

On being a farm wife - And other hazards

Joyce Bupp



After awhile, you learn to expect it.

The unexpected. Pouncing on the unsuspecting.

After years of finding yourself the unsuspecting victim of the unexpected, nothing surprises you anymore. Well, not much anyway.

So only a small yelp escaped my mouth a few weeks back at what came out when I opened the chute at the bottom of the heifer feed bin.

"Good thing I'm not afraid of rats," I observed to The Farmer

later, "Or, you'd have had to peel me off the heifer pen ceiling."

There are few things I feel justified in using the word "hate" with, but.... I hate barn rats with a passion. Not fear. Hate. They're dirty, destructive, despicable and dog-goned costly due to all the feed they steal.

Despite its obviously well-fed condition, the rat had zipped out over the top of the feed reserve at the bottom of the chute and fled over the feed trough. Feed scoop weapon in hand. I'd pursued it.

My poorly-aimed whacks didn't do anything but dent the end of the scoop.

"Here kitty, kitty, kitty," I'd called, summoning the major artillery in the ongoing war against barn rodents. But the cat patrol zoomed in a second too late and blew its chance.

A day later, I moved a straw bale nearby — and a rat ran again. This time it was moving a bit slower and the "kitty, kitty" call worked magic. For the cat, not the rat. Looking back, the metal scoop chase the day before had perhaps met its mark just enough to injure and slow the well-fed rodent.

Once in awhile, the unsuspecting win an unexpected victory. There was a celebration feast — with fresh rat as the main course. I had a brownie.

"You'll never believe what just happened to that tractor," said my mother-in-law on a recent morning phone call. Only minutes before, The Farmer and I had returned from her farm a few miles away, where he had tried to jump-start a reluctant battery on a tractor that had not been run for several weeks.

The expected result of this lat-

est unexpected turn did not materialize - thankfully. Immediate dread of splintered house walls had not happened; the tractor simply drifted past a cousin's nearby home and parked itself in the grass.

Sometimes the unsuspecting unexpectedly receive pardons from potential disaster. (God steered that tractor real good.)

"I need medical attention," noted The Farmer one morning last week, yanking his well-used barn hat off his head and leaning down for inspection. Taking a deep breath, this unsuspecting caregiver prepared for the expected worst.

No major blood trail, just a little red oozing out of a zig-zag slash in his scalp. About an inch and a quarter long, but neat and narrow. A dousing with peroxide and dab of first-aid ointment remedied the

head-on collision with the feed-grinder auger.

"Good thing you had on a hat," I reminded him, feeling new respect for the, shall we say, less-than-clean headcovering.

A mere few hours later, he was back, waving a finger wrapped in a, shall we say, less-than-clean rag.

"Not as bad as it looks," he assured my wide-eyed look and sucked-in breath. "Just a gash, but I couldn't get it to stop bleeding. Guess it hit a vein." Peroxide and a pair of tightly-fastened Band-Aids, as expected, did the trick.

Moral of this tale: Expect the unexpected. Stock up on medical supplies. Keep your hat on! Check the brakes. Be thankful when the unexpected isn't nearly as bad as you expected it to be.

And be glad you aren't a barn rat.

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