

Chapter 5: Bull Riding Goalie

I kept on loving animals and bugs and kept on collecting but by the time I turned 13, I was starting to get stronger and was anxious to be more physical. I wanted to do some of the things the other guys were doing (well, that they *had* been doing). Typical of my development in those days: just when all my friends were beginning to get out of sports, I was getting into them.

I decided I wanted to play hockey. I wanted to be a goalie because I wouldn't have to skate that much. Fortunately, the team I joined needed a goalie, so I was set.

Our games all took place at the George Bell Arena, located just a few blocks from the Swift Premium packers' slaughterhouse. We'd always walk by the place when we were heading to and from the games, and before long, the slaughterhouse became more of a focus for me than playing hockey. There were, after all, animals in the slaughterhouse.

There were bulls—well, actually, they were steers—and they were all out in the open in pens. I couldn't resist climbing over the fence to get to the railings of the pens that held the animals. Then I could reach through and pat them and play with them.

One day this kid I was with said, "Hey, you ever thought of getting on one of those things?" I said "No." He said, "Well, we've got all our equipment on. How can we get hurt?" "Oh," I said, "that's true. Okay." I always liked watching bull-riding.

So every week after our hockey game was over, we'd go and try to ride the steers. It's amazing we didn't get killed. One time I got tossed two pens over from where I'd started. I'd fall and be under their feet and they'd be trampling and all freaked out. This other guy and I would just be killing ourselves laughing. I figured I had all my hockey shins on, elbow pads and helmet and everything, so I couldn't get hurt. I was nervous, yeah, but I was a kid. You think you're invincible, right?

We did that until one day when we got caught and received a stiff warning about not coming onto the property. It was fun while it lasted, although part of me felt bad about tormenting these poor animals that were about to get slaughtered. Then again, maybe it was the last bit of fun they had.

Not long after that, my parents split up and I moved with my mother and sister to stay with my aunt in Etobicoke, a city just outside Toronto. This put an end to my bull-riding goalie days and opened up a whole new chapter in my life.