

## Ode (Cowboy Style) to Mentorship

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Our family came late to the cattle ranching scene. I was just getting ready to begin my first year of junior high when my brother announced he was tired of the city life in hippie-era Boulder, Colorado, and was going to go live with our grandparents in Davis County, Utah, so he could live on the farm. It was not long after that, in my recollection, when my uncle showed up with the bob-tail cattle truck, and we loaded up as a bunch of hillbillies to move the whole family to a broken down old farm house in Utah. Dad had just tossed his promising career as a Ph.D. scientist in the national lab system to certify at Weber State as a secondary school teacher: "Now, class, lets play a little sing-along game to get to know each other."

Within a few short years, my two beloved grandfathers were both buried, and we traded suburbia-encapsulated farm ground for a real ranch in Bridger Valley, Wyoming. The brother I idolized was on a mission, so I now looked for other men to be my mentors. One candidate was our cussing, beer guzzling neighbor who showed us how to build ditches and irrigate using TNT. Another was the retired seminary teacher whose horses somehow came with the ranch and who left us instructions how to ride them. Also the hard working ranchers down the valley who taught us the ways of the farrier. Everyone who shod horses did so under firm conviction that his was the best and only way! Neighbors Dale Graham and rancher-and-businessman Howard Woody were survivors of WWII's European theater, and I held both of them in permanent awe as I sought to know them better. First impressions often hide important facts: Dale was a survivor of the Battle of the Bulge, and he never did have all shrapnel removed from his body. His beer was a small comfort that minimized the chronic pain he suffered every day. Though he was never able to have children of his own, his wife's children from a previous marriage and their's loved and deeply respected him. He was always kind and generous to me, and I valued his neighborly friendship, though I politely declined sharing his beer. But then there were other mentors: Bern Whittaker, President Paul Hyer, Mark Isom, and of course, my dad.

### **Bern Whittaker**

As a brash and impatient sixteen year old, I was thrilled to be entrusted with the responsibility for an entire ranch. Dad and his brother-and-partner were both schoolteachers, and the autumn hay harvest—already a month long and rain delayed—had run into a particularly hard stop: the beginning of the school year. I volunteered to skip the first 'couple' of days of my junior year to finish up on my own. Dad reluctantly agreed, and Grandma offered to stick around to keep me company and feed me mushroom milk gravy. I was thrilled by the challenge and excitedly looked forward to showing everyone how quickly I could knock this job off.

Once the morning dew was off—well, maybe I rushed it just a *little* bit—I had the big John Deere roaring. It was an open cab model 4000 with a roll-bar and shade, towing a New Holland "automatic" bale stacker that held 104 bales, each weighing about 60-80 pounds. I quickly maneuvered the rig around the hay meadow, plucking the bales from the ground and then

manipulating all the hydraulic levers to build a rolling stack of hay, back it into the hay yard, tilt it, carefully push the rig away so the hay stack did not tip over, then repeat the cycle in a record 15 minutes. Speed was definitely my *forté*. But I had several meadows to clear in just a couple of days, and a new school year was waiting with classes I was definitely looking forward to: the legendary Mrs. Vivian Beattie (English and humanities) and Mr. Lenzi Nelson (math / computer programming).

Things went badly from the get-go when my swerve-and-grab driving literally hit a snag. The bale pick-up chute dragged very close to the ground, and hard swerves of the tractor to the left stopped the bale chute's moving forward—the sideways motion was tricky so that if it hit a ditch or a protruding rock, the chute would collapse onto itself and no bale could enter. I wonder now what cowboy words I muttered when I really hit a ditch during a hard left turn and helplessly watched while the chute's heavy steel bracket twisted beyond recognition. I wondered then what Bern would say when I pulled my rig into his place and asked him what to do. I didn't know much about him then, but I knew that he was kind. And he had a well-equipped shop that he knew how to use.

Bern did not disappoint. He quit working in his own hayfield and mopped the sweat off his brow while he sized up what was needed to repair my blunder. No chiding words, no belittling. Every step of the way, he explained what he was doing and why he was doing it and even let me do stuff when it wouldn't hinder the overall progress of the repair: This is why you heat it up before you bend it. This is the welding rod you use to close the cracks in the torn brackets, and this is why you beat it with the hammer after you finish welding. Let's go in and wash up. You can call your grandma and let her know that Myrt has invited you to stay for a bite o' grub. It's better'n a poke in the eye with a sharp stick. (Boy, he wasn't kidding, either. His "li'l Irish Myrt" was a heckuva ranch cook and a fine ranch hand herself!) Then when everything is cooled down, you paint it with whatever color you have lying around so that it doesn't rust after you heated it.

I was amazed at how quickly I was back in the meadow, hauling hay as though nothing had ever happened. Except that I was now very careful with the maneuver to the left, making sure the ground was level and there were no ditches to run into and leaving the bale for later when the terrain was 'iffy'. But I was in a bigger hurry now than ever! Lots of time to make up! And the field I was now entering was farther away from the stack yard! "I wonder if this big John Deere tractor can cut through that swale? It's a bit wet down there, but these are really big tires..." I did not consider the likely high-centering of the hitch while towing a heavy load of hay behind me. Down went the really big tires, up came the mud, and—because I thought that's what you did in such circumstances—out came the cowboy words again!

Being creative, I figured out that I could dump the hay where the trailer was and use the haystack just formed to push myself away from the bog, thus returning the tractor to a solid footing. I was losing time but could still make it up. The plan to get unstuck worked almost perfectly except for the long gangly pieces of steel that poked through big openings in the tilted stack table and pushed the tractor/trailer rig away from the new hay stack, which was now resting on the ground. This time, the dangling push-off paddles were exposed when the unsteady stack of heavy bales collapsed, bending their levers into mocking frowny faces that

once again rendered the stacker useless and kept me from finishing my job—without the help of Bern.

Bern once again interrupted his own harvest. Myrt putt-putted on the baler she was in charge of, while Bern patiently examined my recent inept modifications to an otherwise beautifully engineered machine. Bern shook his head, mopped his brow and set to work again to train a boy. This repair merited different tools for the heavier steel and involved a plasma torch (“Mr. Hotwrench”, lovingly named), a hydraulic ram, chains and a very large hammer. They say, “Make hay while the sun shines,” but all I’d accomplished so far was to distract a kind neighbor so that neither of us made hay while we performing some basic metallurgy, shaping and reshaping my mess until the steel was pointed in the intended direction. When I got back to the hayfield, I knew I would be careful about the left turns and be happy to take the long way to the stack yard. But first I needed to pick up the mess I left with the toppled stack of hay that had helped push me out of the swale and also recently brought me to Bern’s place.

I was manually picking up the bales and loading them on the idling stacker when, I experienced nearly the ultimate in innocent sixteen year old male fantasy: it was hot and I was sweaty, so I removed my shirt. My puny tanned muscles were bulging with the effort of real hay hauling. Bits of grass, hay dust and seeds were all over me and in my hair. Imagine, then, the perfect vision of a beautiful, long-haired blonde my age I’d had never seen before, walking through the field and extending to me an ice cold soda pop. Was I living in a slow motion TV commercial? She introduced herself as Edna Mae’s granddaughter, which my left brain somehow computed and put her visiting our neighbors Dale and Edna Mae Graham. Edna Mae had suggested she stop by to introduce herself, and wow!—right brain taking over again— was the sight ever as welcome as the cold drink! After a few minutes of awkward sixteen-year-old chit-chat, a sweaty, hay-covered boy (jaw probably still agape) was soon left to his imagination and the immediate task of manually loading and then dumping this trailer full of hay.

I had a lot on my mind just then. So I hope the reader will forgive me that, at the stack yard finally dumping the hay in the proper place, I *forgot* to retract the big hydraulic push-off paddles before rotating the stack table to its travel position. There were no cowboy words left at the exasperating moment when I saw that the heavy steel bars were *this time* curled *up* like the toes on fairy slippers.

Bern may have been annoyed at the further damage and yet another interruption, or he may have appreciated the comic relief. I will never know. But I was amazed at how he treated me no differently this time than during either of the (count-‘em! *two*!) earlier episodes that day. Following the day’s final repair and reviewing all of Bern’s artisanship with awe and appreciation, I considered for a brief moment how hard it would be to disguise all my gaffes and Bern’s fixing from my dad’s and little brother’s inevitable chiding —what with all that black paint on the formerly impressive one-year-old red and yellow hay hauler! Bern brought me out of my thoughts and back on the road to my still-waiting responsibility with, “You know, Bob, the haying usually goes a lot faster when you take it a little slower.”

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The following summer—full of the fire, passion and hormones of youth—I was faced with a temptation I was uncertain how to handle. To say now that “I’m glad that Bern was in my life” vastly understates the importance of this life-defining situation. I had gotten to know him a lot better since the previous summer, and I was curious how this complex individual would engage today’s question. Would he encourage me to “follow my feelings”? To “experiment”? Or was there more to this man? Certainly, he would give me something to think about.

This day, Bern was showing me some tricks for irrigating our beautiful meadow with its irregular borders, uneven surface, strangely arranged ditches, rocky mounds and funny dry patches surrounded by boggy swales. Tromping through the lush Wyoming grasses with shovels slung on our shoulders—periodically splashing through a bit of flooded meadow as we searched for where a little ditch might need to be dug to spread the water over to the dry spots—I sized up my opportunity: Bern was a crusty old rancher. His face was weathered. His hands were steel-strong, tough and leathered, with the full range of bruises, fresh cuts, scabs, and scars common to the rancher who works without gloves—often around barbed wire—and never even knows he is bleeding. If he smashed his finger with a hammer, his vocabulary seemed fully appropriate to the occasion. Not a member of the Church. Did he even belong to a church? We never discussed it. Years later, after Bern had died, I asked Myrt to proof-read a first written version of this experience. Myrt indicated that she and Bern had affiliated with Presbyterianism. But the hardscrabble life of ranch work left little opportunity for Sunday-go-to-meetings.

Mostly I liked listening to his stories. Earlier, he had been in rodeo. Those must have been wild days! He had worked in logging camps in the mountains during the frigid winter months, ready to ride the logs down the rivers swollen with spring runoff to the mill. He was a mountain pack guide, hauling fish in mule pack barrels to remote lakes and streams for the Fish and Game Service in the days before airplane drops. As a tank commander in the Pacific War he had seen fierce battle and the ugliness of war, malicious booby traps, torture, disease and too much death. He liberated his own uncle from a POW camp in the Philippines. He had seen *the world*...

I don't recall if or how I prefaced my question, or whether I just dropped it on him like a mortar shell: "Bern, I've got a girlfriend, and I just don't know if I can *wait* until I'm married."

Bern stopped in his tracks, leaned on his shovel, and sized me up with a look of utter disgust as he removed his old felt hat to mop his brow and the round bald part of his head with his shirt sleeve. I might have been a bent, mangled hay stacker he was eyeing while assessing how he was going to initiate the repair. Before shouldering his shovel again and heading off through the meadow, all he said to me was:

"Bob, if *I* could wait, anybody can."

If we talked at all the rest of that hot Wyoming day, I don't remember. I don't recall how we parted. I only remember the feeling of shame: Had I been looking for an easy justification of something he and I both knew was clearly wrong? Had I misjudged and stereotyped him? Worse was the feeling of obvious stupidity. How could I possibly think I was somehow unique—the first person ever enticed by the thoughts and hormonal pressures of youth?

As though shedding scales from my eyes, I suddenly saw this honorable man in an entirely new light: He hadn't always been old and crusty, and I wasn't experiencing anything new! Though he too was once young and full of this same fire, he had been completely *faithful* to his bride *before* they married—before he even knew her! Long ago, he had made the same decision that I was now facing! In fact, Bern married his beautiful sweetheart before he had gone to war and remained absolutely true through that long, sad separation and ever afterward.

Looking back now, I wonder "Why?" What gave Bern the strength to do then what he rightly expected me to do now? It wasn't influence from a Sunday school lesson or priesthood leaders or even covenants. How arrogant of me to ever think that church activity or membership assures goodness or even righteousness! Did Bern even consider intimacy to be a gift from God? Did he somehow realize that it was not his to indulge until he could present it untarnished to his bride?

Or was it because the Light of Christ already burned so brightly in him and in his sweet wife, Myrt? I had seen their "light" in so many contexts: as foster parents who had taken in literally dozens of infants and small children. In their tenderness for each other, their devotion toward their animals, then goodness and generosity with strangers, and—not least—their patience with my own impatient screw-ups. What gave him the strength to resist? Was it simply because he knew that to do otherwise was wrong, and that knowledge was *enough*? His *honor* was enough.

At some point I rescued Bern's old beat-up, sweat-stained felt hat after he'd thrown it away. He wanted a new one. I liked the old one and cherish the memory of that earlier day for the strength it gave me to be honorable to the girl I was then dating and to be true to the girl I would later marry. FYI, the fantasy romance was stillborn in the hayfield: a few awkward letters back and forth, and I soon realized the beautiful blonde was way beyond my league. However, the girl who later consented to marry me —abetted by mutual motherly conspiracy—is my best friend and we live happily together with no regrets. After a temple marriage of over thirty years and with four kids, my bride and I are glad that good people are 'there' to assist our youth during times of doubt and testing.



## **President Hyer**

Bern was also, perhaps, a negative influence. I became prideful in a reckless way. On a long horseback ride moving his cattle to the summer range, he would say, “Whatcha doin’ ridin’ on my damned tail like that? That’s what they do on dude ranches! Get out here by my side or on my quarter!” It was his way of telling me not to be so lazy, to work harder, pay attention, and do things the right way.

Imagine, then, a converted cowboy re-entering the world of other folks. I distinctly remember my first day as a U of U freshman, walking into the great unknown of the Talmage building—my expensive new calculus and physics textbooks slung over my shoulder in saddlebags—and humming the old Sons of the Pioneers’ trail tune, “*I’m a poor, lonesome cowboy... and a long way from home.*”

And then, imagine a proud young missionary newly arrived in Taipei, at the time one of the most congested and densely populated cities in Asia (pre-subway), insisting that he not ride his bicycle ‘dude style,’ behind his companion, but at his side or quarter. Otherwise what would Bern think? What would Bern think of him smashed by a Taiwan delivery truck?

If there is a theme to this self-confessed youthful *faux pas*, I suppose it further relates a mode of learning and growing prescribed by a loving Father in Heaven: facing and making choices, as well as making mistakes but always looking for and heeding good advice. In retrospect, few of our foibles constitute sin or bear on whether we are perfect in the eyes of God. Indeed, the only thing that matters is that we are walking in His way.

Which causes me to reflect upon another incident when concern for one of the elders in our four-man apartment brought me into close discussion with my mission president, Paul V. Hyer. The missionary for whom I felt responsible had become infatuated with a young woman, had repeatedly ignored our efforts to restrain him and had finally left his companion for a rendezvous. With the rest of his counsel and instruction, President Hyer told me something that I have never forgotten, and have pondered frequently since: “There are fools and then there are damned fools: fools don’t learn from other’s mistakes and damned fools don’t learn from their own.”

This was my first-ever realization that there can be no true success without a legitimate opportunity to fail. People need to be able to make and act upon their own choices. But then we all need to accept full ownership of those choices’ consequences and allow others to own theirs too. To ward off someone else’s consequences is a theft, of sorts, robbing justice. The missionary was sent home to offset his negative example and help him qualify for that other gospel principle: forgiveness through divine grace.

## **Doc Isom**

After my mission and back at the ranch, the day started early since we wanted to feed the cattle before the snow set in. It was my shift in the bovine maternity ward, and spring vacation meant hard effort on Dad’s ranch. There were no new calves overnight, and none of the cows showed imminent signs of birthing. The day before, several cows had popped their calves on their own, and only the last one had to be assisted. Dad joked that it would be horrible to have no calves to

record today, and should we maybe change the date in the notebook on yesterday's pull so we would have a continuous string of days with newborns?

Actually, the day turned out much more interesting than that: I was puttering around in the heifer pen wondering if heifer with ear tag ID '4U' was showing imminent signs or not, when I heard Dad's tractor revving, and its horn beep. I raced off in the 4-wheeler to find out what was going on. He was chasing a big pregnant cow across the field. She had started labor and her instincts had kicked in prematurely: she had latched onto another cow's baby in the vicinity where she was laboring. That's bad because she would ignore her newborn when it arrived. I went hoarse yelling at our dogs, who went crazy seeing Dad racing around the field in his 'Jeep Deere' beeping his horn. Dad later commented that the dogs were in the outhouse. "Why's that?" I inquired. "Because you were out there throwing your hat and yelling at them and jumping up and down— must be genetic!"

This was 'Frosty', one of the pet cows, who got a little confused over who her calf was, but it worked out okay, as Dad physically blocked her from the others with the tractor while she completed her labor and soon pushed out and accepted her newborn.

I'd been watching a younger cow throughout the afternoon: 38, the indifferent owner of an upside-down and backwards eartag, which made it easier to monitor her with binoculars from the upstairs window throughout the day. She ranged all over the place, looking for the right spot to have her baby. However when she finally went into active labor, she did not progress. Up/down/push/up/turnaround/down/push: repeat, with no visual effect. We decided to herd her to the barn, where we could better assist her. First, I opened the gate to the house and corrals. We almost got her to the gate, but in the meantime, mom—not knowing what we were up to— had closed it to keep cows from coming into the yard to eat the hay. Well *that* worked. 38 took off up the field at the sight of the closed gate and would not be turned. I consoled myself thinking how nurses try to convince women to take walks when trying to induce productive labor. We let her be... for an hour.

Then I walked up to her and found that she had still not progressed. Something was very wrong. I prayed. I talked to her. She was obviously in distress, and I tried to get closer. This was not one of the pet cows with a name, just one of the generic herd. I had no idea what her disposition was. I crept up to her backside while she watched intently and suspiciously. I spoke soothingly (the "cow-whisperer") and slowly sat about two feet away from her tail, Indian-style. As I reached toward her tail, she jumped up and swung her face a foot from mine. Was that shock, surprise or anger in her eyes? Thanks to my brilliant decision to make myself comfortable Indian style, I was unable to move and so chose to freeze and practice my faith: "Tell her I'm here to help." She inched closer and closer, sniffing madly. Not snorting, but sniffing so hard that each swift exhale was distressingly like a snort! I sat still, wondering if I should attempt reaching for a willow. Her nose was now a quarter-inch from mine, and the sniffing was intensifying. She suddenly jumped back—somehow satisfied by her investigation— abruptly turned and left. I gratefully wiped the cow mucus from my face.

I sat with her again at her next settling place fifty feet to the north, along the creek bank near a snow fence. She was sheltered there from the breeze, and when she flopped her head during an

agonizing contraction, I grabbed something hanging out of her tail and ran my hand, then my arm up inside her to probe what was the matter. She turned and looked at me with incredulous, wondering eyes but held steady.

I searched up to my bicep feeling the warm moisture and astonished at the pressure of the contractions. I felt the calf, but did not recognize the anatomy. No feet... no head... was that its butt? No, not a butt. Other side: something hard down deep. Ahhh, teeth! Ouch! Sharp! Tongue. Is it alive? No response. No gag reflex. So it was presented shoulder-first with the head bent backward and feet folded backward too! No wonder this girl was having trouble. She would die an agonizing death without help.

I called Dad. He's coming but he's wondering if I can push the calf back down where there is more room to work and grab it's feet, which need to come out first. I'll try, if she'll let me, I told him.

*No-can-do* pushing the calf back in. Every push by me is met with a strong contraction, and if my hand gets pinned between her pelvis and the calf's head during one of them, then I know real pain. Somehow I get the head turned around, but it's still very stiff, and what good is it if I haven't got the feet?

Dad comes with the tractor, and we get a rope on her. She's standing now, and I find it much easier to push the calf back down. Head is backwards again. My arm is deep enough now to grab the feet. Both arms in now past my elbows, grabbing and pulling on the first foot. But something else is wrong: The joints are not responding. Everything is very stiff. I wrap a small chain around the foot with great effort and bring it to the birth canal opening. Can't find the other foot. Head is still back. I'm exhausted, and my fingers are losing their grip. Dad calls the vet, Mark Isom. He's here within twenty minutes.

So are the missionaries who are here for a dinner appointment to share mom's home-made spaghetti on my birthday. Mom serves them, tells them to enjoy, then leaves to see if she can help us.

Dr. Mark is doing the same thing I did and having the same results: no response from the joints. Stiff. Can't get the legs. First the left arm, then the right arm. Elbow deep. Then past his biceps. Now both arms. He pushes, she pulls, then OOOooops! The lariat's "quick release" mechanism does as its name suggests— but spontaneously and prematurely.

The cow, freed from her tether, staggers off through the field with me holding tail plus chain. I'm wishing somebody had a camera because this moment is otherwise unbelievable. Dr. Mark grabs another rope out of his truck, races after us, and lassos the cow. Now he tries to hold her by the neck, while I pull on the chain and the tail. "Hey, Dad! Bring the tractor!" Mom's perspective here must have been precious, seeing her birthday boy being dragged through the meadow hanging on to a cow tail with one hand and with the other clinging to a chain sticking out of the cow's butt.



Tractor's here. Tie her off. Probe again. Wave at the missionaries as they leave for their next appointment (having left a very nice note). Dr. Mark's rope now breaks. Off I go again, holding the tail and the chain of a one-ton cow. As the cow passes an astonished Dr. Mark with me in tow, I ask him: What should I do now? Preciously he responds: "I dunno!" But he runs to get another rope. 50 yards down the field, he nails her with the first throw, but now we are in a bog, with a running stream of snowmelt. I notice how Dr. Mark's nice office shoes fail him when he tries to set himself against the pull of the cow. Now where is that tractor? 50 more yards through muck and mud, the tractor roared up from behind. Tie her to the tractor, and geeeeennntly coax her out of this big cold puddle. She goes down with a splash. Relax the rope, get her up and try again. Rope breaks. Not surprised this time. I use the tried and not-true hold-the-tail-and-chain technique. This time she stays put. Dr. Mark has enough rope to tie her off while he jimmies another rope and fashions a snout tie, like a halter. With two ropes, now we use the tractor to pull her out of the puddle.

The unseasonably warm day begins to sneak away as the sun sinks low in the sky. Our feet are now cold and we shiver in our sleeveless shirts. But we have a chance to work uninterrupted and finally get the stiff, dead calf out of her, though in pieces (my job is the cable saw). I set the pieces in the tractor's front-end loader. Dr. Mark does not think this is rigor mortis. He has seen it before, but he's not certain of the cause. Dad thinks it is lupine poisoning.

When 38 is released, I am again utterly amazed at the power of instinct. She immediately jumps up and anxiously looks for her calf. She doesn't run away, just gives us an insistent look, wondering where her baby is. It breaks my heart to think of her disappointment. I just hope we really did save her life. I dearly wish we had an orphan calf to give this gentle mother.

Dr. Mark, who had been serving as stake president in the Bridger Valley, has dropped everything to respond to an emergency call to serve as a mission president with his wife, in Chile. I am grateful for the lessons he taught me in persistence and sacrifice, even without many words.

### **My Dad**

I have a vivid memory of when in my early twenties I was helping to load up cow/calf pairs in the trailer for the three-mile trip to the summer range. Because the cows would not load without their new babies, I would kidnap the babies first, pushing them up the chute into the trailer, then get out of the way while their anxious mamas would quickly follow. Then I would slide the door shut and latch it tight. One time, in the excitement of overly aggressive cows, I failed to check the trailer gate latch. During the subsequent bouncy trip up the dirt road, the door slowly bumped and slid open enough to allow two calves to fall out of the trailer. One died and the other was badly injured. This left a sickening feeling in the pit of my stomach to think that something I had failed to do had caused death and injury. I also worried about what my dad would think. I had badly let him down. Dad was a rancher who had learned his cusswords well both on the farm and in the navy and used them with perfect fluency and ease on any occasion that set off his Yosemite Sam fits of anger. So I was sick with shame and with a degree of terror.

But I am forever thankful to my dad for looking at me calmly but piercingly and telling me with deep compassion for my self-inflicted pain: “Bob, I think you learned a lesson here. There is nothing more to say.” And I am grateful that he never, ever held that mistake over my head.

### **Mentorship Going Around and Coming Around Again**

During a recent hay season, what goes around came around again when I arrived at the ranch late at night after work, when Dad had already gone to bed. I went in to see him, and he was sick with depression. He told me that he just couldn't do it any more. My brothers and I already knew that his crisp, sharp scientist's mind—always so perceptive with spot-on discernment and technical judgment—was fading. We knew that his memory—which had been so clear—had also degenerated quickly with advancing age. This night he expressed his hopelessness that he could not be entrusted with equipment: he had forgotten to close the clamshell door on the baler that used giant belts to wrap almost a ton of hay into roll-shaped bales. As he drove along with the door open, the many belts had become inter-tangled like so much spaghetti. Then when he realized what he had done, he closed the door and pulled the mess tight, smoking the clutch. Dad was sure he had ruined the baler, and I was worried that he had made a good case for his and our larger concern. But this was no time for lecturing, especially from me. The compassion and concern I felt about his deep—nearly suicidal—depression reminded me of our earlier shared experience with my many previous failures, including my failure to close a trailer door (without the excuse of advanced age or dementia). I told him, “Dad, it's OK. I'm here now, and my brothers will be here tomorrow. We'll get the baler sorted out and repaired, and you'll be fine going out to bale again when you feel up to it.”