



RiverBender Blog: When Babysitting Cows, Beware the Electric Fence

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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How do I find myself in these situations?

I once watched a TED Talk by Shonda Rhimes about her “Year of Yes” — that is, the year she spent saying “yes” to every opportunity that came her way. It’s an inspiring speech and one I have taken to heart, and while my new “yes” motto has led to great experiences, it has also opened the door to some of the weirdest things I’ve ever done.

Case in point: Here I was, house-sitting, in charge of five dogs, two cows and a beautiful garden. I am not a farmer. I am not even a gardener. My plants, which sit on the windowsill in my office, are currently holding on for dear life. But suddenly, I had a whole mini farm relying on me.



My biggest concern (literally) was the cows. Baby Cow had been orphaned. Big Cow was a very patient honey-colored heifer who Baby Cow had imprinted on. Baby Cow had to be bottle-fed and was so excited when he saw me coming that he would headbutt

the wooden fence around his little enclosure until I got close enough for him to wrap his tongue around my wrist.

If you've never been around cows, they are exactly like dogs. I'm not exaggerating. I have never been closer to vegetarianism as I was this week. The cows responded to petting and baby talk, they came running to their food dish, they really just wanted to play.

They were also huge — like, way bigger than you'd think when you see them in a field. Even Baby Cow, only a month old, came up to my waist already. I loved the cows and also found them a little nerve-wracking. I would be completely at their mercy if they decided to “Animal Farm” me, or even just lean too heavily against me. One misplaced hoof could break my foot.

But as it turned out, it was the cows who needed to be afraid of me.

After pouring feed into Big Cow's trough and bottle feeding Baby Cow, I hung out with them for a few minutes. Baby Cow was messy, with strings of milk hanging from his lips and drool collecting in puddles on the dusty floor. He reached through the fence and chewed lazily on my jeans like a teething toddler, a true baby.

Big Cow had kind eyes. A year old now, she was losing her fluff and turning sleek and smooth. With Baby Cow occupied (he was now focused on the pellets in his enclosure, meant to slowly wean him off the bottle), I gave Big Cow some much-needed love. She had a bigger enclosure, with plenty of space to roam, but she had come closer to the fence for her meal. I leaned over the fence and stroked her nose, watching her big calm eyes as she blinked and her tail did lazy pinwheels. I leaned closer —

ZAP. I jolted back. My thigh had brushed the electric fence and, I would later discover, burned me through my jeans. A lot of people in the Riverbend area have had this experience before, especially if you're a farmer, but this was my first time. I was unnerved, not by the pain (which was minimal) but by the way I had spasmed. I had been warned about the fence, of course, but a few days of successfully caring for the cows had made me too bold. I had lost my caution.

And poor Big Cow! With my hand on her nose, she had felt the shock too and ran away with an angry “moo.” It was like accidentally stepping on a cat's tail, when you feel so guilty but all you can do is beg for forgiveness. I felt terrible, but fortunately, Big Cow was easily won over again with extra food and pets.

Baby Cow, meanwhile, gave us both a quizzical look and was thoroughly unhelpful.



Later that night, nursing a burn and lingering guilt as five dogs laid on top of me, I reflected on my decisions. Agreeing to everything that comes your way isn't always a good move, but craziness aside, this was one of the most fun "yes'es I had experienced so far in my Year of Yes journey. Then and there, I renewed my commitment to saying yes to more things, even weird things like bottle-feeding cows and tending to a mini farm.

And I suggest you say yes, too. You never know what weird situations you will find yourself in, or the cool things you'll do as a result. You may get burned, but you could also have the time of your life.

Just take the appropriate precautions, and beware the electric fence.

