She used her baby-sitting money—she and her older sister charged 25 cents an hour, 50 cents if it happened to be New Year’s Eve—to pay for feed and to shoe her horse. But yet, this was different, what she and her father were doing. Though not entirely unprecedented—this was the 443rd shipment of livestock that Heifer had made since getting started just shy of 14 years before—this was new just the same. Just 13 years had passed since two atomic bombs had been dropped on the place that was now their destination. What would they find? What would it be like?

She must have had some idea, however.

During the war years, there had been no shortage of fear and animosity toward the unknown: The attack on Pearl Harbor had sparked the need to run drills for bombing raids and sirens, with students forced to huddle into the corners of their classrooms against the imagined enemy. In the years after, however, as the world struggled to put itself back together, and fear and resentment continued to linger—given the internment of nearly 120,000 Japanese residents during the war years, many of whom returned to their homes only to find them stolen, this was more than warranted—her family was somewhat different. The daughter of a Methodist minister, she’d spent her early years moving clear across the state, from Spokane in the far east, and Seattle and Tacoma in the far west. Eventually, she and her family found themselves south of Tacoma, a place home to a sizable population of Japanese refugees, many of whom she met and befriended through her father’s friendship with a man by the name of Alpha Takagi, a minister at the Tacoma Japanese Methodist Church.



Although delivering the cattle and attending the International Christian Education Conference were the main reasons for the trip, the Baldwins still had plenty of time for sightseeing—including a stop at the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Imperial Hotel in Tokyo.

Although she was sailing clear across the world, there must have been some comfort in knowing the people she would find there were, in fact, people no different than her. And of course, she had her father. He was in a different part of the ship, lodging with the officers in a bunk with sheets musty with the high humidity. He was also, at the time, feeling rather under the weather, the beginning of a prolonged bout of nausea and headaches that would plague him for much of the two-month trip, both on the water and off it.

To hear Kathy speak about him, you would think he must’ve measured upward of 20 feet tall, though in reality, he was closer to 6 feet 2. He was affable and charismatic, the sort who would go out for folk dancing on Fridays, a passion he’d pass along to his daughter, but who was stern when it came to his children. Though he was always friendly and obliging with his parishioners, he was not known to smile much around the house. He was industrious and self-made, the sort of man who would fashion his own cross-country skis and, when traveling to Japan, tour the engine room with the chief engineer and make careful note of the ship’s propeller shaft (“laying in trough of oil—no lid—length of ship—22” of steel and visible for hundreds of feet which turned a 22” propeller. Burns 1 1/3 barrels of diesel oil per hour”). It should come as no surprise, then, that he was the sort of man who, when faced with a challenge—say, attending a conference taking place clear across the world—would find a means of solving it.

The previous fall, he’d gotten wind of a less-than-traditional, but arguably more cost-effective, way of attending the coming year’s International Christian Education Conference in Tokyo: If they were able to secure and help chaperone Holstein heifers, pregnant milk-producing cows, to Hokkaido, Japan, for the then still rather young Heifer Project, they would earn their passage across the Pacific. In many respects, the journey was not unlike those taken by other “seagoing cowboys” who had enlisted to help the organization. The first trip had been made when a ship of 17 heifers left from Pennsylvania for Puerto Rico on June 18, 1944. In the years since, other trips had been made to destinations all around the globe, from Europe to Africa—and in each case, the “cowboys” had been men. However, when he was deciding to take the trip, her father decided to bring Kathy along. For one, he knew that she’d long wanted to be a missionary. He knew she had an eye for livestock, having been trained as a dairy judge. He knew, finally, that she wanted to see the world—and when he asked her, he’d hardly finished his sentence when she answered, Yes. His wife was equally enthusiastic about the idea and bought him two suitcases for his birthday, even before he’d even put in an application with the Modesto, California, office.

Having settled that the two of them would go, they spent the next several months working with Takagi to promote their cause: They paid visits to local farmers and sent mailers to members of the Washington State

Holstein Dairymen, asking farmers to donate heifers or at least provide a discounted rate. At one point, Kathy and her father were even the subject of a write-up in the local paper. (Kathy was still in school, so she was only able to attend these excursions on weekends.) Eventually, after months of following leads, and a harried, whirlwind trip with the heifers to San Francisco, they successfully boarded the ship, chaperoning the 20 cows across the ocean.

It looked familiar. As the train wound its way from the fishing villages up into the mountains, they passed cedar and pine trees, foliage not unlike what she’d seen growing up in Washington. From the window of their uncrowded, second-class salon-style compartment, she and her father saw houses with thatched roofs, some trellised with sweet potatoes.

For Kathy, in particular, who’d spent the majority of their first week ashore baby-sitting for an American missionary couple who’d come to the conference from where they were stationed in Madagascar, the views from the window must have been particularly inspiring. This was Hokkaido, the second largest of Japan’s main islands, and the one farthest to the north. It was also where the majority of the cattle they’d helped bring over would eventually arrive. (At this moment, the cattle were still in quarantine. Brucellosis, a highly contagious disease caused by bacteria, had been found in several of the animals,



During the two months they spent traveling up and down Japan, Kathy and her father had an opportunity to see a place that most could only dream of. What they found, however, was a place with more similarities to home than differences.

Top right: Kathy stands in front of Heifer International's headquarters in Little Rock.



which required careful monitoring and eventually resulted in two of the animals being destroyed as a precautionary measure.)

Kathy and her father arrived that night in Sapporo, Hokkaido's capital, a city laid out along a grid of rectangular blocks in the Western style. The next day, they went to the Christian College of Dairy Agriculture, a 350-acre campus-farm located an hour's drive north of Sapporo.

Although their time was relatively limited that first visit, it was more than ample time to realize that the college and its supporting foundation, the Dairy-Farming Education Foundation, had played a considerable role in making their trip possible. Even long before the college was established in 1949, the school literature stated, its founders had been attempting to introduce dairy farming into the local rural economy. (Up until this point, it said, "the per-capita consumption of all milk products amounts to less than a pint a year.") The 80 students whom her father addressed—and, later that day, the young professors who would later be sent to study and conduct research at universities in the U.S. and Denmark—were particularly interested in this new form of agriculture, given the challenges they faced in that part of the country: Six months of the year were considered winter, and the past three years had seen 50 to 90 percent of crops all but wiped out.

The next day, they took a train to a place called Engaru. Accommodations on the train weren't nearly as comfortable as the second-class cabin had been on the train to Hokkaido. Crowded into the third-class cabin, there were people all around. People changed clothes in their seats, women nursed infants, and there were many children. In a word, the conditions were less than pleasant—dirty and smelly, as her father described them in his journal—but there were still many good sights to be seen from the windows. Rice, potatoes and grapes could be seen growing in the green, green fields. Hills rolled away from the tracks, and the rivers were muddy with rain. At each station, vendors approached

their windows selling boxes of rice and meat, tea and fruit. It was dusty that night when they arrived at Engaru.

When they toured the Kate Gako school, a boarding school for delinquent or orphaned boys ages 8 to 15, the following day, they saw some of the heifers from the previous shipment that had arrived just two weeks before. Here was one of their first opportunities to see for themselves the sort of place where the animals they'd accompanied over would make an impact.

Over the course of the next several weeks, they toured the country, from tip to tip, north to south. However, even as they were flooded with the novelty of the new and unfamiliar, one of the most poignant realizations came in seeing the farms where the cows would eventually end up. In seeing these people, the families putting their lives back together and who were just beginning to care for their land in a new and different way, she could not help but be struck by how similar they were to her: These people weren't any different. For starters, of course, they were people. But they were also pioneers in a way that her own family had been pioneers once. She was reminded of her own great-grandfather, who had crossed the United States in a covered wagon, traveling from Connecticut to Sacramento, California. Upon arriving there with a young and burgeoning family that would soon grow to 10 with eight children, he worked on a river boat up and down the Sacramento River, operating something like a floating grocery store for small communities along the banks of the river.

“So ... that's about it.” On one of the last pages of the photo album, there's a photo of her, face turned away from the camera, collar flared up around her ears like a supervillain's cowl with the white clouds billowing over the black rocks from some deep place in the Earth, well outside the frame. She's wearing a white blouse matched to the color of the smoke, looking down over the cliffs, her black skirt the focal draw of the photograph. She's just finished saying what it was like looking into the volcano. There wasn't any lava that she could see. Yellow sulfurous powder had covered the rocks.

As she turns through the last remaining pages of the photo album, she finds a pair of photographs that have been taken out of order and placed in the back. In one, there's the silhouette of the Golden Gate bridge, a photo made the night they left. In the other, you see her and her father, just the slightest bit out of focus, eating at a Mongolian restaurant in Japan. It's one of the very few photos that he appears in, more often preferring the role of photographer. He's looking at the camera and wears an apron, a plate of food on his lap, a pair of chopsticks in his hand just to the right of the plate. He's smiling. Kathy, seated to his left, is wearing the same sort of apron, what must have been a standard issue for the restaurant, over her white dress, having some difficulty breaking up the meat coming off the grill set on their table. She seems unaware that a photo is being made.

“This picture doesn't belong here,” she says, “but like I said, I've had too many people in here. Actually, I have a lot more at home.

But they're in a big book, and I've taken out the best.”

Sitting in the booth, almost 60 years removed from the photos whose story she's just explained, she's very different from the young woman in the photograph. She's a small woman, wears a blue turtleneck with her Heifer lanyard on a black string. Her glasses are set with thick lenses that seem strikingly similar to the ones she wore as an adolescent. She flips the book closed so it lies flat on the table. It's unremarkable to look at, turquoise with a pattern of tiny sky-blue fleurs-de-lis.

That's the story. The same story she's been telling for decades. The same story told by the shipping records and correspondence held in a box in the Heifer archive. But—and this is so important to stress—this isn't where Kathy's story stops. If anything, this is where much of it starts.

It's about this time, when she's describing what happened when she and her father returned from Japan, that the story begins to shift. Specifically, it's when she's talking about the photos that she's just finished using to tell the story of Japan. They're copies of the slides her dad made to give presentations to churches, and the photos “were something that my dad had in his study all those years, available, so anytime somebody wanted to hear about [them], he had them available.”

In the next breath, however, she says, “but when my parents got to when they couldn't stay by themselves anymore ...” She pauses. “He was a minister. He didn't really retire. And he was a strong man. But when he got up in his 80s, he was having these tiny ischemic
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That's the story. The same story she's been telling for decades. The same story told by the shipping records and correspondence held in a box in the Heifer archive. But it's important to note, her story goes well beyond this.



Although the trip Kathy made to Japan as a 16-year-old girl was a brief one, its effects have rippled and resonated all throughout her life.





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strokes. And in a few days, his speech would clear again; he'd slur for a while. But he was losing energy. You know, it would accumulate. ... It got to where he would just whisper. He knew what was going on. But he'd whisper, and he didn't have the strength."

For the next few minutes, the story follows a different vein than it had been previously.

She talks about how her youngest brother had brought her mom and dad down to Arkansas for a short visit. This was "way back when," somewhere in the '90s, the same year that he'd had a stroke. They'd taken him out to Pinnacle Mountain, her brother in front, Kathy in back ("it should have been the other way"), taking their father up the staircaselike path, all the way to the top. "Even with his weakness," she says, "he knew how to climb a mountain, so he was going to climb a mountain. And he did. But that was the last mountain he ever climbed."

From that point, though the conversation returns briefly to her trip (on the voyage home, she recalls dorming with Japanese war brides and looking up at the stars from the upper-class swimming pool, feeling like she was swimming in the Pacific ocean), it's only for a few moments. Instead, she tells stories about her father, her family, her memories growing up, the trips she took later in life. She talks about being 11 years old and seeing a local beach absolutely covered in Portuguese Man-O-War. She remembers being young and, with her mother's encouragement, learning how to catch a Dungeness crab by reaching over the pointy ends and picking it up from behind. She talks about Honduras as a terrifying place to land an airplane, and Cambodia after Pol Pot's mass genocide as a place of nothing.

In effect, she talks about what seems to be everything.

The last time we meet, we look out the window. There are the gingkoes and red maples, the albino redbuds that produce light-yellow leaves in the fall, white flowers in the spring. There are the first nascent shoots of *Rudbeckia maxima*—better known as great coneflowers but which she refers to using their Latin name—but which will grow to be 6 feet tall. She talks about the animals housed at Heifer's urban farm, describing how one of the turkeys fluffs up his plumage when he greets her, or how she's on a first-name basis with one of the alpacas ("Star"). She talks about the vegetables growing in the plots of the community garden, but admits she grows her own vegetables at home.

When we finally sit down to chat, I ask her to tell me about her early years with

Heifer—and she tells me a 30-minute story about how she aided a handful of Laotian refugees in the '70s, before saying, finally, that she reconnected with the organization at an international fair in 1989. At the time, truthfully, I fail to see the significance and hurry to get my last questions answered—however, it's only retrospect that I start to realize something: None of this would have happened had it not been for the trip she took as a 16-year-old girl.

Of course, one can never really know what course a life will take, but what's certain is this: Before she went there, she'd been sure that she'd become a missionary focused on agriculture. When she got home, however, she met with her adviser and told him she wanted to pursue a degree in anthropology with a minor in Far East studies at the University of Washington. Had she not gone there, she likely would have never worked for the U.S. Postal Service, never met her husband, whom she's been with for 52 years. In all likelihood, she would never have moved to Little Rock, never have met the Laotian refugees who moved to Arkansas in the '70s, and who became her family over the next several decades. Of course, all things being equal, it's impossible to say exactly what would have happened, but even if she somehow had found herself in Arkansas and stumbled across the Heifer International table at a street fair in Little Rock in 1989, she would never have been able to say: *I was there.*

Of course, there will always be more to stories such as these. A story will never be able to fit inside a box, in a photo album—much less be told over the course of two hour-long conversations. Even in those more thorough accounts, there will always be details left on the cutting-room floor. In this case, for example, with the amount of detail that her father was able to fit into his journals, there would be enough for another several thousand words of narrative color alone. An entire book could probably be written on what Kathy knows about clouds and the microclimates of the Pacific Northwest.

By their nature, however, stories have beginnings and middles and ends. They're limited to a certain stretch of time, which allows for drama and tension to be built, for there to be a resolution, for the story to be satisfying in the way that any story seeks to be. The reason we keep telling them, however, is that they're always changing, becoming more vibrant. No matter how many times we hear them, there are always elements that make us think we're hearing them for the first time. **AL**

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