

My parents' farm in Western North Dakota was a haven for all kinds of creatures and critters, ducks, chickens, horses, pigs, a few sheep, a "Christmas goose," two, dogs—several cats, a tame house sparrow named "Tweety," and anywhere from 20 to 60 head of cattle.

We had about 1,000 acres of crop land, 400 acres of hay land and 400 acres of pasture land all in Hettinger County in the great "High Plains" of North Central US.

All animals, wild or tame, were respected and well-treated. It was one of the strongest ethics that my parents had. Strays were always cared for if not adopted. Pets were people, too, and each had their personalities and quirks. I am particularly fond of the following memory and of the animals. I miss them – one and all – very much.

Dynamite and **Crazy** were two Hereford cows that dad had in the herd when it was at its largest. **Dynamite** was likely to blow up at any minute and was noted for chasing people. **Crazy** was, well, "crazy" and as likely to take off into the sunset as she was to chase after you with grim gray eyes flaring.

Dad put them in the barn on rare occasions when they needed it by getting them to chase him into the door, running through the barn, and jumping out the back window. Someone would be

closing the door in the meantime. But they were good cows and had good calves and Dad treated them as well as all his other "friends."

I was in grade school, probably about the fourth grade, because I was left to my own devices when I got off the big yellow school bus, Number 6, after an hour ride. By that time it would be about 4:30 p.m. when I got home and chores would be in full swing. So it didn't really surprise me when I came home and didn't see Mom or Dad any where.

Fred, aka. **Freddie the Freeloader**, a very large and very dumb stray Irish setter welcomed me in usual fashion. Running at full speed, gaining momentum all the way down the quarter mile driveway then catching me square on the shoulders with his front paws, knocking me flat in the dust and gravel, and nearly drowning me with what seemed like a

two-foot-long tongue.

I went on into the house and hung out for awhile, then for a longer while, and then I started getting nervous because it was getting on toward dark.

The car the pickup and every other drivable vehicle were accounted for in their usual scattered but logical locations. This was highly unusual! Mom always showed up after awhile to check on me.

Then I heard it, and it finally registered. A loud bang followed by a long

pause and another loud bang. It went on for a bit. Finally just as the sun was starting to set I mustered up the nerve to do the forbidden and go take a look at what was going on in the corral and the farm lot. I wasn't supposed to go out there by myself. **Crazy** and **Dynamite** were both very unpredictable and liked to chase the unwary.

I stayed on the outside of the corral and kind of sidled along the fence until I determined that the big ruckus was coming from the far side of the barn which had a lean-to with a sloped roof. I peered around the corner and there was **Dynamite** about 20 feet away in full charge at the side of the barn which she hit with a resounding thud with the hard poll on the top of her head. Then she snorted, pawed, and backed up for another round.

It was then I realized that Mom and Dad were both on top of the lean to roof, waving and yelling at me. Dad said, "Get her to chase you so we can get down!" Mom said, "Don't you get in this corral, you'll get run over!"

Finally, Dad won. With some determined negotiating, he decided that I should get in the corral, get her attention, and then when she came after me I should run and get in the big blue 1942 Ford truck. She couldn't hurt that too bad. Now, personally, I didn't think this was a great idea, but I figured that leaving Mom and Dad on the barn roof till **Dynamite** ran herself to death wasn't a great option either, so I crawled through the barbed wire and whacked her in the rear with a few dirt clods.

It worked. She turned, pawed and snorted a bit, and then took off full tilt after me. Being relatively bright even in the fourth grade I realized about half way to the Ford truck that I had never successfully gotten the tight, balky door open on my own yet in my life, and the odds of my doing it now were slim. So I took a sharp left and headed for Dad's nice and relatively new 1963 red Ford pickup. I made it into the pickup quite fine, but **Dynamite** spent the next 10 minutes banging the driver's side in with her head while my folks got off the barn roof and worked out a strategy for distracting her.

Needless to say my father wasn't tremendously impressed with my decision making ability under pressure since the pickup required several trips to the garage to get the dents pounded out. Though he did understand that it was the instinct for self-preservation that won out in the end.

We've had a lot of good laughs about it over the years, and it's become one of our favorite family stories. ♡



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