

The Day We Invented Streaking

Folks who that say that driving thru Kansas is boring have never seen three little boys streaking thru the pasture with pond mud forming makeshift loincloths. But that happened at least once that I'd admit to.

The drafty old two-story farmhouse in rural Kansas that I grew up in originally sat far enough from the busy two-lane Highway 54 to be safe. However, the state decided to move the highway close enough to our house that we sometimes had to open the front door to let cars pass each other.

Down the highway to the east of the house about ½ of a mile was Hobson's Pond. A glorious place of our youth that, at the time, seemed as vast, deep, and mysterious as the Atlantic Ocean teeming with aquatic animals and humpback whales. Instead, our pond had finger-length bullhead catfish that swam up your shorts and impaled you with poison-tipped barbs and cantankerous cows that cooled their udders in the water.

Usually, we ran the cows out of the pond only to turn around and have to outrun the cows. Cows are not only fast; they are sarcastic. Cows are the little old ladies of the animal kingdom who love to comment on about how the youth of today are going to hell-in-a-hand basket.

"Hey, Maude!" Gertrude the cow would shout as we raced across the prairie dodging their strategically placed cow pies, "Look at this skinny one run. I bet I can catch him this time before he darts under the barbwire fence."

Since I was the baby of the family with siblings old enough to have children my age, my nieces and nephews were my peers. Each summer, three of them would descend upon me from New York. Sometimes, two others appeared randomly and turned my bored-out-of-my-mind existence on the lonesome prairie into four weeks of sermons on morals, groundings, and spankings, sometimes all the above.

There were an equal number of girls and boys all within a four-year age range so it was easy to form alliances against the enemy: boys against girls. Since we were the boys, it was assumed any mischief originated in our devious little minds. When shenanigans erupted, the boys were lined up in front of the firing squad first. No questions; no jury of our peers; just the judge handing out verdicts without due process.

We didn't have such things at swimming suits, just cut off jeans. If we didn't have those, we were not a bit bashful about skinny-dipping. The three of us boys managed to escape the scorn of cows and, since we didn't own such a thing as a swimming suit, decided to frolic in Hobson's Pond in our birthday suit. The cows were so sarcastic we dared not let them see us in our birthday suits.

We froze when we saw the girls sneaking through the grass headed to our clothes. We dared not emerge from the water lest we traumatize both the girls and ourselves, so we just sat there like three fat toads on a log watching them steal our clothes. Above the giggling of the girls, we heard the cows snickering in the background.

The girls took off towards home with our clothes in hand. Even our shoes.

The line from Hobson's Pond to our house ran parallel to Highway 54, the busiest stretch of blacktop in Kansas. Furthermore, it was only about fifty feet away so we were assured an audience of passersby. There were no fig leave to protect our shame and we knew better than to wrap ourselves in poison ivy so we used the next best thing; pond mud.

The bottom of a Kansas pond has the consistency of warm Jell-O, the toxicity of a nuclear reactor, and the adhesive qualities of Teflon. It is not the optimal clothing to hide one's form. I keep expecting to see Miley Cyrus wearing it on the red carpet.

Furthermore, since we hadn't quite matured yet, our bodies were mainly hairless, so there was absolutely nothing for the mud to adhere to. But we grabbed some up, packed ourselves with it, and took off on a dead run.

We lost most of it in the first fifteen feet of our dash home. By that time, horns were honking, vacationers were stopping to take pictures, and the cows laughed so hard their milk turned into cottage cheese.

Let it be noted that there are few things more frightening than crawling through a barbwire fence while naked.

We made it home only to find out that we, not the girls, were in trouble. Apparently the powers-that-be ruling the farmhouse- namely the Matriarchs of the clan- determined that the boys were responsible for any and all crimes against humanity. We were lined up, tied to a stake, and the fires of righteous indignation lit at our feet.

However, vengeance is the Lord's and the next story will be how we were vindicated, and felt pretty darn smug about it. Naturally, we got in trouble over that, too, but it was worth it.

I often wonder if, at some dining room table at Thanksgiving somewhere in the U.S., some family says, "Hey, remember that time we were driving across Kansas and those three little boys were streaking through the pasture!" They laugh, dig out the photos they took of us, then say to each other, "Well, whoever says Kansas is boring has never seen a cow laughing so hard it blows milk out its nose."

Come to Kansas. We'll wow ya.

