

It Only Takes a Second to Get Hurt

by:
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The February night promised to be clear and cold, with a full moon in the sky. Pigs move good on a night like this, and I enjoy the cold weather. My friend, Marcus, had to cancel at the last minute; but that was okay. I enjoy hunting alone; although my wife, Linda, doesn't approve. She says that hunting by myself makes my brain malfunction.

I settled into my stand well before dark, and as light faded I had a good feeling about the night ahead. An hour or so later I heard the first pig sound, a faint squeal in the hollow below. As I strained to listen I heard a familiar sound, almost like wind in the trees which gradually grew louder and closer. It takes a lot of pigs running through the woods to sound like that.

The little ones came in first, and the feeder light came on to reveal several little piglets. The bigger hogs stopped in the darkness but close enough to hear them sniffing the air and making low grunts. Sometimes they completely circle the feeder before committing, but tonight they came in rather quickly. They were skittish at first, but began to relax as they fed. I chose a pig, slowly stood, settled the pin and touched the release.

There was a thud and loud squeal, then a few seconds of chaos as pigs scattered in all directions. The commotion was followed by total silence. I could see my arrow, with lumenok glowing, laying on the ground; so I sat down to settle my nerves and hope the pigs would return. Sometimes they do, but not tonight. I climbed down to investigate and found blood right away. I needed to wait a little longer before tracking, so I packed my gear and took everything to the truck. I stored my stand and pack, put my good flashlight and GPS in my pocket, and drove as close as possible to the stand. Then I went to find my pig.

The blood trail was just challenging enough to be fun. It went about a hundred yards, all downhill; and at the end lay a good sow, about 150 pounds I guessed. The woods were fairly open, and it would be easy enough to get the four wheeler to her. The only problem was she

died in a deep gully, but I could winch her out. I marked the spot on my GPS and went to get the Polaris.

I phoned Linda to tell her what I was doing and she insisted I call someone to help. I told her I'd call Marcus; and I did, but not to ask for help, just to brag. He said he'd be there in thirty minutes; but I told him not to bother, I'd have her loaded and headed home by then. He called me "a stubborn, hard-headed old fart." I laughed and hung up on him.

The ride in was easy enough, and when I reached the gully it didn't look as steep as before. I can get her out without the winch I thought, and started down the slope.

What happened next took only seconds, but seemed like a slow motion eternity. The four wheeler got sideways and started to flip. I tried to jump, but ended up on my back at the bottom of the gully. I saw the 4x4 flipping over and over and knew it was going to land on me.

It's funny what you think of at times like that. I remember looking up at the moon and stars and thinking they were pretty. I thought about my knee replacement and how the doctor had forbidden me to climb a tree stand and warned me to be careful when hunting. I thought about Linda, how special she is and how much I love her. I remember thinking I didn't want to leave her on her own. And for the first time I wished I wasn't hunting alone.

The impact was even greater than I expected. I felt the air rush out of my body and saw a flash of light. I think I was out for a while, but slowly came to my senses. I lay in the dark knowing I was hurt, but not exactly where or how badly. I began moving body parts to take inventory. Everything seemed to work okay except my left arm. It was hard to move and had a huge knot on the shoulder. Pain in my chest and the taste of blood made me wonder if I had internal injuries.

I managed to get to a sitting position, then struggled to my feet. I walked around gathering my thoughts and wondering what to do next. The logical thing was to call for help, but I didn't. It was ten-thirty at night, and no one knew exactly where I was anyway. Calling Linda would just upset her; and I was too proud, stubborn, and embarrassed to call anyone else.

I didn't think I could walk out, and the four wheeler was still on its side. I pushed it with my foot, and to my surprise it rolled to its wheels. I turned the key, and it started right up. I got on, put it in low range 4WD, and managed to drive out of the woods and load it on the trailer.

As I was getting in the truck I saw headlights coming across the field. Marcus had come even though I told him not to. He looked in the trailer and truck and asked where my pig was. I said it was still in the woods and told him what happened. When he saw my shoulder he said he was taking me to the hospital. I told him I could drive, just needed him to follow me home. He called me "a stubborn, head-headed old fart" again, but agreed to do so.

Linda didn't even seem surprised as I explained the events of the night. She didn't scold me or say "I told you so," but she gave me "the look." I know it means "You're an idiot, and I told you so." As she got dressed to take me to the hospital Marcus asked what he could do to help. I gave him the GPS and said he could go get my pig. I was being facetious, but found out later that he and our friend, Robbie, had indeed recovered her.

The wait at the ER was fairly short. The doctor ordered x-rays and then a CT scan. When he came in with the results he said the good Lord must be watching over me. Six ribs were broken or cracked, and I had a complete AC joint separation in my shoulder, which might require surgery. The amazing thing to him was that the ribs didn't puncture any organs, especially my spleen or lungs. He gave me a prescription for pain pills and referred me to an orthopedic surgeon.

Dr. M. (the orthopedic surgeon) and I are getting to be pretty good friends. This is the third time I've been under his care in two years. The first was for a broken arm when I fell off a stack of buckets while trying to get my grandbabies' cat out of a tree. Then, last summer I had a total knee replacement, and now this.

He came in the room reading the hospital's report, shaking his head, and laughing. He asked me some questions, explained my injuries in language I could understand, and set a course of action. I was fitted with a harness for the shoulder and ribs; we'd give the ribs a month or so to heal, then start physical therapy for the shoulder. If I had a good range of

motion after that, surgery might not be necessary; but I'd always have the hump where my collar bone was torn loose from the shoulder.

For the next month, as my ribs mended, I slept in the recliner and prayed not to cough or sneeze. I started PT, worked hard; and after several weeks the therapist said I was ready to graduate.

I saw Dr. M. for my post-therapy visit, and he was pleased with my progress. No surgery would be necessary, but I would have to limit my activities. We discussed do's and don'ts, and then he floored me. He simply said, "Maybe you should consider giving up hunting." "Give up hunting? Why?" I asked. "Apparently you make a lot of bad choices. You stand on stacks of buckets; you ignore my warnings about tree stands and hunting, and you turn four wheelers over on yourself. You might not be smart enough to hunt, and hunting is too dangerous for someone who doesn't understand that it only takes a second to get hurt."

I admitted he made some good points, and told him I'd think about what he said. Then I got in the truck and hurried home to shoot my bow. It's not long until deer season.