

Feedlot Fun

It was a hot Sunday afternoon, and my eight-year-old neighbor Henry and I had been building forts out of the haybales in the hayloft.

“I’ve got straw all over me,” this nine-year-old girl whined, climbing down the ladder in the barn. “I’m tired of playing in the hayloft.”

“Well, what do you want to do now?” Henry sighed.

Looking out the barn window, I noticed that the lower feedlot was empty of cattle. Sitting in the middle of the feedlot was a cattle feeder.

“Look, Henry. That cattle lot is empty,” I said, excited. “Why don’t we explore the cattle feeder? The feeder has two open sides with feed troughs where we can play. Plus, we can climb on top of the shingled roof and jump off. It will be lots of fun.”

“Didn’t your Dad say to stay out of that feedlot?” Henry asked.

“That’s only when there’s cattle in the lot. The lot’s empty right now. Look for yourself.”

Henry peered over the window ledge and shook his head. “I don’t know. It looks empty.” Slowly he said, “Okay. Let’s go.”

We walked to the fence and climbed up. Sitting on the top fence rail, we double checked to make sure there were no cattle around. We listened. Nope. Not a sound.

Jumping off the fence, we raced to the cattle feeder. We kept climbing on the roof and jumping off, time after time. Crawling into the feeder, we played in the feed troughs. It was so much fun, but dirty. Every now and then, we would get out of the feeder, shake off all the feed, and then resume playing again.

We were resting in the feed trough when a big black nose poked around the corner. I screamed. Henry screamed. Another black nose appeared from around the other corner. The big black noses were attached to some rather large black Angus steers.

“Help!” I screamed. “We’re going to be eaten!” I began to cry. Through the tears I continued to yell for help.

Looking around, I spotted Dad standing against the fence. He was laughing.

“Dad, help! Henry and I are stuck in here, and the cattle are going to attack us if we try to get out!” I yelled.

Dad stopped laughing. “How many times have I told you not to play in this feedlot?”

“I know, I know. Please, Dad, get us out of here,” I pleaded.

Eventually, Dad crawled over the fence and slowly walked through the cattle who had gathered around the feeder for their evening meal. Taking each of us by the hand, he walked us back over to the fence, and we sat on the top rail looking at the cattle, who had now begun to eat.

Sternly, Dad said, "Jeanette and Henry, because of the heat this afternoon, all the cattle were resting in the shade behind the cattle shed. That's why you didn't see any cattle standing in the lot. When it was feeding time, they came out to eat the corn mixture that was in the feeder. Looks like most of that corn is now on the ground." Shaking his head, he continued, "Tomorrow morning, before I do anything else, I'll have to refill the feeder. These cattle are being fattened on corn to sell in a month or two."

As Dad and I walked back toward the house, Henry headed home. Very quietly, I said, "I'm sorry, Dad. It just looked like a fun place to explore."

"For the most part, the steers are more scared of you than you are of them. But you were lucky you didn't get head-butted by one of those hungry steers. When the cattle get hungry, nothing stops them from getting to their feed. If there had been a bull in the feedlot, you might have been in big trouble. Do you get my point?"

Tears were running down my cheeks as I looked up at him, "Yes, Dad."

"I'll tell you a little secret," he said with a slight smile on his face. "I was walking out of the corncrib when I saw you and Henry run into the feedlot. I stood inside the barn door the whole time you were playing. When the steers started coming out to the corn feeder, I began walking to the fence. The two of you were not in much danger, but you needed to learn a lesson. Got it?" I nodded my head. "Let's not tell Mom of your feedlot adventure. She'd skin both of us."

There was a smile on my face as Dad snuck me into the house to change out of my dirty clothes for supper.