

And I've got to admit that sometimes I exaggerate a little about the way he wants to make me into a cowgirl. I know that his only desire is for me to be happy. I once told him that I'd like to go into communications some day and he said, "Sound great. There's lots to tell about cow and chickens!"

Dad!

Well ... I hope he's just joking. But I wouldn't trade the things I've learned from my dad for anything.

And seriously, Mrs. Hayes. If you ever want a lifetime supply of eggs and fried chicken ... just see me.

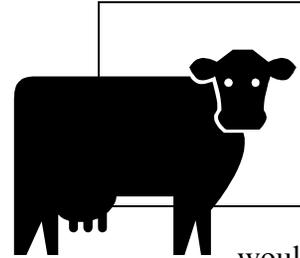
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#111 - COW GIRL

by Ken Bradbury

Don't take me wrong and please don't quote me on this. I mean, I wouldn't want him to find out and then I'd be in real trouble ... but if you've got a minute, then I've got a secret for you. Promise you'll keep it quiet? Do you promise? You've got that look on your face. Ok ... here's the secret: My Dad is trying to ruin my Life!

I'm not kidding! He hatched the plot the day I was born. Really! This is not just a speech! This is the honest-to-gosh truth! And how is he doing this? My father is trying to establish that me being a farm girl surpasses all other human endeavors.

OK, for those of you who don't know anything about farming, let me set a few things straight. We don't ride to school on a mule, we don't sleep with the chickens, and (*sarcastically*) even some of us have indoor plumbing.

My dad was born on a farm, his dad was born on a farm, *his* dad was a farmer, and his ... well listen ... Do you remember how one of Adam and Eve's boys decided to "till the soil?" We have an old picture of him at one of our family's reunions.

My dad always dreamed of having a boy to farm along side him. Before I was born, he'd purchased a set of toy tractors, a toy tool set, and painted my baby room blue with Angus cows all over the ceiling. Then I was born. He asked the doctor, "Are you sure?" But dad isn't one to give up. He figured, "Heck, I'll just slap a pair of overalls on her until she's twenty years old and maybe she'll just become a boy from the chemicals in the work boots."

But here I am ... a semi-normal eighth-grade girl with all the hopes and dreams of any girl. ... stuck with a dad who wonders why I don't have an urge to go out and wrestle steers.

My friends will sit around in our last hour class on Friday afternoon and say to each other, "What are you doing this weekend, Jenny?"

And Jenny says, “Oh, I’m so excited! Mom is taking me to the mall and we’re spending the entire day at Lord and Taylor, and Victoria’s Secret, just doing girl stuff.”

“Wow! Sounds great! And what are you doing, Alison?”

And Alison says, “Me? Oh nothing much. We’re taking off for St. Louis to see a game, then do a little shopping at Central Station. Mom says I can have a manicure and get my hair done in one of those fancy places!”

“Great! And how about YOU _____?”

A quiet drops onto the room of girls as the entire group turns to look at me. My mouth drops open. I try to smile. I try to think of an elegant way to tell what dad has planned for us this weekend. I mean, how do you say, “Oh, we’re going to scoop manure and slop the hogs” in a French accent? I stumble around for a minute, then mumble, “Oh, we’re going to ... clean a few things out ... and prepare some food.”

They nod and smile, not having any idea what I’ve just said ... which is just the way I want it.

I just feel like my girlhood is passing me by while I’m standing in the cornfield!

Last week we were talking during PE. class. Stephanie said, “Can you believe the price they want for Guess jeans these days? I mean, I’m going to be reduced to wearing my old Calvin Kleins and Paris Sport Club!”

“I know what you mean,” says Chandra. “Mom just got me some of the new Georgio Armani perfume but I think it’s worth every dollar.”

“Tell me,” says Katie. “Do you guys like Pantene Pro V shampoo or do you prefer Herbal Essence?”

“Who cares? They’re all the same,” answers Callie. “As long as I have my Maurice’s nail polish, I’m ready for anything!”

Then they turn to me. “What about you, _____? Don’t you have anything to say?”

Again, my mouth drops open. I begin to sweat. I mean, I’ve got to at least talk like a girl, even if my dad doesn’t believe I am one. Frantically, I search my mind for an intelligent comment, then the words blurt out of my mouth: “Did you know that if you use

enough Furadan Insecticide you can increase your corn yield by over twenty percent?”

Now *their* mouths drop open. You could hear a soybean drop. They looked at each other out of the corners of their eyes ... you know, sort of the way they do when someone walks into the President’s Inaugural Ball wearing a Burrus Seed hat.

Last year we had to do an informational speech in class. Mrs. Hayes said, “Pick a topic you’re familiar with. Tell us about something at home.” JoEllyn told the class how she made a four-layer chocolate cake. Jane explained how to paint fancy pictures on your fingernails. Laura told how she made a skirt out of her mother’s old drapes. Then it was my turn. I don’t want to say that mine was unusual but it was certainly the first time the seventh-grade class had ever heard a speech on chicken breeding. It was my Dad’s idea.

“Dad!” I said, “What are the chances that Mrs. Hayes will ever need to raise a brood of chickens?”

“Well, _____ you just never know. Things like that can come in mighty useful sometimes.”

I thought about it. Mrs. Hayes lives in a condo. After about a week, she’d have to get pretty creative trying to find a place for all those chicks. But I couldn’t come up with a better idea, so I gave the speech.

Then one night dad picked me up from speech practice. As he pulled into the school’s driveway after a long day on his job, one of my friends said to me, “You’re so lucky, to have a dad like that.”

I looked at his muddy truck and said, “Huh?”

She said, “I mean one who cares that much about you. That guy would do anything for you.”

I guess I’d known that all along but it suddenly hit me. He really does care about me. And he would do anything for me ... including encouraging me to be whatever I want to be. The things he’s taught me about hard work, being responsible, and feeling appreciated and loved are the greatest gifts a father could ever give his daughter.