

Episode 3: The HighCroft Farm Running Race

Sudden banging on the front door aroused us from a relaxing mid-morning tea break. I knew immediately there was trouble, the fencing kind of trouble where all the neighbours know your name, but don't sing your praises. Indeed, the husky, bewhiskered dairy man from down the road was standing in full blown agitation at the front door – his truck still running for speedy getaway – and he bellowed “Your Bulls are in with my Heifers!”

Did I mention we had bought FOUR DAIRY BULLS masquerading as beef steers? (I mean, what did we know about the difference between dairy and beef cattle this first year of Sorrento farming? They all had four legs, right?) The bewhiskered dairy farmer took off back to his precious heifers, and three of us piled into a vehicle and raced after him, amazed and proud that our little lovely calvey walveys had made it 2 kms down the hill, through multiple barbed wire fences and had found “The Gals”. We glowed as we remarked on how smart our calves were, indeed a sense of ownership pride filling our hearts. But within minutes, we experienced a rapid change of heart as we faced the great dilemma posed by our runaway Bully Boys – how to get them back home when they had no intention of leaving The Gals? Within minutes, we were indeed glowing but not from pride and joy. With sweat running down our faces and hearts pumping overtime, we were running full out in attempts to herd the over-excited, attention deficit Bully Boys back home.

You may remember I wrote, down the hill, just a few short sentences ago, and a very smart person would know that what runs down must struggle back up. Indeed, this is so, and never more so as I zigged and zagged back and forth in top running gear up a VERY STEEP 2 klm hill. Neighbours went by chuckling that this was the new “Jenny Craig Workout for Sorrento” and giving advice on different ways to skip up the hill for maximum fat burning benefit. We politely smiled and waved in between ragged breaths and curses at Bully Boys who had suddenly turned into brilliant homing devices, constantly recalculating the quickest route back to The Gals! “Can we outwit four bull calves?” was the million dollar question of the moment. We were sorely tested and definitely humbled by the time we secured the double padlock on their barn gate, **three hours later!**

One might think that those bully boys would never have escaped again, and to be true, we did put them the next day into our VERY BEST FENCED FIELD! “Ah Hah!” we crowed in their bully faces, “You can't get out of THERE!!!!” But they did, the very next evening...My husband and I were all dressed in our magnificent finery looking forward to dinner out with friends. As we were leaving the long and winding road to our property, I glanced across the field looking for the regular evening appearance of a lovely herd of deer. But what is this? A rusty colored deer was gracing our fields?!? An aberration? A trick of the light? “NO, BEGAAADS!” I shrieked in top soprano “The Bully Boys are out AGAIN!!” High heels flew in the hayfield as I leapt out of the car and attempted to block their path, spurred on by visions of no sugar coated fairies danced in my head, but very angry be-whiskered dairy men shaking their fists in my direction! Dinner had to wait; it was time to start the Evening Attire Version of the HighCroft Farm Running Race again! Those bully boys HAD TO BE STOPPED!!

Episode 4 – Who’s Got Your Back?

Partnerships are crucial on the farm, it being a place of much upheaval and unexpected emergencies on practically a daily basis. You really want to know that someone has your back, that if you don’t return for dinner, someone back at the farmhouse cares enough to come looking....

“I’m going out to check on the lambs.” I advised my husband as I jammed the toque down over my ears. The clock showed the weary hour of 11 p.m. on a January night, the temperature dropping well below freezing. “I won’t be long.” I mumbled over my shoulder as I stomped out.

The sheep were all quiet, chewing their cud and gazing wisely into the distance. Next stop was the goat barn and my husband had just repaired the two latches to make them failsafe. Goats are forever escaping and with these new latches, the door would be impossible for goats to open. Perfect!

As I stepped inside, I could see a newly born kid lying unnaturally still in front of a doe who was obviously in pain and struggling with a second birth. With no time to waste, I ripped off my gloves and knelt over the rapidly cooling newborn. Quickly, I cleared mouth mucous and then massaged the small limp body with a soft ball of hay. “Come on, little one, take a breath.” I pleaded and a little cough reassured me this one would make it. Now I turned my attention to the young doe, who was letting out howls of pain and fear. “Shhh now girl, it’s alright, you’re going to be fine.” I spoke soothingly and stroked her neck. Here was the second one coming alright, but the little hooves were pointing the wrong way – a backwards entrance into the world was causing trouble for this new mum. “Oh why didn’t I bring my sterile gloves?” I groaned to myself, as I realized this one needed a bit of help to get the hips through the birth canal. But with some gentle manipulation, out popped a very big twin.

I headed to the barn door, going to get towels and disinfectant, but the door wouldn’t open! Not one inch! I was dumfounded, and looked around in confusion. The door was locked from the outside that was clear, but how? Oh no, Molly, the Goat Queen, was not in the barn! She had nudged the door open, and out into the night while my back was turned. No doubt feeling the sting of the freezing cold, she had been trying to get back inside and had jumped up, closing those failsafe latches with her hooves! I was imprisoned in the goat house!

Nobody would hear me yelling, so I attempted a mind meld with my husband. I felt sure he would realize very soon that I hadn’t come back in, but by 2 a.m., I was cold, grumpy and fed up with goat bonding. Memories of action shows tickled my brain as I remembered impressive scenes of doors being ripped off their hinges by dudes with strong shoulders. I stood up and stretched my frozen muscles like Rocky before the big fight, realizing with cold determination what I had to do. I jumped full force at the door, but nothing budged except the bones in my shoulder. Aaargh! I’d had enough! Before I could hesitate, I put my head down, let out a bloodcurdling yell and ran straight through that door without stopping, destroying those two failsafe latches and out into the freedom of the night.

Loud, carefree snores greeted my slack jawed, glazed look of disbelief as I staggered into the house. Yep, on the farm you really want to know that someone has your back.....

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