

As a parent, I've always found it interesting to know that despite all of my careful planning and well thought out lectures, my children always seemed to see through my attempt to "mold" them and instead chose to learn things that I had not intended to teach, things that likely have more to do with who I am than I would care to admit. I think (hope) that all parents and children have this in common and when I think of all the lessons I've learned from my father, I am reminded of a particular story about his childhood.

My father was born and raised in S.W. Florida at a time and place that has always made me think that his parents must have been exiled there for committing some terrible crime, but no... they purposely homesteaded there in the early 1900's because they wanted to build a life and family there. There being "the swampy side" of what now is known as Cape Coral. It was a hot, wet, dangerous, lonely place where you were probably as likely to be eaten as find something to eat...but at least there were mosquitoes? Enough to literally drive the cattle mad and cause the settlers to burn "cow pies" as mosquito repellent and possibly "cracker" birth control.

On one occasion my father, 8 years old, and his brother Charlie, at 10 years old, were helping their father Chris, put a Long Horned Bull back in a pen. Their father's plan was that after he, on horseback, drove the bull into the pen, they were to keep the Bull from running through the hole in the fence by standing in front of it and waving their hands. Sensing that the plan needed an "incentives program" their father said, "If you let that Bull get past you there will be Hell to pay!" Now, the Bull weighed in at a little less than 2,000 lbs. and hated everything that wasn't a cow or food. My Grandfather, on the other hand, was a man of "notorious and intemperate disposition" and not someone that you crossed without suffering a wide variety of consequences, none of which were good. As the action unfolded and my father and his brother, both weighing in at well under 80 lbs. a piece, stood there in front of the hole in the fence, they had a "whisper out of the corner of the mouth meeting". Charlie decided he wanted no part of a "whippen" from Pa". My dad's assessment... "I ain't getting' run over by no Bull". True to their words, at the last second my Dad jumped out of the way, Charlie stood his ground and the Bull happily fulfilled his side of the bargain by "freight training" Charlie on his way to greener pastures and the temporary freedom of the swamp. My grandfather, after peeling Charlie, "cartoon like" off of the ground and finding him to be amazingly intact, drug him off to the woodshed for a whippen' for "being stupid enough to let a Bull run over him".

Now, there is a lot to think about in this true story (I checked with my Uncle Charlie) and no shortage of life lessons and potential morals. But to me, one of the most important was to always base our decisions on what we know to be true, not what we fear.

Of course, my Dad just thought it was funny...(until his brother Charlie caught back up with him!)