

# Have you pulled any great pranks?

## Douglas Goodfellow December 29<sup>th</sup> 2021



Okay, I know you've heard this story on multiple occasions, but it really should be documented for posterity.

I spent the summer of 1974 (sixteen years old) stacking hay around Chugwater, Wyoming. Long story how that happened; maybe another of the prompts will open up the opportunity to tell it!

Anyway, my boss, Jim Collins, spit fire and meanness at us all summer long. Meanest guy I ever worked for—and that turned out to be a blessing, as I worked for folks who fancied themselves as mean but couldn't have played in the same league with Jim. My experience with him helped me survive them! Quick side note—I Googled Jim a bit back. He was in his mid-twenties, I think, when I worked for him; found a picture of him as a Ted Cruz delegate at the 2016 GOP convention! Man he'd put on some miles. Big ol' bourbon face.

Anyway, for the better part of the summer I ran a Drube Hay Bale Loader, constructed by the Drube Machine Shop in Wheatland, Wyoming—about twenty-five miles or so north of Chugwater. The folks there basically turned a Ford truck chassis backwards, reversing the gears to make it a front-wheel drive vehicle with the driver's seat and the drive wheels in front of the Ford six-cylinder engine and the steering wheels in front, also. Quite maneuverable! Then they welded on a hydraulic frame attached to a loading platform which sported about thirteen or so oak stakes. I could run those stakes near the ground, raise and lower them slightly, and move the Drube so as to load them with twelve to fifteen bales of hay (as I recall), return to the under-construction haystack, raise them as fair as thirteen bales or so high (again, as I recall), dump them, then go get more.

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Pretty regularly snapped those oak stakes. That made Jim mad. He broke stakes when he ran it, too, but I was better at it.

As I ran the thing, though, I discovered something. It came equipped with a three-speed, floor-mounted, manual transmission. I figured out that if I raised that platform high, came in to the stack pretty quick, hit the clutch, the brake pedal, and the dump lever all at once, I could make those rear wheels come off the ground, and bounce the back of the machine a bit.

WHEEEEE!

That was all well and good until doing so broke one of the rear leaf springs. Jim was none too pleased.

Well, he brought out the parts to fix the leaf spring. Also determined to change the oil in it while doing so. Did that first. Then ran the engine to circulate the oil. As he inspected the suspension, he determined he needed a sledge hammer. So in his usual colorful fashion, he directed me to retrieve the sledge hammer he maintained in the bed of his pickup for just that sort of occasions.

Off I went. But as I approached the pickup, I heard a steady buzz. People think it's a rattle. Really it's more of a buzz. I thought to myself, I wonder if that's what a rattlesnake looks like? Looked down, and sure enough. There, right between me and the pickup, all coiled up and poised to pounce, awaited a four-foot rattler. Prairie rattler, I believe, though I could be wrong about that. Not wrong about it being a rattler. And it might have even been bigger—I'm trying to be conservative here! Not that I'd have been any less intimidated had it been only three-feet long. Or even two. That rattlesnake was the first I'd ever encountered in open country, and any rattler would have caused me to do just what I did. Stop dead in my tracks.

Well, Jim became a bit impatient for his sledge hammer, and his short-fuse temper got set off when he saw me just standing stock still rather than getting it, as he'd instructed. So, "Goddammit, get me the fucking sledge hammer!"

"There's a rattlesnake!"

"GET ME THE FUCKING SLEDGE HAMMER!"

"THERE'S A RATTLESNAKE!"

"WHAT?"

"THERE'S A RATTLESNAKE!"

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“Oh! Well, then—kill it!”

Being a rural Wyoming Republican, I suppose now that’s their natural reaction to just about anything he doesn’t care for, and I’m glad the laws specifically address that sort of dealing with human beings or I’m pretty sure I’d not have survived that summer. Anyway, he got up, took a wide berth around the side of the truck where the rattlesnake and I kept watch on each other, grabbed a spade out of the back of the pickup, came around, scooped the coiled rattlesnake up, tossed it into the air.

When it landed, it laid straight out. Rattlesnakes have to be coiled to strike effectively. Jim took the blade of the shovel and decapitated it. He dug a hole to bury the head (didn’t want anything stepping on it and getting deceased rattlesnake venom), then tossed the remainder of the carcass off into the field. All done in a truly impressive nonchalant fashion.

We finished repairing the Drube. Jim went off to attend to other tasks. But before we got back to work, I thought, We’ll tell Toby we (success has many fathers) killed a rattlesnake. We won’t tell him I’ve coiled the carcass in his bed.

Oh, who’s Toby? Toby ran the windrower. A windrower looks a little like a small combine. I suppose that’s only helpful if you know what a combine is. Well you can Google either or both. Anyway, it goes to a hay field ripe for cutting. Its mower, the forefront of the thing, cuts the hay. The rotating head gathers it into the machine. And then the hay is organized into about three-foot or so rows. Those rows dry out, and then a baler of some sort comes along (after a few days or a week or more), gathers up those rows, and turns them into bales. So Toby never travelled with us; we followed him by days or a couple weeks.

Anyway, I told neither Jim nor Keith (I think that was his name; none of us have stayed in touch and memory fades—the only names I’m sure of are mine and Jim’s), who stacked the bales I dumped, now I’d stowed the snake-body in the truck. When I got a chance, I reclaimed it, snuck into our bunkhouse (us three workers slept in a sparsely furnished, rented house while Jim and his wife slept in their trailer with their baby and raccoon), pulled back Keith’s sheets, circled the now quite-cold (I know; they’re cold-blooded anyway, but evenings were cool and he’d been in the shade on top of that) on Keith’s bottom sheet, and then replaced the other sheets and blanket atop them.

Then the wait started.

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Well, Jim kept us working almost daily for the whole summer. Long days, too—typically twelve hours or more if he could manage it. We only took maybe one bath or two per week. What was the point? We three comprised the whole crew, and if everybody stinks then nobody stinks. Typically, before bed, we'd read for a bit, listen to some records, and hit the sack as we were dead tired.

But on this night, Keith determined to take a bath. A long bath.

Then he wrote a letter to his mom. Good boy, Keith.

And he determined to read some of a work of fiction. Occurs to me now I'd like to know the title, just out of curiosity.

And, as he'd recently found Jesus, he also determined to read some Bible.

All this while lying on his bed. How he managed to do so without feeling the carcass of the snake beneath him I have no idea—luck of placement, I suppose. But I know for a fact that's how it happened, and you'll agree with me momentarily.

All the while, I'm lying on my bed (being the Drube driver, I got the big bed in its own room!), desperately trying to stay awake through my exhaustion, waiting for Keith to get into his.

Which he finally did. But even so, for the next five minutes, nothing. Nada. Zip. Zero. Zilch.

My thoughts were that Keith had, in fact, discovered the snake, ascertained that I had placed it there, and attempted to reverse the field by torturing me through non-reaction. Pretty smart of Keith. If that's how it worked out.

That's not how it worked out. I know. Because finally, after that five minutes (thereabouts—you know how these estimations work!) Keith rolled over. Directly atop Mr. Rattler.

What I heard sounded kind of like a backwards scream. Try screaming, not with your breath coming out of you, but while inhaling. That's pretty much what it sounded like. Not really loud. You can only scream so loud while inhaling, as we learned. But it still kind of sounds like a scream.

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Why an inwardly drawn scream rather than an outwardly drawn scream?

Well, as Keith explained it, he somehow roll onto the rattler, jump out of bed, and “eek” (that’s what we’ll call it—a prolonged “eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeek”) all while every muscle in his entire body simultaneously constricted.

Quite a feat, when you think about it!

And the first words to come out of his mouth afterwards? “Goodfellow, I am going to get even. I do not know how I am going to get even. But I am going to get even.”

How he determined so quickly that I did the deed, rather than Toby or Jim (Jim really was out of the question, as he evidenced no sense of humor whatsoever at any point during that summer) is something I still ponder.

But what he did to get even was freaking brilliant.

Not a thing. Not. A. Single. Thing.

So, every day I had to check my food for additional salt or some other sort of sabotage. Check my hat before I put it on. My boots. The seat on my Drube. Oh of course my bed. Every. Single. Thing.

And whenever Keith saw me doing so, I could count on being able to look over at him, see him smile at me, shake his head as if affirming, “Yes, do check. Every time. Everything. Because you just never know. You. Just. Never. Know.”

But how many people do you know who get to honesty say they put a rattlesnake in a friend’s bed? And got to be there, in the dark, when he rolled his torso upon it? So you know what I know?

It was darn well worth it!