

# My moo-ving experience with some COWS

*Reading Emily Rosenthal's **fun story** about a herd of cows taking up residence at the Shrine of St. Anthony in Ellicott City reminded me of a close encounter I had with cows when I was a young reporter a couple years out of graduate school. Here's an account of that experience I wrote for the Catholic Review in the late 1990s ...*

The Archdiocese of Baltimore had purchased some 25 acres of farmland in Frederick County to build an elementary school, and my job as the Catholic Review education reporter was to cover Cardinal William H. Keeler's press conference announcing the good news.

Little did I know that this apparently simple, straightforward assignment was going to turn into one of the more curious adventures of my journalism career thus far.

It all started when I arrived at the Garst Farm more than an hour before the morning press conference was to begin. Not exactly sure if I was at the right location, I pulled into a long driveway and parked my car on the lush, rolling farmland along Opossumtown Pike.

While I was sitting there waiting for something to happen, two cows meandered up to my car. Unflinchingly, they began to lick the hood of my Chevy Lumina — apparently enjoying the thin, green coat of pollen clinging to my vehicle.

As my automobile rocked back and forth from the surprising power of vigorous bovine tongues, I gave a passing thought to scaring the cows off with a beep of the horn. Instead, I just sat there transfixed by the surreal scenario unfolding before me.

Then a gray-haired gentleman with a weathered face and a worried look in his eyes came trotting up to my car.

Uh-oh, I thought. This guy is going to shoot me for letting his cows lick my car.

“Good morning,” I offered with a smile. “I don’t know if I’m in the right place, but I’m here for the press conference.”

The farmer’s response was immediate.

“I don’t care what you’re here for,” he countered. “We’ve got to get these cows back in their pen.”

Just then, three other cows appeared — each grazing a different part of the immense farm. The five cows had somehow escaped their holding area, where about a dozen other cattle were clustered.

“Come on,” the farmer repeated. “We’ve got to take care of these cows.”

A bit incredulously, I tossed my reporter’s notebook and pen and took to shooing stray cows back in their holding area. Being a city boy, I kind of waved my arms toward the indifferent animals as my primary way of moving them into place.

“Are you from Mars?” the farmer remarked. “Just go after them! They won’t hurt you.”

For about 10 minutes, we unsuccessfully chased cows all over the field before a second car pulled up. Inside were Father Keith Boisvert and Father Robert Jaskot — two priests there for the press conference. They too were recruited as cow herders.

All of us tracked the hoofed trespassers and scooted them to where they needed to be. Since both my priestly colleagues were bolder than I, they were unafraid of following the cows into a part of the field laden with enough cow pies to hold a “Betsy Bingo” contest.

Eventually, all the bovines were herded into place. The priests fixed their collars and checked their shoes. The cardinal arrived and made the splendid announcement without any freewheeling cows to spoil the scene.

And when it was all over, if you listened very carefully, you could hear a deep mooing over by the cow pen.

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