

News Column
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For Release 04/27/20
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DAD'S SLEDGE HAMMER

My dad's favorite tool was a sledge hammer. He was good with a sledge and he used it for just about everything.

Dad couldn't weld. He wasn't a woodworker. And he wasn't a great mechanic. However, if you handed my dad a sledge hammer, he could get things done!

When we had to replace bearings on the disc, Dad used a sledge hammer. Bent shaft on the V-blades? Get out the sledge hammer. Broken hitch on the Haybuster stacker? That one required a Handyman jack and a sledge hammer.

Smashed rear fender on the 1968 Pontiac? OK, that didn't work. Dad crawled in the trunk and tried to beat the dent back out – and I'm not talking small dent, it was smashed in about eight inches deep, stretching from the back door to the rear bumper – but he couldn't swing his sledge hammer in the trunk.

Dad eventually used the big end of a baseball bat to punch the fender back out. When he was done, he stood back admiring his work, and calmly observed that it now looked like the belly of a pregnant sow.

Oh,... and I'll never forget the day we were 10 miles from home needing to replace a post after driving the bull back to our side of the fence. We had a spare T-post in the truck, but no post driver – just Dad's often-used sledge hammer.

“Hold this post,” he said, as he adjusted his grip on the sledge hammer handle and

focused on his target, the top of the post.

I protested. You see, I had seen Dad swing a sledge hammer. He was good with it, but he didn't mess around. I knew he wasn't planning to drive the post with tiny blows from four inches away. Instead, he was going to swing that sledge hammer and drive that post in the ground with just three or four blows.

The argument didn't last long. Dad was a take-charge kind of guy who had spent some time in the military. He had a booming voice and a commanding presence. You knew it when he meant business. He barked back, "Hold the post! I won't miss!"

I held the post. He didn't miss.

As you might have guessed – judging by my dad's frequent use of a sledge hammer – things often didn't get fixed on the McClure farm until they were "broke good". At one point, the V-blade could have been repaired with minor adjustments, maybe a smaller hammer and some bolt tightening, instead of a sledge hammer. But we were apparently slow learners.

It wasn't until I was in my early-20s that I realized there was a different way of doing things. One fall in the early 1980s I helped a neighbor fill silo and it seemed like we were always stopping to fix the smallest of problems when we could have finished the day and fixed things after dark.

The silo filling job lasted a week and it finally hit me by the end of the week that, in spite of all the old and well-used equipment we were running, we never had any major breakdowns. We had stopped for a half hour to an hour some days to go to the shop and weld a small crack, but we never lost a whole day to fix something that was "broke good".

Maybe those half-hour repairs weren't a bad idea after all? And, maybe that 4:00 p.m. snack break wasn't such a bad idea either. I thought we were just wasting time – I was young

and reasoned that we could eat and rest later – but the afternoon break likely kept us fresh and alert. Now that I'm a bit older, I understand that being fresh and alert leads to less breakdowns and less accidents.

As we move into the busy planting season, I hope you will take those short breaks, and I hop you will fix those minor breakdowns before they get big. Slow down and take time to hug the kids or grandkids. The work will still get done,... and probably sooner than it would have if you hadn't taken a break.

As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, my office is temporarily in the basement of my home, so don't call my office. Call my cell phone at 785/477-2494 if you need to reach me. Or, send e-mail to gmcclure@ksu.edu.

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