

Power Outage

There's nothing like an animal escape for a rush of pure adrenaline. Whether it's an alligator leaving the Florida Everglades and moving downtown, a cow running from a Texas slaughterhouse, a pet snake slithering away during a kindergarten show-and-tell or a puma turned loose in a pilates class, animals have the ability to terrorize.

And they attract media and cops like free donuts.

Despite our best efforts to keep fences tight, getaways happen, and it was a real concern for me on a ranch I leased that bordered a major highway. My fence was the only thing keeping a cow from causing a nine car pileup. That's why I had hung a minimum of nine tight strands of barb wire on the fence that looked like something you see in old World War II footage of concentration or POW camps. The only thing missing from my fence were machine gun turrets.

There was one weak spot in my freeway fence. We had what folks in Nebraska and Wyoming call a crick, and Californians correctly call a creek, running under the fence at one point, and in this spot I had hung what we call a water gap. You tie rocks to fence stays which holds the entire fence down low, over the creek. That way if it ever did rain around these parts ever again I wouldn't lose a bunch of fencing and the cattle would still be corralled. The problem happens if you get a real gully washer. That's why I was standing in the rain on the side of the highway being interrogated by a freshly minted member of the local law enforcement community. I think I was his first shakedown because he was shaking like a cat trying to pass a peach pit.

You know that saying about grass being greener on the other side of the fence? Any place I run cows it's true. The feed was getting a little short inside the cow concentration camp so a grand dam we called Paint was now grazing alongside the highway.

After trying to herd Paint with his siren and lights blinking the cop gave up and concentrated his efforts on writing me a ticket two feet long. "Put your hands up," he demanded, "and show me your driver's license."

"I can't do both at the same time," I correctly uttered as I showed him my wallet.

"Take your license out of your wallet," he demanded, reaching for his gun.

Why is it that when you are pulled over by a cop every friend and enemy you ever had drives by?

After he'd called for backup, another recent addition to our police department arrived: the K-9 unit. I think if we had a swat team he'd have called that unit out too. As the cops discussed whether they were going to shoot my good cow or sick the German Shepherd loose on it, my wife had simply walked Paint down the fence line and through a gate. This made the cop even madder, probably because he didn't get to shoot something, which I believe would have been a first for him also.

Three weeks later the same cop shows up in the grocery store where my wife was a checker for 30 years. He was now officially out of his jurisdiction. All he had in his basket was a six pack of beer, a gallon of ice cream and a T-bone steak, and so naturally he lined up in the express lane, which my wife promptly asked an associate to shut down. This forced the irate cop to take his place about fifteen people back in the only line open. Just as she'd done with old Paint, my wife had herded the cop right where she wanted him: into the line where she was checking. By the time the officer got to the checkstand his ice cream had melted and the steak was well aged.

She scanned his items very s-l-o-w-l-y and when it was time to pay he wrote a check. "May I see some form of identification?" my wife demanded.

The cop opened his wallet and showed my wife his driver's license.

"Take it out of your wallet," she commanded, as she waved her scan gun at him.

It's the Pitts

Written by Lee Pitts

That's when the cop finally recognized my wife from the loose cow incident.

Aren't paybacks sweet?