

# Safety lessons you learned the hard way

Thanks to everyone who sent in stories. Next month we'll publish your stories about farm life. [Deadline was April 15.] See the remaining themes and rules of our "Nothing Could Be Finer" series on page 16.

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## Painting lessons from a pro

Mistakes are our best teachers. That's what a grade school teacher used to tell my class. I will leave it up to your imagination just how I learned these safety lessons during my 20-plus years as a professional house painter.

- Never set your work bucket full of paint on the ground behind you.
- Don't move a stepladder with an open can of paint on it, no matter how careful you think you can be.
- Always replace the lid snugly on a partially full paint can by stepping on it firmly. You never know who might knock it over or pick it up to shake it. It might even be you.
- When replacing the lid snugly on a paint can that has wet paint around the rim, throw a rag over the lid first if you don't like paint spurting up your leg.
- When you set a ladder against a wall and rest the bottom of it on a drop cloth laid down to protect a shiny new floor, the drop cloth will quickly slide away from the wall, and the ladder with it, when you get to the top of the ladder.
- It is impossible to get dried paint off clothes. Also, paint is not attracted to work clothing but seems to have a magnetic attraction to an expensive new jacket.

*John Pilcher  
Arapahoe, Tideland EMC*

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## Driving with children

I learned a safety lesson the hard way when my son was a toddler. After shopping at a little country store, I put Jimmy into the front seat and got behind the steering wheel. Jimmy was standing on the seat, trying to open a box of cookies.

I started the car and slowly headed toward the road. Suddenly the passenger side door flew open, and my little boy fell out. I slammed on the brakes, opened the door and jumped out. Jimmy was screaming and so was I. His little leg was under the car wheel.

A teenage boy slowly drove the car off Jimmy's leg. I grabbed him up and ran into the store. We looked him over, decided he was not injured except for a laceration on his leg where the tire had been. Anyway, I insisted that he go to the doctor.

My daddy drove us to the doctor in Mocksville. He had no other injuries except the leg laceration.

My oldest son is almost 57 years old now. I could have killed him. If I had not learned this lesson with him, I could have killed or badly injured one of my other four children. Thank God I learned this lesson, even though I wish I could have learned it without pain to my little boy.

*Virginia L. Kinley  
Woodleaf, EnergyUnited*

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## Learning from dad

Safety is a number one priority in my house. As we were growing up we learned certain things that every child learns: don't put the scissors in the light sockets, don't cut with big knives, don't sit too close to the television because it will ruin your eyesight. My brother and I seemed to obey these rules more closely than our father.

When we were growing up we got to see firsthand what would happen if we did not listen to Mom about the light sockets and the sharp objects. Our father was always the guinea pig.

On my spring vacation one year, my father decided to take his chainsaw and cut some tree limbs for my grandparents who lived just below us. My grandfather, who is always trying to be the sensible one, told my father not to get up on the roof with the chainsaw. My father waved him off and got on the roof anyway and nearly sawed off his leg. The ambulance, the local fire department, and several family members and neighbors came to help get him down. When this little parade was over, my father had managed to get himself nearly 200-some stitches and a good six weeks of recuperation.

When I was in sixth grade I played basketball for the local elementary school. I was a little taller than most of the girls and had broad shoulders. One Sunday after church, my father in his Sunday suit, my brother and I decided to play basketball in our backyard. While my father was attempting a jump shot I tried to block him. I blocked him all right; he went down and something snapped. Crawling back to the house he declared that everything was fine and that he didn't need to go to the doctor. Several days later, after working on our kitchen with my grandfather, my father decided he'd better go to the hospital. When he returned his foot was in a blue cast and he was walking on crutches. He had broken his foot.

The worst was yet to come. That same day, my father got the bright idea to go down to my grandfather's in his cast. While attempting to walk down the stairs, which were only cinder blocks, he fell again and this time fractured the other foot.

This time, the nurse politely told my father to go home and sit down.

If nothing else we've learned that my father proves the theory that accidents occur more often at home than on the job.

*Stacy Hawks  
Sparta, Blue Ridge Electric*

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## Working with paint thinner

I was working for a local company, learning to use industrial spray paint, and part of the job involved mixing my own paint. Someone had replaced the supply line of the thinner tank I was using with a piece of air hose. Over time the air hose weakened from reaction with the petroleum in the thinner. When I turned on the pump, the line ruptured and thinner sprayed right into my face, off my head and into my eyes. It burned my eyes and temporarily blinded me.

There was no eyewash available so I ran for the bathroom where I knew about a large sink that I could soak my head in.



Each time I opened my eyes as I ran, more thinner ran into them, burning then even worse.

Thankfully everything turned out OK and nobody was hurt, except the guy who was standing in the bathroom doorway as I made my speedy entrance.

A few years later I went to work for General Electric in Mebane and was appointed to a safety committee. I always remembered my paint thinner experience, and that made me a very active participant. Over the next 12 years I was involved in accident investigations and in looking for better personal protective equipment for my fellow employees, as well as in developing better safety practices and training.

I was fortunate to chair the North Carolina Star program and helped our company receive the North Carolina Star award given by OSHA (U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration) to companies with outstanding safety records. I was lucky I wasn't seriously injured and that I have been able to help so many others from having a similar if not worse experience.

*Michael Howe  
Haw River, Piedmont EMC*

### Riding a tractor

Back in 1971, none of the tractors that we used on our family farm had cabs or rollover protection on them. It was common for farm children to ride on the fender of a tractor or to sit in the lap of its driver. That danger turned into tragedy for my family. My little brother went on the tractor with a farm worker to disc a field. The worker came to the house screaming for help. My sister tried CPR, and I called the rescue squad. Our brother was killed when he fell off the tractor and the wheel crushed his body.

Now my husband and I farm. Our son works with us. We have volunteered in the Progressive Farmer Farm Safety Camps for Kids programs for the past 10 years. This is where farm kids learn safety. They teach

lessons about fire safety, electricity, ATVs and lawnmowers, livestock and chemicals, and inclement weather. Hundreds of kids across North Carolina have the safety skills they need to live safely on the farm thanks to this program. There is a reason that lawnmower and tractor manuals state "no riders." That reason is the life of your child or grandchild.

*Lillian Harden  
Windsor, Roanoke Electric*

### Drinking and driving

On Saturday night, Nov. 15, 1985, my life changed forever. I was out with some friends and sitting in the back seat when we ran head-on into another car filled with

some other friends we were out with that night. I was most seriously hurt. I basically "broke my face," as the doctors put it. I had metal plates, screws and wires throughout my face along with a wired-closed jaw for several months. Since then I've had many dozens of operations inside my mouth. Lots of time and money spent on dentists, periodontists, orthodontists, endodontists and oral surgeons. Pain. Misery. Each day I brush my teeth I am reminded of that event. Every time I look in the mirror, I see the scars around my eyes where the surgeons went in to fix my broken face.

The amazing thing is that nobody died. Nobody received maiming injuries. As unfortunate as the accident was, we were lucky. Of the eight people involved, I was

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the youngest and most “innocent.” I was the only one not drinking. While no DWI charges were part of this incident, everyone else including both drivers was indeed drinking alcohol.

Since then I have made it an unbreakable rule that I would never again go in a car with anyone who has been drinking. If I am driving, I don’t even take a sip of alcohol. I also made an agreement with my parents that if I ever need a ride, I could call them, no questions asked. I will do the same for my children, and encourage you not to make the one mistake that could change your life or someone else’s life forever. I was lucky. I escaped death and serious injury unlike many thousands of kids and adults each year.

*Ross Mandell*  
*Waxhaw, Union Power Cooperative*

### Climbing a ladder

Having been on this earth for about 75 years, I figured I had learned a lot about common sense and safety. This past January I found out that I had one more lesson to learn.

I had a rule when working around my shop alone: Never get up high on a ladder. That particular day I not only broke my rule, I broke my arm.

I went up my old ladder, the one without rubber “feet.” It seemed okay until I reached the rafters 15 feet up. Then it was too late. That old ladder was swinging from my foot. And where was I? Hanging from the rafters just a’ swinging. Eventually all I could do was drop to the concrete floor below.

Later on, a friend wanted to know why I didn’t call for help on my mobile phone while I was just hanging around up there in the rafters. Now that would have been a trick!

After a visit to the ER, many doctor visits and a great deal of pain, I am almost 100 percent. And, yes, very lucky. I did learn my lesson.

*Bob Gober*  
*Bessemer City, Rutherford EMC*

### Driving without seatbelts

It was June 1980. I had two children: a four-year-old girl and a one-and-a-half-year-old boy. In 1980 cars had seat belts, but no one ever wore them and it was not a law.

I was driving to my mom’s house with my two children in the front seat, no seat belts. My daughter was in the middle and

my son was next to the passenger side door. The road to Mom’s house was dirt and gravel and inclined downward on the passenger side.

My daughter reached over my younger son and opened the door. He fell out of the car onto the road. I immediately stopped the car, turned off the motor and ran around the car to the passenger side. If I had not stopped when I did, I would have run over my child. He was only inches away from the back tire, and he rolled under the car when he fell out.

I thank God for saving my child. Today my car does not move out of the driveway without all seatbelts fastened, all children buckled in and all the doors locked.

*Rebecca E. Harkey*  
*Lincolnton, Rutherford EMC*

### Running on a treadmill

One afternoon last spring, my daughter and her children came for a visit. I was enjoying the afternoon with my grandchildren Dalton and Cheyenne. My daughter Christy decided she was going to walk on the treadmill. The children were playing with their toys. Cheyenne took her toys in the room with her mom to play. While she was playing one of the toys went under the treadmill and she went after it. She got her hand caught under the belt of the treadmill. The belt burned her hand and fingers. She had treatment on them until they healed. Cheyenne then had to have surgery on her fingers to straighten them. After surgery, she had to have physical therapy on her fingers. I am thankful she is alright now. She can use her fingers fine.

The safety lesson I learned that day was to never let a child in the same room while using the treadmill. This was an accident that taught me a valuable lesson at the expense of my granddaughter’s suffering.

*Teresa Crouse*  
*Newton, Rutherford EMC*

### Driving with morning coffee

Getting in our 1983 two-door, brown-and-white Plymouth Fury to go to work, I had a hot cup of coffee with me to drink on my way to the office. As I backed out of the carport in a rush, I spilled the hot liquid on me and jumped out of the car to get away from the spill. The only problem was I forgot to put the car in park. The vehicle kept going in reverse with the door wide open. It headed for our pump house. I tried to jump back in to stop the sedan, but could

not. Only seconds before the open door slammed into the pump house, I jumped away from the car.

My husband was also leaving in his truck and saw the whole horror. He said he knew I was going to be crushed to death between the door and pump house, and there was nothing he could do.

I thank God daily for saving my life. I know not to drink hot coffee on the way to work and to slow down even if I am late.

*Mary Kay Cox*  
*Four Oaks, South River EMC*

## Send us your best Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our “Nothing Could Be Finer” series. Send us your stories and pictures about these themes. If yours is chosen for publication, we’ll send you \$50. You don’t have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

#### July 2005

##### The First Meal I Ever Made

What was it and how did you like it?

*Deadline: May 15*

#### August 2005

##### What I Learned From My Kids

Sometimes children can teach grown-ups a thing or two.

*Deadline: June 15*

#### September 2005

##### Celebrity Look-alikes

Photos of people who are dead-ringers for someone famous. Digital ones must be 300 dpi and at least 4 by 6 inches.

*Deadline: July 15*

#### October 2005

##### My Favorite Photo

North Carolina people, places, things. Digital ones must be 300 dpi and at least 4 by 6 inches.

*Deadline: August 15*

#### November 2005

##### It’s the Thought That Counts

The dumbest gift you ever received.

*Deadline: Sept. 15*

#### December 2005

##### Holiday Mishaps

Those holiday plans that just didn’t work out as you hoped they would.

*Deadline: Oct. 15*

#### The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. Only one entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mailed or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published. We retain reprint rights.
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