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Phone calls at 1 a.m.

Commentary by **Mathew Elliott**

I've been told that nothing good happens past midnight. Now that's never stopped me from being out past then, but, still, it's good to know.

Growing up on a cow-calf operation, I always knew that when the phone rang past midnight, nothing good was going to come out of it. Usually it meant someone's cows were out.

My family's farm is approximately 45 minutes west of Saint Joseph, Mo., and outside of an averaged-sized Kansas town. I often go there on weekends to help out when needed. After doing a little growing up, I do find it ironic that all the jobs I hated when I was growing up don't seem so bad now that I have a little perspective on life.

One weekend this spring I spent the entire day with

my father fixing electric fence so we could turn the cows and calves on grass. There was much work to be done on the fences because of the devastating ice storm last winter that damaged many of the surrounding trees, leaving branches down and wires broken.

By the end of the day we were proud of what we had accomplished. With a chainsaw the two of us had gone around miles of fence, cutting limbs and replacing wire.

We believed nothing could escape from our fence.

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Always an exception

Well, except for one section. This particular section has given us fits for as long as I can remember. I remember when we built that fence — and the hard work that we put into building it. Situated right beside our yard and barn, it surrounds about 4 acres

where we kept show cattle during the summer. Being that close to the fencer, that section should be the hottest wire around — but it never was.

Even though it wasn't the hottest fence on the farm, that evening we turned a show steer and another steer that we were fattening for ourselves into that section. From our living room in the house, we watched them closely to make sure they seemed content in their new surroundings — and they seemed to be. That night at dinner my father announced to our family that something had to be done with that fence; we all agreed and went happily about our Saturday evening plans.

Then, around 1 a.m. the phone rang, followed directly by a knocking on our door. The sheriff

was on the phone about some cows out in the area, and someone was in our driveway telling about the cow they just about hit. Without a word we all dressed and my mom got into the car to go slow traffic while my dad and I grabbed flashlights to go look for the escaped cattle.

After about a half-hour search, we decided that a) they were our cattle and b) the car had scared the steers back into the pen. We got the steers in the barn and locked them in until something better could be done with that dang fence.

Walking back to the house I realized that we all have our "phone call at 1 a.m." moments. It's not always easy, and no one ever said it would be. But we also have purple ribbons from the county fair, the friends gained, the anticipation of driving through your herd during calving season to see if you have the next great one, and the satisfaction of seeing the smile on a young child's face after purchasing their first show heifer from you. These moments definitely outweigh the bad ones, and they are the reasons why, even after a 1 a.m. phone call, we are all proud to be a part of the beef industry.

