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Safety Savvy

Think Twice About the Fall

By Dan West

This is an actual incident that almost dramatically changed a family's life. The names are not real names, but please don't put yourself in a situation where your name would fit.

Recently I was visiting with a friend who has been a dairy farmer all his life. Something I said brought to his memory an incident he told me about that I would like (with his permission) to share with you. Maybe it will cause you to think twice before doing the same thing he did.

Glen told me about a day, many years ago, when he was going to clip the weeds in a pasture and trim around his farm buildings. He was a young farmer who took good care of his farmstead and his family. He agreed with his wife in being very careful about the safety of their young son, Chad.

On this particular day, Glen's wife had not returned home from an errand when the school bus dropped Chad off after a day in kindergarten. Glen was happy to see Chad and hoped they might have some father-son time together. Chad's mom would be home any minute so Glen thought he would do some trimming close to the barn where Chad could ride along with him and get a taste of some good, healthy farm work.

Glen helped his son Chad up onto the 120 horsepower tractor and helped him get settled into a comfortable spot between the fender and dad's seat. Even though the area he was going to mow was close-by, it was rough and boggy. He would be going very slowly.

Father and son enjoyed the few minutes together as the tractor and mower went at a slow walking speed around the pasture. As they got near the area that can be swampy, the bogs or mounds were a concern. They could really damage the mower if Glen wasn't careful driving over them. As the tractor tire came upon one of the mounds, the tractor's slow speed hesitated for an instant. Whether it was the tire giving against the obstruction or maybe spinning a little, a lag in the tractor's governor, or maybe the lash or slack being taken up in the tractor's drive train, he didn't know. All he remembers is little Chad's feet slipping across the tractor platform and off the front edge, right in front of the rear tire! As Chad's body dropped toward the ground in front of the tire, Glen's reflexes took over. His foot had been on the clutch ready to slow or stop the tractor to protect his equipment, so in his lunge for his son, he depressed the tractor's clutch. Miraculously, two of Glen's fingers caught little Chad's shirt collar. Glen remembers feeling the lugs of the tractor tire claw at Chad's body as he pulled him back onto the platform!

Glen embraced his son in terror and relief. Glen could not keep his knees still as adrenaline continued to race through his veins. He could not finish mowing. He did not

even feel like finishing his day's work. As many times as they had guarded against allowing Chad to be around hazardous situations, the one time circumstances seemed to allow an exception, a potential tragedy ensued with a very narrow escape. This was really a wake-up call for the family. Never again did they thoughtlessly allow one of their children to ride on a tractor just for the fun of it.

Tractor run-over is the second leading cause of death in agriculture. In New York State 43% of all tractor-related fatalities result from a run over. Nationally, about one quarter of the deaths in the nation's second most hazardous industry happen very much like this incident. A high percentage of the victims are Chad's age. Tractors are serious machines in the industry of food production. They are not something children should think are "fun" things.

The more times we take chances like this, the greater the chance there is of a tragic outcome. Keep the odds in your favor; don't allow riders, especially children, on your tractor. For more information about reducing the risks in agriculture, one of the nation's most hazardous industries, call NYCAMH, the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health at 607-547-6023 or 800-343-7527.