

## Farm Safety: A Lesson Learned

by

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I was eight years old, and it was my second summer as a farm kid. I had not yet acquired the necessary farm safety knowledge and my parents did very little to help educate me. I guess they just assumed I would learn on my own; unfortunately, they were right. Even though my lessons were learned alone, they were generally witnessed by my sister.

I was very rarely left home with a babysitter, nonetheless, on this bright, warm summer day, my parents left my older sister in charge of the farm and of me. With three-hundred fifty acres of farm land to explore, including a creek in the cattle pasture, we needed to decide what we were going to do to occupy our time. I was usually content playing in the yard, but my sister, however, declared she wanted to go fishing. I was faced with the decision to go fishing or to stay home alone.

Staying home alone may not seem like an altogether life-altering experience, but being alone in my home was different. The large white monstrosity was one-hundred years old and very well-known because a previous owner had committed suicide in an underground tunnel. This event led to rumors of hauntings and of unexplained happenings.

Taking the previous facts into consideration, I weighed them against the fishing option. There was one very large problem with this choice, and I could spell it out with six letters—C A T T L E. I was not a big fan of livestock, and to reach the fishing spot, I would have to walk through the ankle deep manure in the cattle yard, past the cattle, and down in the pasture to the creek.

I made my decision; I would stay home.

Now, I tried to persuade my sister to wait and go fishing when our parents returned, but I think she found immense pleasure in seeing me so upset. So, without a speck of concern or second thought, off she went with her fishing pole in hand and a smirk on her face. I was alone.

I immediately sought refuge behind the leather recliner in our bedroom, the former parlor. I wept uncontrollably until my face was tear-stained and red, and my breathing erratic. Then I started to second guess my decision, asking myself, how bad could the cattle be? At least if I were fishing I would have my sister to protect me. Here, alone, I was left to defend myself against whatever evil was waiting for me.

Decision overturned; I was going fishing.

Even though I was never a fast runner, I managed to make it out of the house in record time. I ran down through the yard, climbed over the rickety fence, and entered the manure-filled cattle yard. To my relief, the cattle were all out to pasture. Even without their presence, my pace did not slow, nor did my wailing. This led to my first lesson: loud noises scare cattle.

As I continued on my journey in the direction of the creek, hurdling the long grass and trying not to stumble on any hidden cow pies, I failed to notice the sudden excitement in the grazing cattle. When I briefly looked back to note my progress, I was horrified to see the cattle rapidly approaching. They, too, had decided to join my marathon toward the creek. Lesson number two: cattle are fast runners when they sense danger or food.

My loud cries alerted my sister of my impending arrival and the danger following close behind. Realizing the cattle's speed was like a freight train and my speed was like a bicycle with a flat tire, my sister redirected my route toward the nearest escape which happened to be the fence by the road. I made a sharp right turn, and I followed my sister to the fence—the electric

fence. Decision time again—I had to choose between electricity and very large animals. I chose the electricity, which led to lesson number three: electricity is painful.

My sister made it over the electric fence just fine; regrettably, I did not. The stringy little tank top I was wearing became entangled in the electric fence. Every time I moved, 2500 volts of electricity marred the skin on my back and created a sensation that felt like I had swallowed my mom's sewing pins and they were flying freely through my smaller than average body. This reminded me of the time my sister tested the pig shocker on me; that was a lesson in trust. I could run away from the pain then, but now I was trapped.

“Help me!” I cried.

My sister turned back and then evaluated my predicament. She was not sure what to do and did not offer immediate assistance. She knew she would get shocked if she helped unwind my shirt strings. After a brief moment of what appeared to be thinking, she announced the plan. “I will get a scissors and cut your shirt off.”

I was not sure I liked this plan, since I really liked my stringy tank top, but my freedom was at stake. Left without any other options to consider, I agreed to the scissors remedy. With the decision made, my sister headed off to get the scissors, leaving me to ponder the situation.

The cattle had finally settled down and just stood there, staring and mooing as slimy green cud dripped from their mouths. I was able to calm down, and I felt relatively safe with a fence separating us. Now, I am naturally paranoid and have a vivid imagination, and even though the cattle no longer seemed to be a threat, I kept thinking about all the other things that could happen: a kidnapper could drive by, a friend could drive by, or worse, my sister could decide she liked me better stuck to the fence. I tried to put all of these scenarios out of my head, although it was a difficult task given the time it was taking my rescuer to return.

Just as I was giving up on the idea of freedom, I saw my sister running down the ditch carrying the scissors. When she arrived, she quickly cut my shirt down the front, and stated, “I must cut it down the front so I don’t get shocked.” I wondered why she did not cut the strings, but then I decided it was not wise to question the one holding the scissors. With a sigh of relief, I embraced my newly established freedom, and then realized the task that lie ahead: I would have to run half naked back home.

Because of the flurry of events that led up to this point, I did not realize how far I had wandered from home, but now, running partially unclothed up an incline, the distance was very obvious. I tried to cover myself since I had to completely abandon what was left of my tank top. I also prayed, and remembered how my mom said that God would never give you more than you could handle, but at that moment, I could have handled faster legs. Keeping the fastest pace possible, I ran up the slope of the ditch and into the safety of my yard.

When I entered the house, I put on a different shirt, rested for a moment, and then my sister and I discussed the events that took place. After careful consideration, we decided to not tell Mom or Dad about the lessons I learned in farm safety. If they needed tips on farm safety, they would have to get them elsewhere.