

I Shot the Bull in the Nose

We were all set to slaughter a Jersey bull.
I was the shooter.
My Pa and my older brother John each had a rope on the bull.
I was facing the Jersey bull with a 22 rifle.
Pa was on my right. John was on my left.
This was 50 years ago more or less.
I was fourteen.



Pa and John had walked the bull out to the west side of the barnyard.
There was space there so when the bull went down, we could get to him with a tractor and loader to lift the carcass for butchering.
Before we had a tractor with a loader, Pa would kill cattle in the single stall garage.
Pa would hoist the carcass up with a block-and-tackle attached to the rafters.
Killing isn't necessarily a bad thing.
If you are a farmer everything you grow must eventually be harvested.
Even if you never kill an animal, someone is doing your share of killing for you.
Taking a life is a serious thing.
It is important to do it quickly and to do it with as little trauma as possible.
That's not how it went on this day.
This was more of a learning day for me.
The normal procedure was to shoot the animal in the brain rendering it senseless.
Then quickly slit the major blood vessels of the neck to get a good bleed.
I was armed with a 22 rifle.
In case you don't know much about guns, a 22 is a low caliber rifle.
We probably didn't own anything better or bigger at the time.
A 22 was a common tool for farm slaughter.
A 22-bullet cost a penny then.

The upper half of a bull's skull hasn't got much in it.
The brain itself is small, maybe the size of a fist.
The area from the nose to the horns is mostly empty sinus cavities.
It is basically a structure to support horns.
A bullet in that sinus area probably doesn't even give



the animal a headache, at least not right away.
It is likely to irritate him though.
The bull tossed his head just as I pulled the trigger.
The bullet entered about where I intended, but at an angle so to skedaddle somewhere around in his sinuses.
He was mad as hell and not at all incapacitated.
I was focusing on the bull, so I don't know when John lost the rope.
Pa smoked a pipe in those days and even if the pipe wasn't lit it was between his teeth.
Pa lost that pipe pretty early on.
He lost his hat, and he lost his footing, but he didn't lose his rope.
Pa was a short man but heavily muscled from a lifetime of hard work.
I suppose the young bull weighed 800 pounds or more, Pa weighed something over 250.
It wasn't a fair contest, but Pa hung on.
He was trying to dig his boots in as the bull dragged him around the barnyard and then back.
The two of them fought from side to side and end to end of that barnyard before the bull tired.
Until the bull settled down, there was no chance for a second shot.
This is the point where it gets a little dangerous.
Well, I suppose this whole event is dangerous from the bull's perspective, but I mean dangerous for the butchers.
The animal was no longer going to be a good target nor was he going to go down easily even if well hit.
Too much adrenaline was involved now.
The challenge now was to kill the animal without accidentally shooting a human.
I knew it would take more time and more care, and it might take a lot more ammunition.
I think I had to put four more rounds into this poor critter to bring him down.
Thank goodness I had that many bullets in my pocket.

Once the bull was down things went as intended.
Pa was always a man of few or no words.
There were many times in my growing-up years when I wished he would have said more.



This was not one of those times.
We went about our butchering, and he never said a word about my shooting.
Pa was always an incredibly powerful teacher.
His silence made the lessons sink in deep.
This story occurred long ago.
I have killed hundreds of large animals since.
I take great care to do it well.

Tom 11/13/2008