

STUNG BY BEES, RUN OVER BY TRACTOR

Wisconsin Farmer "Should Be Dead"

By Tom Lawin

Wisconsin dairyman Steve Anderson might have uttered the epitome of understatements when he described his experience on the morning of July 21 as "unique."

He also was reluctant to retell it, contending, "No one except those who know me will believe it."

Yet the episode that occurred when Anderson, 34, was cutting hay on a neighbor's farm near Sanborn is one that Anderson said reinforced his religious convictions. "I was a believer before this happened but this clinched it."

For those who doubt this experience, Anderson has several broken ribs and rear tractor tire marks on his body to prove the actual happening of a farm accident that his doctor and others said should have left him dead.

About mid-morning July 21, Anderson was operating his 60 horsepower Model 175 Massey-Ferguson tractor, cutting hay on a neighbor's farm.

"It was just a nice day to be out in the fields," Anderson remembers.

As he neared an apiary of perhaps 16 bee hives, Anderson was attacked by swarms of honey bees.

"I guess I panicked and jumped off the tractor," he says. "I have been driving tractor since I was 6 or 7, and this was the first time I ever got off a tractor without stopping it first. But it didn't make any difference which side I jumped off. If I had jumped off the other (left) side, I would have landed closer to the hives and I just wanted to get away from the bees. As it was, it would have happened anyway. I guess."

The "IT" Anderson referred to is an incident dripping with luck, strength, valor and, he is convinced, "help from someone else."

Anderson jumped from the moving tractor, but tripped on a small pipe protruding from the side of the tractor where the front-end loader trip is attached. This caused him to land on the hayfield in a standing position, facing the rear tractor tire, which was bearing down on him.

"It almost was like slow-motion," Anderson remembers as the tractor tire started its trek up his body.

"The tire pressed against my feet so I couldn't move. It knocked me to the ground, of course, and just kept rolling up the center of my body," the 6-foot tall, 230-pound Anderson said, all the time being swarmed and stung by hordes of bees which Anderson said later "reminded me of some sort of horror movie."

And what was to happen next may be the most remarkable aspect of this freak accident on a small dairy farm less than 15 miles from the shore of Lake Superior, other than the fact that Anderson still lives.

As the left rear tractor tire crept up Steve Anderson's body, he braced his elbows on the hayfield, shielding his face, and exerted upward pressure. The tractor tire followed up his arms and over — but ABOVE — his head.

"That tractor weighs 7,400 pounds without any attachments and the rear tires are filled with fluid," Anderson said. "I have broken elm beams loading that tractor on a truck to take to tractor pulls, so I know it is a heavy one."

And he added, still mystified, "I don't know if it was me or somebody else lifting that tractor tire off my head."

The tractor continued its errant journey across Mary Wallner's hayfield, dragging Steve Anderson behind it only inches from an operating haybine.

Although he was covered by swarming, frenzied honey bees, Anderson braced one foot against a haybine sickle guard and grabbed a metal bar that hangs above the sickle, while at the same time pressing the

"Reminded me of a horror movie."

other leg against the haybine frame.

"It was at this point that I thought for sure it was all over for me," he says. "I was covered with bees and barely hanging on to a runaway tractor pulling a fully operative haybine. And I can remember screaming, 'Oh, my God, don't let me die.'"

"When I said that, the tractor stopped — dead."

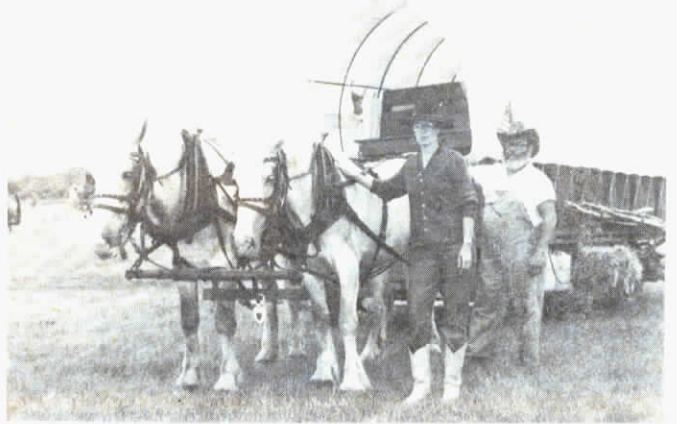
Indeed, the tractor had stopped. It had come to rest against the only tree in an entire fenceline large enough to stop the tractor and haybine. A rather small tree was bent over by the front end of the tractor; it snapped up against the front tractor axle, causing the rear tires to spin and dig deep holes, killing the engine.

But that wasn't the end of the morning ordeal for Steve Anderson.

After the tractor lodged against that small tree (causing not a single scratch on the tractor), Mr. Anderson jumped up and although injured and covered with bees, he started running toward his neighbor's house, 250 yards away, "grabbing handfuls of bees out of my head and crushing them in the palms of my hands." He pounded on her screen door and she let him in, along with many bees.

Anderson asked Mrs. Wallner to call the ambulance and after that the elderly woman started beating at the bees with a fly swatter.

Anderson's condition deteriorated, due probably to bee venom. "I was convinced I was dying and I told my



Marion and Glen Gruenburg traveled like pioneers from Wisconsin to Texas.

"A DREAM COME TRUE"

Modern Pioneers Travel By Covered Wagon

By Wally E. Schulz

Retired Wisconsin farmers Marion and Glen Gruenburg, of Argyle, sold their possessions, built a covered wagon and headed for Texas to realize "a dream come true."

From May to December of last year, they traveled through 160 towns and cities, staying with 86 different families along the way. They're currently in Texas and about ready to journey back to Wisconsin with their homemade covered wagon and team of horses.

It all began in early 1985 when the Gruenburgs began building their 7 by 14 ft. covered wagon, a task that took them 2½ months to complete. It's made of pinewood and features foot-pedal disc brakes, salvaged from a junked car, on all four wheels.

"We started out from home with a team of Welch ponies but they didn't work out," notes Marion. "We sold them and bought Maude and Jerry, a pair of 3-year old Belgian roans that weigh 3,000 lbs."

It took the Gruenburgs 2½ months to make the trip to Texas. They averaged 20 miles per day during the 61 days they were actually on the road.

"People were so friendly and helpful along the way," notes Glen.

Some would visit for a few minutes — others for several hours. All admired our courage to make the long trip alone.

"At night we took shelter in farm yards. We'd always ask for permission to park and were never sent away. Many times, families would invite us into their homes to dine with them, and to spend an entire weekend. Some even took us along to church."

The Gruenburgs carry only the "bare essentials" for clothing and food in their covered wagon. Supplies, including grain for the horses, are stored under the floor boards.

Water is carried in huge plastic jugs which hang on the sides of the wagon. "We stop in small towns along the way to purchase groceries and other supplies," says Marion. "We cook over a Coleman two-burner stove which also heats the wagon to a comfortable temperature on chilly mornings. I do the washing in a big tub and string a line between two trees to dry it."

Marion adds that "we've never had trouble with outlaws trying to raid our wagon, or steal our belongings."

brother not to let my wife or daughter into the emergency room at the hospital. I knew what I must have looked like after being dragged by the tractor and being stung by all those bees."

His doctor apparently shared some of the same thoughts. Anderson says that three or four times during the 2½ days he was in the intensive care unit "My doctor would only shake his head and say, 'by rights, you should be dead.'"

The number of bee stings is not known, but Anderson's brother pulled 17 stingers from the palm of just one hand. And he said his entire

forehead looked just like whisker stubble there were so many bee stingers sticking out of it. When the ambulance arrived, Anderson's brother wrapped him in ice and administered oxygen because of the difficulty his brother had in breathing, a reaction from the bee venom.

And it was discovered that when the rear tractor tire was lifted over Steve Anderson's head, his elbows were hammered a full three inches into the ground from the weight of the tractor.

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