



Laurie (left) lights candles in her store. The Kromm family (below) includes Laurie and David (back row), daughters Solvei, Inger and Sateash (center row) and grandson, Devan.



Burning at Both Ends

This Wisconsin candle maker pours her heart into her art.

By Laurie Kromm MINERAL POINT, WISCONSIN

Happy holidays from beautiful southwest Wisconsin! My family and I live on a 600-acre farm outside of Mineral Point. My family and I share our land with 200 beef cows, 200 calves, 12 herd bulls, six llamas, countless cats and our family dog.

Ironically, being born and raised in Wisconsin, the land of milk and cheese, I didn't even know there were beef cattle in this state. I learned a lot about beef farming soon after meeting my husband, David, who grew up on a farm in West Brooklyn, Illinois.

David learned by watching his dad, Dale, and his mom, Geraldine, feed cattle and plant and harvest crops. Later, he established his own farm in Wisconsin.

I met David, the love of my life, in 1984, and we married four years later. My 10-year-old daughter, Sateash, and I moved to the farm.

For many years I was a stay-at-home mom and farm wife. I loved to weave, garden, raise chickens, cook, bake and be at home with my daughters, Sateash, Inger and Solvei.



In 2000, I started my own business—SpringHouse Candles and Scents—in the kitchen of our 75-year-old farmhouse. I was frustrated with expensive candles that burned poorly, so I made my own.

The business outgrew the kitchen, so we built a small manufacturing facility and retail store on the farm. We sell our candles nationwide on our Web site, www.springhousecandles.com, which went live in 2002. The business is now an important part of my life. I enjoy knowing that so many people appreciate what I produce.

My kids play a big role in my candle business and help out in the shop. Even my 8-year-old grandson, Devan, puts labels on votives for me.

From the first of October until the end of December, 16-hour days in the shop are not unusual. It's almost impossible to balance work and family, but I do make it to my daughters' volleyball games and gymnastic meets and manage to make an occasional meal. This is my the busiest time of the year, so we all make sacrifices.

Sunday My day starts at 4 a.m. I made my way down to the shop in the early-morning chill. I turned on the

coffeemaker, began melting the re-pour wax and sat down at my computer to print out labels and the online orders placed overnight.

Then I began to re-pour the many candles poured the day before. The wax shrinks overnight and creates a sinkhole that must be filled after the candle is completely cooled. This process is called re-pouring.

While I was working, my dear friend and longtime manager, Laurie Sue,

From left to right: Inger, Sateash and Solvei prep the candle jars with wicks before Laurie pours the wax.

About an hour later, I was back in the shop pouring candles. Sateash, Inger and Solvei worked with me today.

The girls regularly help. They glue wicks into empty jars and clean the outside of the jars, which have to be free of any kind of residue before applying the SpringHouse Candles label.

"The business is now an important part of my life, and I enjoy knowing that so many people appreciate what I produce."

walked into the shop about 5 a.m. She has been working for me since my days of pouring candles in the kitchen.

Around 7 a.m., I headed to the shed to feed the llamas and then to the kitchen to put a beef roast, potatoes and carrots in the slow cooker for supper. Slow cookers are the best invention since sliced bread.

While we spent our time working in the shop today, David was out feeding cattle. This may sound like a simple job, but with over 400 head, it takes hours.

After a long day in the shop filling orders and pouring candles, the girls and Devan took some time to go sledding.

We all made our way to the house at 6 p.m. and had a nice family dinner.



David (left) feeds the cattle. He raises about 400 head of beef cattle on the family's 600-acre farm. The cattle graze in this 90-acre pasture during the winter.



Monday Winter storm warning. They've predicted 6 to 10 inches of snow for the surrounding area.

The sun rose about 7 a.m. and flooded the sky with bright reds and pinks. "Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning." It seemed that the old saying was right on track.

We had some snow yesterday, and it covered the farm beautifully. Though it is an amazing sight to behold, the large amounts of snow created a lot of work for David, who had to clear the lane with one of his tractors.

In addition to clearing snow, David moved many round bales at the top of our hill to the 90-acre pasture where the cattle winter. This makes feeding easier.

Laurie Sue packed and shipped orders all day. She is involved in all aspects of the business and is literally my right arm. Laurie Sue's sister, Linda, cleaned and labeled the candles while I poured.

In order to pour a perfect candle, I start by melting wax in my 300-pound melter. From there I take the melted wax and put it into my 70-pound melter and add the wonderful fragrance and color. The wax is then individually poured into hot, clean jars. These jars must be hot out of the oven so the wax will not immediately cool.

School was released early due to

weather, so I went into town to pick up Solvei. Inger had to drive home from her nearby college campus. Both girls hope for a snow day tomorrow, so they can be lazy all day. Little do they know that they will be giving me much needed help in the shop.

Tuesday I woke up at 4 a.m. to a snow-covered winter wonderland. I love the 70-yard trek to the shop in the dark and making the first footprints in this freshly fallen snow. The holiday

able to break last year's record of 101 inches. The weather forecast predicted 6 more inches today.

I put the girls to work in the shop, so I had a full crew today: Laurie Sue, Inger, Solvei, Linda and my dear friend Jodi all braved the snow to get candles ready for the rush of holiday sales.

Many orders came in overnight, and they all needed to be filled and sent out to our customers.

Dinner was self-serve tonight. I poured candles until after 11 p.m.

"A little bit of my heart goes into each candle I pour... I love what I do everyday."

lights on the house, the lights on the shop and the star on the cattle shed all give the perfect illumination to the early-morning stillness.

The girls got their wish, sort of. Solvei's school was canceled. Inger's wasn't, but she was snowbound on the farm. Normal yearly snowfall for this area is 49 inches. So far, 12 days before the first day of winter, we have already had 15 inches of snow. Maybe we will be

Wednesday The stars were out and 4 inches of fresh snow was on the ground when I walked down to the shop this morning.

The wax I poured last night was still warm from the night before. It was a late night of pouring candles, which didn't allow for the 12 hours of cooling that wax needs in order to shrink and form a sinkhole for the re-pour. I am waiting

for the Balsam Fir, Christmas Memories, Holly Berry and Hot Apple Pie candles to cool completely so I can finish pouring and then clean and label the jars. I found two orders from California and Maryland on the fax machine. I think I will send some of our beautiful snow to California.

Along with the wholesale orders were the last of the SpringHouse Candles fundraisers for the season. Many groups sell our candles to raise money for their organizations. This is a busy time, and I will be burning the candle at both ends.

David had a late night of doing chores after a long day of pregnancy-checking 170 cows.

Thursday The moon was phenomenal this morning. Laurie Sue walked in the door at 4:10 a.m. Oh, my, for a couple of old ladies, we aren't getting enough sleep. Amazing how you can put yourself on autopilot, which means melting, mixing, pouring, cleaning, labeling, boxing, updating the Web site, filling orders, shipping orders, ordering supplies, doing bookwork and helping customers. Then we do it all over again the next day.

At 10 a.m., the UPS driver and a customer met on the lane, which is 10 feet wide. The UPS driver veered to the side to avoid the customer and got stuck. He freed himself, and about two hours later, a semi drove up to deliver shipping boxes and packing peanuts, and he got stuck! It took him an hour to get out of this winter paradise.

Friday Four o'clock came too quickly this morning, and my morning coffee tasted especially sweet.

There were a lot of shoppers online overnight. This is an exciting time around the holidays. Today, we shipped out 14 candle lamps, candle warmers and candle accessories along with a lot of candles. Oh, my! I am expecting a big shipment of candle lamps. Hope it comes in soon.

At 9 a.m. the lane grabbed another victim—Inger. She was leaving for school and went too far off the side and got stuck. Unfortunately, this is not In-



Clockwise from the top: the family's 75-year-old farmhouse; Laurie with Rhea the llama; Sateash, Solvei, Inger and Devan go sledding on the farm hills.

ger's first time. Good thing David has a dependable tractor. He pulled our daughter out of the snow.

Even though it is winter, David is looking toward the fall harvest. He is planning on buying a new combine and is making a deal on another. He was off for the afternoon to talk with the dealer and possibly make a buy.

Saturday Tonight was Gallery Night in Mineral Point. Gallery Night is a traditional holiday shopping experience that draws many tourists to our historic downtown and its art galleries. I was the featured artist at Bobbi Jo's Interiors and showed many shoppers how to burn candles properly.

This week was one of laughter, love and togetherness. My family and friends are the heart of this business. A little bit of my heart goes into each candle I pour. I am a woman who loves what I do everyday and feel truly blessed to be able to share it with you. 



Web Exclusive!

See photos of the Kromm family by logging on to www.country-magazine.com. Then click on "Links" to learn more about SpringHouse Candles Scents.