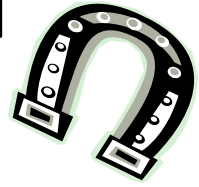


Down on the Farm



by Stan Thompson....

It started out with one of those really good plans that I come up with now and then. I could tell by the look in my wife's eyes that she was thinking back to some of my other really good plans. Such as the "Why don't we get married?" plan, and that all time favorite, "Let's get the kids a puppy" plan. Well sure there might have been a few little bumps along the way but all in all they were good plans. Well, ok maybe the puppy grew into a huge dog and maybe that time I lifted him into the back of the pickup and ruined my back and had to have surgery, maybe that wasn't too good of an idea. But I never said anything when I carried her over the threshold and hurt my back. It might not have been the puppy's fault after all.

But, I digress. We were planning on working cows that fine fall day. Ear tag, give shots, vaccinate, all the usual fall games that you play when you have cattle and a willing wife with working age children (Son#1 10 & Son #2 8 1/2). I thought that it might be fun to have someone on the roof of the barn filming all this fun, for posterity you know. One of my sons, being slightly quicker than the other son, and seeing the advantage of sitting on the barn versus being knocked around by a bunch of cows, quickly volunteered to be the camera man.



The cattle sorting went as usual, and after all bloody noses were patched up and a general peace truce was agreed upon, we commenced with running the cattle through the chute. We seemed to hit a glitch with Son # 2 not quite running the head gate the way he should, so I calmly said to Son #1 "Do you want to turn that off for a second please?" Whereupon he did and I had a few quiet words with Son #2 on how to improve his performance, I signaled to the camera man to start up again, and we went back to our games.

Two cows later we went through the same process. "Can you turn that off again for a minute?" And I again pointed out some slight failure in our process, this time addressing the valuable information to my wife. A couple of cows later, "Shut the camera off!" Here again I passed on some much needed advice. Several cows later "What in the world are you doing? What? Yes, shut off the stupid camera! Why is this so hard for you guys to figure out?" As you might have surmised, things were starting to go slightly down hill. It was at this time that I felt my leadership ability might be better expressed through example so I asked them to sit down for a couple of cows while I demonstrated the performance I was asking of them. (Somehow this was transformed via camera into "Just get out of the way while I show you how simple this can be!")

After one cow escaped, I forgot to vaccinate two head and I got my hand caught in the head gate, I figured they had the general idea and I allowed them to rejoin the operation. Soon after my wife pinched her toe, Son #2 was crying, small girl child was cringing in fear out by the pickup which was serving as the main wing of the fence, I instructed Son #1 to come down off the barn and help with the work, I mean games.

One game that was a success was my teaching the dog to play Dodge the Stick. It works like this:



Dog chases wrong cow wrong way. I take swipe at dog with stick. Dog dodges stick. This was such a big success I decided to play another game I'm good at. It's called Transference. It is played liked this. I transfer all energy that I'm not passing on to dog via the Dodge Stick game to my immediate working staff. I used to be very good at this game.

The taped documentation revealed many discrepancies between memory and fact that day. Where I remember saying "Maybe we should work a little faster" the camera portrayed this as "Get your butt in gear!" Where I remember "I wonder what happened there?" the camera remembers "What in the @\$% did you do that for!" While I distinctly remember inquiring to Son #2 "Did you happen to see which way that last tag went in?" the camera record me saying "Get your head out of your #\$5# and look at what you are doing!" The film generally supported her version but I'm pretty sure she must have dubbed some of the conversation in.

We did the get the project completed. Finally. We all went our separate ways for the day and by supper they had forgiven me to the point that I was allowed to fix supper and wash dishes. I think I even got to watch what I wanted on TV that night. I believe they went to a movie in Pierre.

The whole episode was quietly shut away in the back of our minds to ponder, an experience to grow from. We all carried our own version of the incident around until, many years later, while browsing through some old VCR movies we came across one labeled "Cow Games." Not having quite the memory that my wife does, I said "Hey, let's watch this. Just for old time's sake." Well, we watched the movie, or at least up to the part that Son #1 had to get down off the barn and help. If I remember right, I was allowed to fix my own supper again that night. I'm not sure why she would be still unhappy with me after all these years. I'm sure I said I was sorry many, many times since then. I wonder if it is because on film I had pantomimed kicking her in her pants pocket several times, or maybe it was where I almost attempted to teach her the Dodge Stick game behind her back. These are the only frames really in focus during the whole stupid movie. Thank you Son # 1. I tired to cover up by sweetly stating that I didn't see any truth to the saying that the TV adds 10 pounds to everyone as she didn't look any bigger then than she does now. I could tell by the look I got from that remark that I better hit the mute button more often.

the end.....for now

(Stan is the CED for Marshall County)