

OFF THE CUFF

BY: Ron Kern

Week of September 30

My old boss Jack used to say "the world would be a boring place if all folks were the same." Yep, all of us take our own journey and make our own choices; good and bad. You only hope that the bad choices you make can be mitigated and not fatal. But alas, for some the opportunity to exhibit incredible stupidity cannot be constrained.

And so I present to you some of the more interesting stories I've run across lately.

A cautionary tale for those who can't spare the time to slow down and do things properly.

In Kentucky | Kelita was travelling "at highway speed" in her Chevy, cruising down Country Road 519 with the wind blowing through her hair, when she and her passenger decided to swap seats. In this situation, a less hasty person would stop the car for a "Chinese fire drill" but Kelita was a little more creative than that. Fortunately, you see, her car had an open T-Top.

She stood up, pulled herself onto the roof, and she fell. And then Kelita was travelling solo "at highway speed" down that country road.

The Fayette County Coroner's Office reported that the 20-year-old died from injuries sustained while impacting a guardrail.

On the way down, her foot hit the steering wheel and the car veered left--but the passenger, who was still inside the vehicle, grabbed the wheel and averted his own possible demise, thereby demonstrating the wisdom of learning from the mistakes of others. That passenger, by the way, easily earns an Honorable Mention himself, as he was arrested and charged with driving on a suspended license with improper registration and no insurance.

XX

Summer is the most blissful of seasons, when our favorite summertime activity -- do it yourself stupidity -- kicks into high gear. Meet Charles, 34, a Denver masonry contractor who created brick and mortar edifices. Charles was in construction. He had worked on houses, he had watched electricians install wiring. He believed this qualified him as a member of the Junior Electrician Society. He figured he could handle any electrical issue that came up around his own home.

One day on the job, Charles was apparently bonked in the head by his bricks. He had the great idea! He would build an electric fence in his own backyard. "An electric fence will keep the dogs in." Charles connected a wire to an extension cord, and managed to encircle his backyard with a 120-V strand of wire without mishap. His dogs will not be sued for puppy support with this security system in place!

The household became accustomed to the fence, and things settled down to normal, until Charles picked up a passion for gardening. Charles had a real nice set of tomatoes. One day

he reached for a tomato, put his hand on the electrified wire, and there's really no need to explain what happened next.

Why did this man die? Like other inexperienced people, he thought he knew what he was doing. But his design had two major flaws. Fences constructed for dogs use one-tenth the voltage of cattle fences. And he needed to install a repeater, which transmits 150-microsecond pulses, to hit a cow with a jolt of juice that cuts off in time to avoid creating a pile of rare steaks by the fence.

The moral of this story is, as always, one of the guiding principles of common sense: if you don't know how to do something, don't do it!

XX

This story sounds like an urban legend, but it's true. Rodney was jet skiing around Lake Washington, enjoying the sun and the power between his knees. Then he noticed that his battery was beginning to fail. He idled over to a dock near Juanita Beach Park and tied up his craft, then ran to the car for his battery charger. When he returned, he plugged the charger into a 110-volt outlet, and jumped onto his watercraft while holding the booster cable. Sizzle. He was found floating facedown beneath the dock later that evening.

XX

On Friday the 13th, Scott and his sister Kimberly had an electrifying experience while attempting to view the annual Perseid meteor shower. Scott, an aspiring young astronomer, set up his telescope for a closer view of the sky. Alas, poor Scott did not reflect on the merits of using a telescope for watching the Perseids. A telescope is really a hindrance. The wide field of vision of a naked eye will catch far more shooting stars than a telescope, particularly if that eye is taken away from from city lights into the desert or mountains.

Having already proven to be a poor astronomer, Scott proceeded to show that he was not much of an electrician, either. Bothered by the glare of a nearby streetlight, he broke into the base of the light pole and attempted to sever the 4000-volt power cord. He was pronounced dead at Hoag Memorial Hospital shortly after his spectacularly aborted skywatching attempt.

At 1AM on Friday, Scott used pliers to pry open an inspection plate at the base of the streetlight, then sawed into the 2-centimeter wire. Kimberly saw a flash knock him onto his back.

All which proves...You can't fix stupid.