

# Trouble strikes in a heartbeat



## My Generation By HOLLY SPANGLER

**M**Y husband, John, walked in the backdoor the other day with a telltale blue shop towel wrapped around his hand, the blue slowly being overtaken by red.

After washing and examining, we declared it clearly painful but not stitch-worthy. (John is a fairly good assessor of stitch-worthiness, having sported 50-some in his lifetime.) This one was a typical shop injury; he was replacing shovels on the cultivator, operating an impact on the back side and using his gloved hand to hold the top end of the bolt, which was rubbed smooth and sharp at the edges. It slipped, the bolt spun and there he was.

"Should've stopped and put on leather gloves," John said later as we wrapped his finger.

That one will leave a mark. But as farm accidents go, it certainly could've been worse. Like the time he wound up with a bruised kidney after a cow tried to go over him instead of around him. Or the time our neighbor found himself beneath the settling bean head of his combine.

Farming communities are littered with such tales. Like the neighbor whose pelvis was broken beneath a mower. Or the guy in the next town who took a nasty fall down a silo. The livestock men with bad knees, or those like my own dad, who was nearly killed by a bull. And how, with near certainty, you can figure that a man of a certain age with a mangled or missing hand had, at one time, found himself tangled in a corn picker.

You begin to wonder, is there any other industry, besides perhaps mining, in which so many are injured or killed or simply bear stories of being nearly so?

### Right place, wrong time

Bad shoulders, bad hearing, bumps on heads, cuts on hands. Trouble comes in the blink of an eye, in that second when perhaps you choose to cut a corner and save a few minutes. And sometimes you take all the right precautions, to no avail. Like one Midwestern young farmer, who was fighting an uphill battle this time last year.

As he mounted insecticide boxes on the planter, flipping them over from their upside-down position on the pallet, powdery insecticide spilled everywhere. In a colossal manufacturing defect, the drill that had made holes in the metal mounting brackets slipped too far and punctured the container.

He wore goggles, gloves and a dust mask, but it wasn't long before he began feeling lightheaded, nauseous and "kind of spacey." He read the label, saw that exposure "wasn't good," and headed to the hospital with label in hand. Doctors watched him closely and later released him, but not before telling him that what he was exposed to was the same chemical found in nerve gas. If you're exposed to enough of it, you need an injection — the same shot that soldiers in Iraq carry and use

if they're exposed to nerve gas.

That day itself wasn't so bad. In fact he was planting corn again by that evening, though he admits he wasn't feeling the best. But three weeks later, he came down with a viral infection, which led to organ failure. His liver shut down, his body stopped making white blood cells and his lungs began to fill with fluid. He spent 10 days in the hospital and came home on oxygen. This is a young man,

with a wife and small children.

No doctor could connect the two, and even this young farmer doesn't think they're directly related. "But whether it did something to my immune system, that's more likely," he says.

The take-home is similarly unclear. "I don't really know what to be scared of," he says. "We always do take precautions, and I was taking precautions that day. I think the biggest thing is to realize

that things will still be there if you take an extra half hour to check over something. You hear that time and time again, but you just have to do it.

"You're still in one of the most dangerous jobs in the world," he adds. "And there's a lot left to do in life."

Exactly.

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