I see

Why my ag teacher thought it would be a good idea to assign a man-killing steer to a skinny freshman still puzzles me. After he saw his mistake he went to teach in Thailand and didn't come back until he was sure that steer was deader than disco.

I called the maniacal steer Abe, with apologies to our great President, and his "coming out" party was a pre-fair show day where he arrived with his head and one leg poking through the roof of my Grandpa's horse trailer. So it was only natural that he'd be a little excited as four grown men extricated him from the trailer.

It didn't surprise anyone who knew Abe intimately that we spent the rest of the day chasing the steer through the south side of our community. After that, word spread throughout the county for people to lock up their kids and pets as a black devil was coming to the fair.

I spent the first few days of the fair staying as far away from Abe as possible. During that time my buddies and I passed the time playing Blind Man's Bluff with a cane that a friend used to show his hog. I'd put on a pair of sunglasses and walk down the midway pretending to be blind, swinging that cane and clobbering every other fairgoer in the shins. Then we'd stand in front of a booth or food stand and my friends would describe to me what I'd be seeing if I could only see. Which of course I could. I know it would be politically incorrect nowadays and I promise I'll never to do it again.

When showmanship day came, for some reason Abe mellowed out for the first and only time in his life. I know what you're thinking, I swear I didn't give him any drugs. Unbelievable as it sounds, Abe and I won beef showmanship, which made us eligible to compete in a round robin where the winners of hog, dairy, sheep and beef showmanship all had to show each other's animal.

Fortunately for me, Abe reverted back to his own mean self by the time the round robin began.

In preparation for the contest it was suggested that the ambulance relocate from the rodeo arena to the showmanship ring where it might be needed for a load and go, or a scoop and a scoot.

The winner of the dairy showmanship was one of my best friends and he knew all about my steer being a psychotic killer. He was shaking like a frozen calf and started stuttering for the first time in his life as I handed him the lead strap.

“D-d-d-do-I-h-h-have-t-t-to?” he asked. He tried leading Abe walking backwards like he did his Holstein replacement heifer and all you could hear as Abe stepped on his toes across the ring was, “Ow,ow,ow,ow.” He walks with a limp to this day as a result.

Next, I handed off my steer to the sheep showman with the admonition not to use the show stick. Figuring I was just trying to win, he tried to get Abe’s back up by hooking him under the sheath. Big mistake!

Abe exploded like a rocket across the arena, dragging the showman with him. It didn’t seem to slow Abe down one bit as he kept yelling, “Whoa’ whoa, whoa!” When he finally did rise from the turf (with help from the medics) he was covered in blood and grass stains and his eyes bulged out of his head like those of a roadkill flattened frog. He had emotional scars the rest of his life.

After witnessing this carnage, the mother of the hog showmanship came running and screaming into the ring as I was about to hand her diminutive child the devil steer. Her delicate son wouldn’t have weighed 100 pounds if he was holding a big bag of taters, so after a brief ringside conference it was decided that the small fry would just answer questions for the judge while Abe stayed triple-tied to the fence.

Thanks to my deranged steer I thought I had the round robin won but much to my surprise the judges said the winner was the wimpy hog showman who never even took a turn at Abe’s halter! Initially I couldn’t understand the judge’s decision, but I could see more clearly when, on my way out of the ring the hog showmanship judge said to me with a smirk, “I’m glad to see you regained your eyesight in time for the round robin.”

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