Dave's Crypt Orchid Stallion

Dave owned an eighty-acre farm just south of us. Dave was a tall, lanky, slow talking. farmer.
A good man, friendly, likeable, and intelligent.
He had been raised north, somewhere around Foley.
He had a wife and two young children at the time. They were nice people.
Dave thought he wanted a horse or two on his place so he purchased this fine colt.

A beautiful animal physically but neither gentled nor trained.
Colts are born with their testicles inside of their abdomen.
Normally the testicles travel through the abdominal wall and then present themselves in the normal way when the horses are between one and two years old.
That is not as strange as it sounds.
The same process occurs within human males and most other mammals.
The difference is that it occurs before birth.
In fact, the area where human testicles travel from inside the abdomen to outside is a weak spot where men most frequently have herniations.
That might be more than you wanted to know.
Generally, folks do not want a stallion unless they intend to breed and reproduce horses.
Mature stallions are frequently hard to control. They can be troublesome and dangerous around other horses.
Dave bought this horse when it was less than a year old.
Colts cannot be castrated (changed from a stallion to a gelding) until both testicles appear outside the abdomen.
Dave kept the horse until he was three years old and had grown into a strong animal.
Nearly sixteen hands high, he would be a tall saddle horse.
The testicles never showed.
Well actually one did but you need to get them both.
This situation is not common, but it does happen.
The technical term for that condition is crypt orchid.
With a testicle withheld in the abdomen there are two poor choices.
You can leave the horse as a stallion, but he won't be a good breeder.
The testicles are normally outside the body for a reason.
The viability of sperm is much higher in the exterior scrotum.

It is cooler and the sperm live better.
The second choice is an expensive surgical operation.
The cost of the operation would have been much more than the value of the horse.
Dave did come up with a good third option.
He sold the horse to me for ten bucks.
This all took place nearly 40 years ago.
I cannot recall my exact reason for buying this horse, but I am pretty sure my thinking was flawed.
Over the next couple of months, as time permitted, I worked to gentle and train the stallion.
Again, I don't recall all the details, but I do remember that progress was erratic.
On the particular day that I am about to describe the horse was pastured with a herd of cattle in a ten-acre field. I had recently fenced this field with five strands of the brightest, sharpest, barbwire that Montgomery Wards had to offer.
I had built the corners according to the U of M's Ag school recommendations.
Lots of cross bracing wires and extra posts. My new fences would hold up for years.
It was a bright summer afternoon.
I caught the horse, saddled, and bridled him right there in the field.
He was still pretty green.
It is always easier to work a green horse in a confined space.
At this point in his training the horse's most serious fault was that he liked to run.
Of course, a headstrong horse is hard to control at a run.
We made a few laps of the field at different paces.
He was getting warmed up and into a nice, heavy sweat.
That was fine.
Then for a reason only he knew, he broke into a dead run.
I wasn't particularly worried; in fact I suppose I expected that.
We were in a big pasture and even when you cannot stop a runaway horse, you can almost always turn him.
Not always, but almost always.
A useful definition of a runaway horse might be a horse that is traveling in the direction of its choice at a high speed and ignoring the rider's signals.
Generally, a runaway will hold its neck straight ahead and stiff.
Even so, a strong rider who concentrates on pulling one rein only can force the horse's head to the side.
A horse has a natural inclination to follow its head.
If it does not follow its head, the running horse is seriously off balance.
By my thinking, if you can get a running horse to circle, he's no longer a runaway.
He's just a horse running himself to exhaustion.
Unfortunately, Dave's horse was exceptional in its ability to run away from its own head.
We crossed the field diagonally, about a quarter mile in mighty good time.
I spend all of that time, however brief, trying to turn that horse.

He was headed directly into the far corner.
A corner, which you may recall, that I had recently built with plenty of good wooden posts, braces, and lots of sharp, shiny, new barbwire.
I could have bailed out, even at a dead run.
I've done it before.
You need to pick a spot that is clear of obstacles, like trees and boulders, and you need to hit the ground rolling. It is going to hurt, but the theory is that it will hurt less than what that horse is taking you into.
Well, I stayed with him.
A big mistake.
A few strides before the fence, I let up on the reins so he could clearly see what was ahead of him.
I just could not believe he would hit that fence at full speed with his eyes wide open.
He just didn't care.
He didn't even consider slowing, swerving or jumping.
He hit that reinforced corner head on and at full speed.
I was mounted high enough so that none of the wires broke over me directly.
Some of my wounds suggested that a wire fragment or two ripped across me as the fence blew apart but the young stallion took most of the damage.
I held the reins in one hand as we tumbled.
I still had control of him when we picked ourselves up.
It wasn't necessary.
He wasn't dead and he hadn't broken any bones, but my fence did not come apart easily.
He was covered with bloody slices.
Given that he was equipped with horse hide, none of his many cuts was individually serious.
Collectively they looked horrid.
We both caught our wind and shook ourselves off.
I walked him back through the hole in the fence, made some temporary patches and limped home.
Now I know you're thinking that is pretty much the end of this story because both man and beast would have learned from this.
Well, you're wrong.
The second chapter of this story reminds me of Charlie Brown and Lucy playing football every fall.
Later that same summer, Walt, a new neighbor, was surveying for a 20-acre parcel on which he intended to build a house.
Walt wasn't a surveyor by trade but if you understand the principles.
He had some basic equipment and knew where to find a starting place.
A steel marker buried years ago by surveyors to mark the corner of the section.
Walt was correctly using that as his starting point.
Walt had a few friends helping him.

That activity happened to occur at the same time I was giving Dave's horse a second chance.
We were just nearing home from what I would have described as a pretty good training ride.
I was returning on the road from the east.
I had to cross the intersection where Walt and his crew were setting up.
The farm access to the gravel road is U shaped with two driveways.
Something about Walt, his helpers or their equipment spooked the horse.
Big surprise there, right?
In a flash we were headed for the farm buildings at a full run.
I stayed with him into the first driveway and tried to follow the U.
There were buildings, trees and farm machinery to avoid.
He was running too hard and couldn't follow the shape of the U.
I mentally calculated that on our current course and trajectory we were going to hit the wall of the big pole barn head on.
We did exactly that.
The horse never flinched, swerved, or made any attempt to reduce the speed of impact.
The crash on the wall reminded me of another cartoon.
Do you recall those Road Runner scenes where the coyote would paint an image of a road onto the face of a stone wall?
It was like that.
I think my body sort of slammed and slid upward and the stallions body slammed and slid down
I don't recall what occurred after that.
I suppose I was a little groggy.
Some years later, Walt told me that he and his friends saw the action and were about to rush to my aid.
My son Joel, who was about six years old, happened to be talking to Walt at the time.
Joel always was a friendly and gregarious kid.
Anyway, Walt told me that Joel proudly said, "Don't worry, that's my dad, he's ok."
Maybe I was doing too much of this sort of thing.
A few weeks later a guy was delivering fertilizer for me and mentioned that the market for horses was good.
He liked handling horses, and he had a truck.
He offered to pick up Dave's horse and deliver him to the Sale Barn for ten bucks.
Well, he did that and called me a day later to tell me there had been some issue with the horse at the auction and he only brought eight dollars.
I'm thinking he may have tried to ride him into the sale ring, what do you think?
I never asked.
Anyway, that left him two dollars short of the ten that I owed him for the hauling.
He was a decent fellow and said he's let me off for the two bucks.
It seemed like a mighty good deal to me. Tom. 11/19/08