



Headline: Alberta Rancher Considers Himself Lucky After Bull Injury

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Ray Murphy had a bad heart. That's why he was so busy on September 22, 2009. His pre-op appointment with the surgeon for open heart surgery was scheduled for the next day and Murphy Livestock—a 300 head, pure-bred, Angus and Charolais beef farm in Bonnyville, Alberta—wouldn't just run itself while Ray was gone.

Murphy was in a rush to get that week's cattle shipment moving. On his way to the loading chute, he noticed a bull was missing his Canadian Cattle Identification Association (CCIA) tag. Normally, Murphy would have asked someone to help him run the bull into a locking head gate to replace it. But his hired help was loading hay for transport and Murphy decided the bull's head was too big for the gate anyway. Murphy considered reaching his arm through the sides of the squeeze chute, but was concerned the animal might pin his arm in the process. Instead, he stepped up on the catwalk to tag the bull from overhead. It didn't go as planned. The action caused the animal to startle. In the process, the animal hit Murphy in the head, sending him backwards off the catwalk.

"When I woke up, I was on the ground and I felt like a football," Murphy says as he recalls regaining consciousness. "All I could feel was my head; I didn't know if I had arms or legs, or where they were."

It was Murphy's hired worker who found him. He had noticed that Murphy's truck hadn't left the loading chute area and went to investigate. He found Murphy lying on the ground and called an ambulance relaying Murphy's directions to the farm. After EMS personnel arrived and bundled Murphy into a waiting ambulance, Murphy's wife Leona Murphy received a call at work.

"The message I got from our hired man was that Ray had an accident and he was on his way to town by ambulance," she recalls. "I thought Ed had said 'accident' to be nice...I thought he'd had a heart attack."

A doctor told Leona Murphy that the bull had done damage to her husband's C3, C4, and, worst of all, to his C5 vertebrae, leaving him almost completely paralyzed except for one toe, which he was able to move.

According to Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting data, animal-related injuries are the leading cause of non-machine-related farm fatalities in Canada. Between 1990 and 2008, there were 123 animal-related deaths in Canada. Over half of these involved cattle.

Ray Murphy was transferred to a larger hospital in Edmonton for surgery, where he spent three months in recovery before moving to the Glen Rose Rehabilitation Centre. Murphy says he fully committed himself to physiotherapy. He learned to move his limbs a little at first, and then slowly regained more and more mobility until he was finally able to roll over, maintain a sitting position, feed himself, stand, and eventually walk short distances. "I was determined to try and make the best of the rehab as I could," says Murphy. "Those things were good for the mind because you could see little improvements and it gave me encouragement to keep trying."

Glen Blahey is an Agricultural Safety and Health Specialist with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and grew up on a cattle operation. He says bulls are particularly dangerous. "People are



dwarfed by the animal's size and strength and when you couple that with the animal's unpredictable, instinctive behaviour, livestock handlers cannot be overly cautious enough when working around them."

Four years later, Murphy says he can't grip a self-propelled wheelchair firmly enough to get himself around but he manages just fine in a powered wheelchair. The community around Bonnyville chipped in to get him a wheelchair with big wheels for getting around on the farm to supervise all the family, neighbours, and hired help that have operated the farm over the last four years.

"My core hired man, Edmund, he certainly came to the task and carried the operation on," says Murphy with admiration. Still, Ray and Leona Murphy plan to disperse the herd this year and rent out their land. "You begin to realize when you can't do things yourself, things don't get done quite the way you would want them or quite when they should be done," Ray Murphy says. Now that Leona Murphy has retired, the couple heads south for the winter, where Ray Murphy can be more active and keep up his pool exercises a little easier. She says it's the right time for them to make the decision. "Snow and wheelchairs don't work together very well," explains Leona Murphy.

Ray Murphy will be sharing his story with other producers and farm safety supporters at a Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) launch event in Olds, Alberta in March. He'll also be featured in a YouTube video series posted at www.agsafetyweek.ca in the lead up to CASW, which runs from March 9 to 15, 2014. This year, the farm safety public education campaign focuses on the importance of talking about safety. It's organized by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, with support this year from the Government of Canada through *Growing Forward 2*, Farm Credit Canada, Ag for Life, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, CHS, Imperial Oil and Pioneer Hi-Bred Limited.

All in all, Ray and Leona Murphy consider themselves lucky. The injury took place when Ray Murphy was 59. In their case it meant that most of their debts were paid, and they used disability insurance—which they highly recommend to young farmers—to cover some of their loans. They also admonish other farmers not only to purchase and install safe animal-handling equipment—as they had done with chutes, alleys and calving pens—but also to always use it because even with all of it, you can still get seriously injured.

Blahey says that injuries are more likely to occur when a farmer or rancher is in a hurry. "The probability of things going wrong increases exponentially. We follow established procedures for a reason—they get the job done correctly. When we hurry and disregard established procedures in the interest of saving two minutes, we are setting ourselves up for failure," he says.

Ray and Leona Murphy encourage other ranchers not to tolerate ill-tempered animals. "The animal that hurt Ray wasn't mean, just nervous," offers Leona Murphy, as Ray Murphy adds, "I never did like hot-headed animals, but we tolerated them to a certain degree because maybe they were worth more as a bull than as a cull animal. But now, I don't tolerate them at all."

Ray Murphy says life is too short to keep animals that are accidents just waiting to happen. Animals are unpredictable at the best of times and two sets of eyes, ears, and minds are always better than one when it comes to handling them. "Had I had my hired man there, he might have said, 'No, no, don't do that; let's get rid of that heifer in front and put him in the squeeze chute further,' and we might have come up with a better decision," Ray Murphy muses. "If you're doing things where there's high risk, have two people."



Cutlines

CASW2014_RayMurphy_pic1.jpeg

Thanks to friends and neighbours in his community, Ray Murphy now gets around in this electric wheelchair. They chipped in to buy it for him after the Alberta rancher damaged his spine in an altercation with a bull.

CASW2014_RayMurphy_pic2.jpeg

Ray Murphy damaged his spine in an alternation with a bull when he climbed onto this catwalk, now partially covered in snow, to tag a bull in September 2009.

CASW2014_RayMurphy_pic3.jpeg

Ray Murphy says he “felt like a football” after a bull hit him in the head and sent him flying off this catwalk, now partially snow covered, over four years ago.

CASW2014_RayMurphy_pic4.jpeg

Looking back, Ray Murphy says two heads would have been better than one. Murphy was thrown off this catwalk in September 2009 when he tried to quickly reach over and tag a bull on his own. The injury left the Alberta rancher in a wheelchair.

