A View from the Buggy

Jerry S. Eicher
Nathan Miller

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A Horse Named Rose

Jerry Eicher

Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away (Matthew 5:42).

Humility is valued by the Amish community, right up there after godliness. Every member is expected to readily admit to his or her shortcomings. So I will open this book of true Amish stories with a tale from my family's repertoire of less-than-stellar accomplishments.

County Road 96 runs through the center of the little Amish community in Belle Center, Ohio, where our family had moved upon our return from several years in Honduras. Our time in Honduras had been a mixture of good and bad, but our return home was disappointing to the whole family.

Dad had come up to the states some months earlier and made the down payment on the property that would be our new home. When he returned, he made a point of telling us that our neighbors, Eldon Yoder and his wife, Fannie, were friendly folks, as were other folks in the Amish community.

I was 16 at the time and mourned our move away from Honduras. This preempted any interest I had in who our new neighbors would be. But when we arrived in Belle Center, Dad was proved right—the Yoders were fine, generous people. This was made clear when, upon our arrival, Eldon Yoder offered to sell us Rose, his best horse.

Eldon Yoder was a short man with a bushy beard. His wife, Fannie, was always smiling. She was almost as tall as her husband, and a fluttering sort of woman. Fannie gave off a sense of eternal busyness, which contrasted with the easygoing nature of her husband.

If Eldon had any regrets about the sale of Rose, I never heard him

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say so. And one would have heard such a thing in that small community. I hasten to add that Rose was a gentle, mild-natured horse when we bought her. This was one of her attractive qualities, Dad claimed. We didn't need a dashing horse. We had arrived back Stateside bruised in heart and soul. A troublesome horse was the last thing we needed. Maybe that knowledge was what had stirred Eldon Yoder's compassion to sell Rose to us—or perhaps it was simply our general bedraggled condition.

Sadly, the sale of Rose to our family—though well-intentioned—quickly turned into a disaster. What happened, we never really knew. But something went wrong as we proceeded that turned a kind gesture sour. Not intentionally, of course. It just sort of happened. Dad knew how to handle horses, and he didn't abuse them. He had been around horses all of his life.

I know we liked the calm and gentle Rose and expected that she'd be a fine horse for us. But to our surprise—and no doubt Eldon Yoder's too—she was soon ruined beyond repair. Perhaps she didn't like this Amish family who had spent time in faraway Honduras. Whatever the reason, Rose began to balk. When hitched to a buggy, she simply refused to go.

This is not only a most inconvenient trait for an Amish horse to have, but a well-nigh intolerable one. The whole family would cram into the buggy outside whatever farm the church service had been held at that Sunday. People were milling around, talking with each other as the Amish do after the services—and there we were, right in the middle of the driveway, with Rose refusing to budge.

Dad would slap the reins and holler for Rose to go. Nothing happened! Rose stayed stubbornly in place. She'd even rear a little off her front feet, but she made no other movement. Next, we'd climb out of the buggy and pull on her bridle. This only angered Rose, causing her to rear higher and paw the air. We were the embarrassment of the Sunday afternoon church gathering.

Eldon Yoder would come by and talk to Rose. He'd speak in soft, soothing words of comfort. But his touch no longer did any good. Rose didn't plan to move for the Eichers until she was good and ready, and

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that was often a longer time than we cared to wait. The funny thing was that once Rose *did* take off, she hightailed it out of the lane so fast Dad could barely hang on to the lines.

This was a situation that couldn't continue for long. Dad tried every method of curing Rose he could think of. Every Amish horseman's trick in the book, Dad tried. Nothing worked.

A horse that won't cooperate isn't much good to an Amish man. So, sad to say, in the end, the inevitable happened. Dad had to sell Rose to the buyer of last resort: the local butcher shop. No one else wanted a balking horse.

It troubled us greatly—this gentle horse we had somehow ruined. We questioned the integrity of our souls. Weren't horses a decent judge of one's character? Had we failed as a family to make Rose feel at home with us? No matter how hard we tried to figure out what had gone wrong, we came to a dead end every time.

Through it all Eldon Yoder and his wife, Fannie, were our greatest comforters. They assured us that this could have happened to anyone. Not one incriminating word was ever spoken by them against this new family who had come from the ends of the earth to settle in the community.

I'm not sure I could have done the same if Eldon Yoder and his family had ruined my best horse. Eldon was a good man who knew how to give away what God had placed in his hands and to fully let it go. I wish I could always say the same of myself.

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Color Tour

Nathan Miller

And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it (Psalm 90:17).

COME HERE, THUNDER! COME HERE!" I CALLED AS I CROSSED OUR pasture. Thunder was our faithful standardbred buggy horse. I had equipped myself with a scoop of his favorite feed and a lead rope. I approached cautiously, knowing that pushing him usually didn't work. Thunder was a suspicious horse and easily turned tail. Thankfully, today Thunder cooperated and I snapped the lead rope to his halter. We headed for the barn.

The autumn day was comfortable, neither too hot nor too cold. The sky was clear and the family's excitement high. My wife, Mattie, and I had made plans for a fall color tour with our three daughters and a friend named Delores. Taking time out for a family ride along with a picnic lunch would be a special treat for all of us.

"Okay, are we ready?" I asked after I hitched Thunder to the buggy.

"Yes! Yes!" came the happy chorus.

"Giddap, Thunder," I said, and we were on our way. Thunder wasn't in a hurry and neither were we. The picture-perfect day matched our spirits as we slowly *clip-clopped* our way to deacon Omer Schrock's house to pick up Delores. Here we exchanged our buggy for their one-horse wagon, which provided more room and a better view of the scenery.

The late September countryside in rural Michigan was beautiful. We were headed eight miles to the northwest where the elevation climbed, allowing us to look out over the valley in which our small Amish community was settled.

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We relaxed and chatted as our wagon wheels slowly ate away the miles. The pace afforded plenty of time to visit, notice the birds singing, rabbits hopping, and squirrels scampering.

We crossed the Muskegon River and turned left on River Road. The trees were stunning along this back route, bursting with varied hues of bright reds, yellows, and gaudy oranges. The traffic was low and the *English* people were friendly. Most of them waved as they passed our wagon.

We must have been a rare treat for one man. He quickly pulled out his camera and took our picture as we approached. He barely had time to jump out of the way of an oncoming car as we passed each other. We waved to him and he waved back. We chuckled as we continued our journey.

"At least we made his day," I remarked to Mattie. "Apparently he doesn't see too many horses travel this road."

I soon pointed to my right. "Look at this, girls!" Someone had carved an impressive totem pole using a variety of animals. An eagle topped the pole. This was the first totem pole our children had seen in real life. We probably would have missed the delight if we had hurried by in a faster vehicle.

As we approached our destination, the road steepened and I had to urge Thunder to keep on the move. This was a longer drive than he usually took. But we soon turned onto the final stretch, a small dirt road not much wider than a two-track. We climbed the last half mile and we were there.

The view so far had been pretty, but here, looking out over the valley with the forests in crimson colors broken by the fields, it was awesome. Farms dotted the hillside here and there. Cars meandered down the ribbon roads, appearing small from our vantage point. All was peaceful and quiet as we sat on a log munching fresh popcorn and drinking lemonade. Thunder was tied close by, gratefully resting up for his return trip.

For a moment our little group sat quietly absorbing the tranquility and beauty. We were amazed how far we could see across the valley. We could even recognize a building that belonged to one of the Amish homes.

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"It looks much farther than it actually is," I remarked.

"That's right, it does," Mattie agreed. "This is so special. We get to spend time together and enjoy God's handiwork."

"I really enjoy this," I said in approval.

About then Delores had a suggestion. "Let's go for a walk. There's a trail that runs through the woods over there." She pointed to a beautiful stand of hardwoods on the right.

"Yes, let's," the children consented happily.

We slowly rose from our special log seat and stretched. We gathered the remaining picnic supplies and loaded them on the wagon for when we would later leave. Thunder was happily munching the tender grass, enjoying his break. We meandered slowly down the trail, fully enjoying this time of togetherness and family happiness.

How blessed we are, I meditated. *Thank You, Father, for giving me a beautiful, loving family. I have much more than I deserve. Thank You for Your love and care.*

Eventually I announced with reluctance, "I believe it's time to get back and head for home."

"Oh, please, just a little longer," the children begged.

"I'm sorry, but we must get home before it's too late," I said. "Perhaps we can come again next fall."

"Yes, let's," they agreed.

"Maybe we should make this a yearly tradition," Mattie suggested.

"I think that would be a great idea," I agreed.

Minutes later, the family had climbed aboard the wagon for home.

"Is everyone loaded and ready?" I asked before I untied Thunder. When there was a chorus of "Yes," I turned the wagon around, climbed aboard, and we began to retrace the eight miles back home.

"That was really worthwhile," I told Mattie. "Thank you for suggesting it."

"Oh, you're welcome," Mattie said with a smile. "It was really special."

Everyone was quiet and seemed a bit tired on the trip back. Emilee, the youngest, snuggled on my lap and was soon fast asleep. We traveled in comfortable silence, each lost in his or her own thoughts.

Thunder eagerly pulled the wagon along. He sensed we were headed

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home and had an extra spring to his steps. In no time we crossed the river and reached the Schrock residence.

We thanked Delores, glad that she had accompanied us, and hitched Thunder to our own buggy. We loaded one last time and *clip-clopped* the last stretch home. After we unhitched Thunder we unloaded the buggy. Thunder was turned out to pasture tired and happy, as we headed for the house feeling no less so.

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Going Fishing

Erma Louise Schrock

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Malachi 4:6).

One bright day in June our family was sitting at the lunch table. Rapid conversation was flowing as everyone shared their bit of news from the day's happenings so far.

My brother Alvin piped up, "Dad! I talked with Jesse this morning. He's wondering if we fellows want to go fishing this evening. He'll pick us up in his van."

Our brother Aaron wasted no time in answering that question. "Yes, let's."

Dad took a little more time to think this through. He glanced toward Mom. "Is there something else planned for this evening?"

"Not that I know of," Mom said. "Other than a quiet night at home."

"Please…let's go," the boys begged Dad.

Dad finally nodded. "I'm in favor, and I think I'll go along."

"What about me?" I asked. "I'm the oldest girl. Do I get to go even if Jesse didn't mention me?"

Jesse was our next door neighbor and an older man. He was a retired school teacher and spoke with a British accent. He sounded really intelligent. We children would hang around and enjoy his stories when he stopped by for a visit.

"Do you want to?" Dad had a smile on his face, but he already knew that answer. If Jesse was taking the boys finishing, I certainly wanted to go along.

"I'm sure Jesse wouldn't mind you tagging along," Nelson spoke up.

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I wasn't convinced and looked skeptically at Mom. She shrugged. "Whatever Dad thinks is fine with me."

"Then may I?" I was getting excited now.

Dad's smile grew broader. "Yes, I think you can." And so it was decided.

Alvin had to warn me, though. "Be ready exactly at six."

"I can handle that," I said. I was already looking forward to getting out of the house for a while. What a great treat!

The rest of the afternoon seemed to drag until it had slowed down to a snail's pace. Finally, six o'clock rolled around. As Mom and I washed the last of the dinner dishes, a small blue minivan glided into the driveway.

"Jesse's here!" I shouted, and looked hopefully at Mom. "May I go now?"

"Of course," Mom said. "I'll finish up with your sisters."

"Thanks," I whispered, and slipped into my flip-flops.

"Enjoy yourself," Mom said as I went out the door.

"Don't worry, I will," I hollered over my shoulder.

I approached the van, and a sudden shyness swept over me. I quietly joined Dad and Alvin, who were packing the last of the fishing devices.

Jesse peered out of the van. "Well…hello! So you're going along?"

"Hi." I tried to smile. "I guess so."

Jesse didn't seem to object and my pounding heart slowed down.

Dad shoved the cooler into the back of the van and said, "I think we're all set now. Everyone hop in."

"Where will I sit?" I whispered to Alvin.

"You can sit in the backseat with me," Alvin suggested, so I wiggled in beside him while the rest found their seats around us.

We're actually going, I thought with excitement.

I leaned toward Alvin. "How long does it take to get there?"

"About fifteen minutes," Alvin explained as the van rolled out of the lane.

I settled back and watched the landscape pass by with one ear open to the guys' conversation.

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"Why aren't we driving to the lake in our buggy?" I interrupted to ask Alvin.

"We could have," Alvin said, "but it's better this way. The lake only allows access to the property owners living around it or to the people they know. We'd cause too many questions driving in with our buggy."

That made sense, and I went back to looking out of the van windows.

"I think we're getting close," Alvin finally said. He pointed to a large welcome sign marking the entrance to Lake Miramichi. We followed the winding lane and parked close to the water's edge. Someone pushed open the van doors and out we tumbled.

"Come with me," Dad said as he picked up the tackle box, fishing pole, and a bucket.

I pulled my rod out of the back of the van. "Do we have worms?" I asked.

Nelson handed me a Folger's coffee can full of wiggling night crawlers. "Here are some for you."

I took the can with one hand and followed Dad as he led the way to the beach area, where we found a pretty spot along the bank. The rest of the group also settled in. I gazed around in wonder at the beauty of the place.

Dad interrupted my pleasant thoughts when he handed me a worm. "Tear this long one apart so we don't waste anything."

I wrinkled my nose as I tried to get a grip on the slimy thing. I clutched the worm with both hands and gave a mighty jerk. The deed was done. Dad took one end and I was left with the other piece.

"Can you bait your own hook?" Dad asked.

"The boys showed me how at home," I said, but I held my breath as I slid the worm on the hook. Afterward I bent over to rinse my hand in the lake water and rose to my feet again. I gave the line a fling and ever so slowly reeled the line in. Dad gave his rod another toss, which sent his line way beyond where mine had landed.

"How do you cast it out so far?" I asked.

Dad jiggled his line. "You give the rod a good, firm cast and release the button just as you finish your swing."

"I wish you'd watch and see if I do it right," I said.

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"Just a minute." Dad finished reeling his line in. "Okay. Go for it."

I took a good grip and gave my best cast. It fell short of where I wanted it, but Dad didn't appear discouraged. "Practice, practice, practice," he said.

I smiled and reeled in slowly. The line bobbed.

"Set your hook!" Dad hollered.

I hauled back and wailed when the now empty line flew out over the water. Dad only smiled. "Practice, practice, practice."

I cast my line again, and there it was. Another bite. I set my hook and squealed, "I got him!"

"Bring it in," Dad encouraged. "Keep reeling."

The next moment I had a good-sized fish out of the water.

"That's a nice bluegill." Dad beamed. "Can you unhook it?"

"No," I said. Dread filled my mind. Surely Dad wouldn't make me learn how to unhook a fish this evening. But my fears soon came true.

Dad calmly stepped closer. "I'll show you how, and the next time you can do it." He pointed. "Here are the gills, so slip your hand down like this." He demonstrated, grasping the fish. "Push the hook down like this, and there you go." Dad finished and threw the fish into the bucket.

How will I ever get a grip like that on a slippery fish? I wondered with wide eyes.

Dad had already gone back to fishing, so I cast once more. In no time I had another fish.

"I still can't do it," I moaned to Dad.

"It's part of the fun," Dad said. "It's not as hard as it looks."

I took a deep breath and slipped my left hand over the fish's face. Dad smiled as I seized the hook. Slowly I pushed down, and amazingly I had it unhooked.

"Good job," Dad cheered.

I felt warm all over. "You're right," I told him. "It works if you just do it."

We were soon back to fishing, the rest of the evening passing swiftly. We released the smaller fish but kept the larger ones.

Just before sunset Dad announced, "I think we should gather up our things and head home."

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"Already?" I groaned. "I'm enjoying myself."

"It's after nine." Alvin seconded Dad's opinion, and I knew we'd have to leave. Moments later we loaded everything into the van, and I settled into the backseat again.

"I hope we can do this again," I whispered to Alvin.

"So do I," Alvin agreed.

I figured I'd smile a long time over this wonderful evening. And to think that God had made such amazing things as fish. He must be a very great God.

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