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COMMENT

Necessity is still the mother of invention

By Ted Brown
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A Ted Bit

There's an old phrase: Necessity is the mother of invention.

Now when I looked up references to that phrase, the explanation was: Difficult situations inspire ingenious solutions.

It's true: inventions like radar, sonar and even wireless radio transmission were all developed during wartime, when necessity dictated they be developed to win the war.

This past week, I had a bout of Necessitism, when I decided I had to make a change to win the war at the barn, loading sheep into the crate on the back of the truck.

This time of year, we're at that stage when the ram lambs must travel to the stock yards in St. Jacobs, where they are sold.

They've grown to their optimum weight for the market, and are demanding a lot of hay and ration. It's time.

I hate having to send out those lambs I've nurtured since they were born in March, to the point they are at today. I feel like a traitor at times.

But that's the sheep business, and one can't dwell on the emotional aspect of being a shepherd.

As a shepherd, my goal is to grow the lambs to their market weight, with as little stress as possible, for both the lambs and me.

And when it comes to loading eight or ten 60-70 lbs. lambs into the truck, it's not easy.

The back of the truck is fairly high off the ground (like most 4x4 F150s), so in the past, The Sidekick and I had to catch each lamb, and lift its 70 lbs. kicking, squirming body up into the crate without hurting it or us.

Following that exercise of sheer strength and adrenaline, we would invariably wake up the next morning with sore backs, which usually hung around for a few days.

The last load went June 28, and after that load, I was determined to find an alternative means of loading the sheep without killing my back.

Hence the Mother of Invention.

I thought of building a portable ramp on

wheels, with an adjustable platform that could be adjusted up or down, to meet the height of the truck tailgate.

Of course, using it only a few times of the year made me think about where I'd store it.

Too much space; so back to the drawing board.

Other schemes came and went without making a dent in the problem.

I decided to look at the old loading chute door that we used to load cattle years ago to see if I could get some inspiration.

For interest's sake I backed the truck up to the door, just to see how it lined up.

It was a perfect, level match.

I couldn't believe the answer to my problem had been staring me in the face for decades, and would take a bunch of cuts on the table saw to make it workable.

I constructed two interacting doors with hinges that would swing across the door opening, allowing me to hold the sheep in a small holding pen, then open the doors to reveal the truck crate on the other side.

I had called my brother-in-law to help me herd the lambs into the truck. When I asked him, we were going to be lifting the lambs into the crate individually, as in the past.

But when he arrived, I had completed building the loading chute door, and we opened the pen with the lambs in it, they crossed the passageway, and gathered in the holding pen.

I opened the inside door, and the lambs walked into the crate, without any incident, no stress, no rodeo - not even one baaaa.

In less than four minutes!

I was over the moon.

So now, rather than dreading to load a bunch of lambs into the truck, it's a piece of cake.

And thanks to Mother, you do remember Mother from earlier in the column, a simple fix became a reality, out of necessity, to find a better way.

And best of all: no back ache.